



THOLOS

VOLUME 28

PROJECT UPDATE

A House for All Seasons

FEATURE

Ducts in a Row

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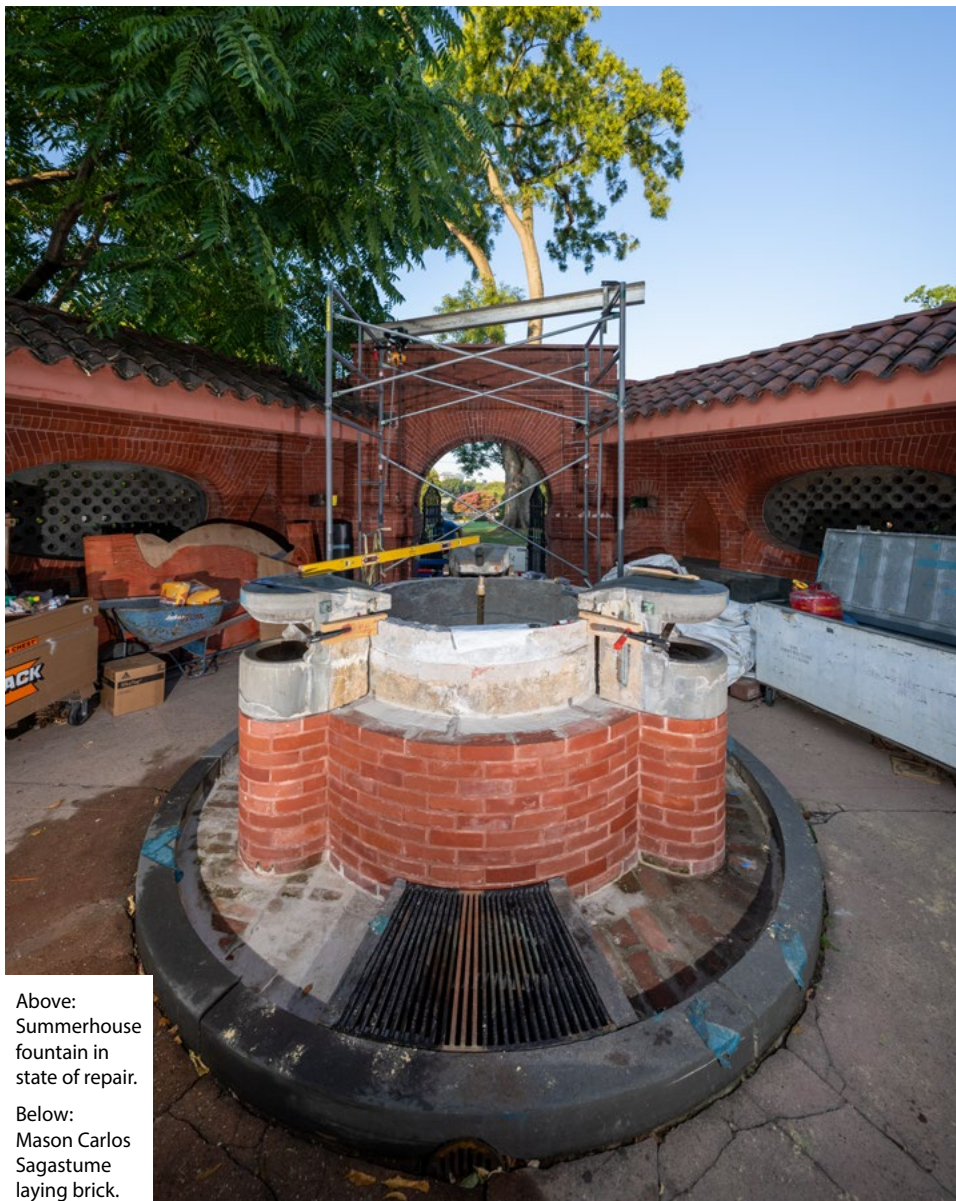


PROJECT UPDATE

A House for All Seasons

More than 140 years later, the Architect of the Capitol's Summerhouse still offers visitors respite. Recent maintenance efforts will help keep the site around for repeat visitors and first timers alike.

BY JUSTIN KIEFFER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY THOMAS HATZENBUHLER
& JAMES ROSENTHAL



Above:
Summerhouse
fountain in
state of repair.

Below:
Mason Carlos
Sagastume
laying brick.

There is nothing like taking a walk in the middle of winter to conduct some in-the-field research for an article on the Architect of the Capitol’s (AOC) Summerhouse. Tourists seemed to avoid the location while I sat on one of many empty stone seats. The location may appear off-limits with its black iron gates and lack of signage. Frederick Law Olmsted, the famous landscape architect, designer of the Summerhouse and mastermind of the U.S. Capitol Grounds, wanted “the entire structure (to be) wholly lost to view” because of the plantings around the structure, and today it appears to be a successful outcome. It is also possible no one was there because it was winter.

I did notice people looking at me while they walked by the grotto perhaps without realizing what it was. When it was originally finished in 1880, Olmsted complained about the lack of police protection. Plants around the Summerhouse were stolen; on one Sunday afternoon he recalled seeing more than 100 people climbing on the structure.

In the past the Summerhouse was a place people visited with their horses to cool down from the sweltering heat. The milder temperature is because of the ingenious design of the structure, which is partially below ground. The air flows through the archways and open roof, and there is running water from the fountain and flowing from the grotto, and it is shaded by trees. Although I visited in

The milder temperature is because of the ingenious design of the structure, which is partially below ground. The air flows through the archways and open roof...

the winter, I could still feel the temperature difference as I looked through the iron bars to the grotto and felt the cooler air blow in my direction.

What brought me to the Summerhouse in the winter? My assignment from Legislative and Public Affairs. But why the Summerhouse? It is an outdoor structure, which means for more than 140 years it has been exposed to the elements and has been a hard sell for funding to keep it intact; its southside-campus counterpart was never approved for construction in 1881.

The Summerhouse work I’m admiring on my walk is not a preservation project nor is it a restoration. As the Summerhouse is not currently funded for any major work, this recent effort came together as a maintenance project from the Capitol Grounds and Arboretum jurisdiction, which was able to fund a smaller scale project to delay continuing deterioration.



▼
View from the
Summerhouse
grotto.



What were the most urgent concerns? Curtis Houston, a Construction Division (CD) Construction Representative states the obvious adage, “In the construction world, wherever you have water you are going to have issues.” Capitol Grounds and Arboretum and the Office of the Chief Engineer’s (OCE) Design Services and CD investigated and identified the fountain as the main component that could cause imminent failure to the entire Summerhouse. With water seeping through the brick work, the inevitability of the historic fountain falling apart was not an issue of if, but rather when.

The original design for the fountain itself is lost, which proved an additional challenge when the team needed to fix it. Because they only had pictures from the past and no actual shop drawings or specifications, the OCE CD Mason crew, run by Russell Jones, took the structure apart, piece by piece, to learn how it

was supposed to function properly and what could be done to repair it. Typical for the AOC and its preservation efforts, every portion of the fountain was saved so the structure could be returned as close to its original state as possible.

The workers kept 90 percent of the brick and put 70 percent back in place. Houston humbly claimed, “I didn’t do much for this project besides find a manufacturer that could replicate the curved brick, matching the shape and color found all around the fountain to replace the bricks that could not be reused.” Houston found a North Carolina company that he said did an amazing job replicating the brick-curved shape and color and found another company to glaze them. (Houston was too modest to mention that it was also his responsibility to keep the project on time and on budget — which he did.)

Mason Juan Angel removes brick with the goal of keeping as much of the historical material as possible.



▼
Mason Supervisor
Franco Divalentin
waterproofs the
fountain bowl with
a cement-based
mixture.



The Summerhouse fountain has been restored, but visitors should still not drink the water.



This project was a great example of how teamwork across jurisdictions showcases the talent of the AOC.

While taking apart the stone and bricks, the team conducted its own investigation; it was confirmed that the water intrusion and freeze/thaw cycle of the seasons caused most of the problems for the fountain, including spalling (pieces breaking off)

and cracking. The original capstone's crack was caused because of a groove made in it to allow for the copper lining. Houston jokes, "If I was there in the 1880s, I'd be the one cautioning everyone that this would cause the issues we're seeing today."

Now the team ensures that everything is watertight, including the scuppers — where the water comes out. It is not for drinking — see below. This work allows the fountain to operate and not continue to harm itself. This maintenance is the first step in stabilizing the current situation for the Summerhouse.

This project was a great example of how teamwork across jurisdictions showcases the talent of the AOC. I've already mentioned

work performed by the OCE CD and Capitol Grounds and Arboretum; the project also included work from the Capitol Building Sheet Metal Shop that manufactured the replacement bronze grates and the Plumbing Shop from Capitol Grounds and Arboretum that rebuilt the entire drainage system, including installing a bigger drain and retrofitted pieces in the grotto.

Jim Kaufmann, Director of Capitol Grounds and Arboretum, also notes that the Summerhouse is not only a structure but also includes landscaping, and his jurisdiction has the ability to bring it back to what it should look like. During this maintenance project, Capitol Grounds and Arboretum reviewed Cultural Landscape Reports and focused on

restoring the soil, using high-pressure air to air-till it to avoid damaging the roots of the mature trees. The team removed invasive and undesirable plants, including poison and English ivy. They will be replaced with native clematis and passionflower vines and other plant selections that are more eco-friendly while maintaining the aesthetic of the original landscape design.

So far, two beds are completed, and work is progressing on other beds and on the grotto. By the time all the plants fill in, it will be close to a preservation effort, in theory, or “a modern sympathetic preservation effort,” states Jill McClure, Jurisdiction Executive for the Capitol Grounds and Arboretum.

This project is just one example of how the AOC continues to strive to preserve the Capitol campus, including the Summerhouse, which is a place to take a break from the demands of our fast-paced lives to peacefully contemplate — while in the middle of one of the busiest places in the world.



Pipefitter Adam McClanahan installs new irrigation for the planting beds.



Capitol Grounds and Arboretum staff gather for a ribbon-cutting ceremony celebrating the reopening of the historic structure.

Summerhouse Through the Years

1874

Frederick Law Olmsted is appointed to develop the U.S. Capitol Grounds

1879

Summerhouse construction begins and is completed in 1881



1940s

Roof, bricks, floor and gate are repaired/replaced; new electrical wiring, fountains and floor grilles are installed



1970s

Broken roof tiles, iron grilles and gates, fountains, and bricks are replaced



EARLY 2000s

Repairs are completed on the roof, brickwork and fountain; tree is removed to prevent further structural damage

2023

Summerhouse fountain undergoes a major maintenance effort; landscape improvements begin — to be completed in 2024



SUSTAINABILITY SPOTLIGHT

EMPLOYEES ADVANCE
GREEN IMPACTS THROUGH

UNIFORM RECYCLING

The U.S. Botanic Garden launched a program to recycle old uniforms and keep them out of landfills, and the earth-friendly program has spread across the Architect of the Capitol.

WRITTEN BY DEVIN DOTSON
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DEWITT ROSEBOROUGH AND JAMES ROSENTHAL



USBG Education Specialist Elizabeth Barton recycles an old uniform shirt.



The Green Team was thrilled to find a way to reduce the USBG’s environmental impact by recycling old uniform items and keeping them out of the waste stream ... It is great to receive widespread support from employees and management.

RAY MIMS
Green Team Co-Chair,
USBG Partnerships and
Conservation Specialist

For many years, employees at the U.S. Botanic Garden (USBG) have sought ways to advance sustainable practices through creating and working as part of the employee-led USBG Green Team. Because embroidered uniforms cannot be donated or reused by other employees, in 2020, about a dozen people on this team explored the possibility of recycling old, tattered, unusable uniforms.

Unlike typical clothing, uniforms are more complicated to dispose of due to security concerns. Because of the names and official Architect of the Capitol (AOC) and USBG patches, they need to be shredded. The AOC Uniform Policy specifies that employees cannot give uniforms away, donate or sell them. Green Team Co-Chair Ray Mims, USBG Partnerships and Conservation Specialist, researched multiple avenues for fabric recycling and discovered a company called TerraCycle that shreds fabrics as part of their recycling process — fulfilling that key security requirement.

DID YOU KNOW?



The USBG has recycled an estimated 650 pounds of uniforms



The AOC’s uniform recycling program has grown to include six participating jurisdictions since 2021

In July 2021, Mims presented the idea to the Green Team and to the USBG executive team, where it received enthusiastic support.

“The Green Team was thrilled to find a way to reduce the USBG’s environmental impact by recycling old uniform items and keeping them out of the waste stream,” Mims said. “It is great to receive widespread support from employees and management.”

The Green Team had to ensure the program was voluntary and aligned with the Uniform Policy. The AOC Uniform Committee and the Office of General Counsel reviewed and approved the program, and with this final approval, uniform recycling was cleared to start.

Beginning in fall 2021, uniform recycling collection boxes have been available in employee areas of the USBG Conservatory and Production Facility. Employees can bring in clean, used



Collection boxes to receive uniform items for recycling are found in multiple areas of the USBG.

uniforms, and when the boxes are full, they are mailed to TerraCycle for shredding and recycling. Once shredded, the natural fibers are turned into insulation or stuffing. Polyester is pelletized and can be made into new products such as nursery pots. Mixed fibers are burned and converted to energy.

THE PROGRAM GROWS

To spread the news about the program's existence, when USBG employees receive new uniforms, USBG Inventory Specialist Aleem Taylor shares information about the voluntary program.

Not only is the program popular throughout the USBG, but it has also been adopted by other AOC jurisdictions. In fall 2022, USBG Executive Director Susan Pell presented the recycling program to the Chief of Operations team and the AOC Facility Management meeting attendees, and Mims shared it with the AOC Sustainability Community of Practice. As a result, other jurisdictions adopted the program. It is now offered by Capitol Grounds and Arboretum, the Senate Office Buildings, Library Buildings and Grounds, and jointly by the Capitol Building and Capitol Visitor Center.

"We've had such great success with the program for the Capitol and Capitol Visitor Center that we've upgraded from using the smaller boxes to using larger totes so that we could accommodate the number of uniforms that employees are bringing in for recycling," said Ashiq Yusuf, AOC Environmental Engineer/Sustainability Manager. "I am excited that we are able to offer this environmentally friendly and secure option for uniform disposal via recycle."

ADDING A NEW DIMENSION

After the success of recycling uniforms at the USBG, two employees reached out separately to Mims asking if disposable nitrile gloves could also be recycled instead of going into the waste stream.

Since TerraCycle also recycles nitrile gloves, in January 2023 the USBG began offering glove recycling, and receptacles are now available in multiple USBG locations near high-use work areas.

"It makes us all so happy that we are able to offer this program and that it came from employee ideas," said Mims. "Frontline employees wanted to find a way to be more sustainable, and the team worked hard to figure out how to make it work inside AOC policy."

"Not only are we reducing our environmental impact, but it is good for employee morale. Several employees have reported how they are proud to be able to participate in this positive program."

➔ For more uniform and glove recycling info contact Ray Mims at ray.mims@aac.gov.



▼ Members of the USBG Green Team working to promote positive environmental practices.



FEATURE

Ducts in a Row

The experts at the House Mechanic Shop meticulously oversee campus HVAC systems, ensuring building temperatures are optimal for both daily operations and historic preservation.

WRITTEN BY MADELEINE LUCCHETTI
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SEAN GREENE

The Architect of the Capitol (AOC) Legislative and Public Affairs team arrived in the Ford House Office Building with plenty of experience working underground. Previously, we were stationed in the U.S. Capitol's basement in a space adjacent to the stone-walled room where George Washington would have been interred had he not been buried at Mount Vernon. Like many teams at the AOC, we'd adjusted to the occasional chilliness typical in older buildings. But this time, no one was prepared for the draftiness.

In the early winter mornings at the Ford Building, our room's four thermostats displayed low, uncomfortable temperatures: 67 to 68 degrees on average. Pressing buttons to adjust the heat proved futile. As we shivered, we discussed what sorts of sweaters and blankets we'd keep at our desks. But thanks to the work of the expert House Office Buildings' Direct Digital Control (DDC) Mechanics, we never had to invest in new layers.

BEHIND THE SCENES

A call to Charles Day, Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC) Electronics Mechanic Leader was our first step in creating a more hospitable office environment. Day and his team are experts in DDC systems, which use a computerized Building Automation System Network (BASnet) to monitor different components of HVAC systems. The tool displays HVAC operations in real-time, pinpointing equipment faults and communication issues that prevent the normal flow of air needed to maintain comfortable room temperatures in a building. This means that for the DDC team, communication is more than interpersonal. They must be able to speak the system's language, too, and translate their knowledge into workable solutions.

Since they couldn't peek behind the office walls without cutting into them, they used DDC tools to determine if a broken steam booster heater was at fault. Indeed, the heater's control valve wasn't operating as designed. Small repairs to the wiring brought the heat back on, but it still didn't circulate into the office. From there, they were able to determine that a closed safety damper prohibited airflow throughout our wing of the Ford Building. The team reopened the damper, and — thankfully!

— their finesse resulted in maintained, controllable and comfortable temperatures.

Day says it's projects like these that remind him of the reason he pursued this trade in the first place.

"All along, my goal has been to refine my controls skills while using the position I'm in as a leader to help my team be the best they can be, to set them up to learn," he says. "This project was a chance to do both those things."

ONWARD AND UPWARD

One of Day's teammates is Christopher Clinton, an HVAC Electronics Mechanic (DDC) who came to the AOC in 2004 as a Recycler/Laborer and quickly rose to leadership within that group. Finding a position in the federal government had been a career goal; Clinton felt that public service would present him with opportunities to challenge himself. By all accounts, Clinton accomplished that goal years ago — his colleagues and friends around the agency testify to his longtime spirit of hard work — but over the past two decades he's continued to branch out and use his mechanic skills in new specialties.

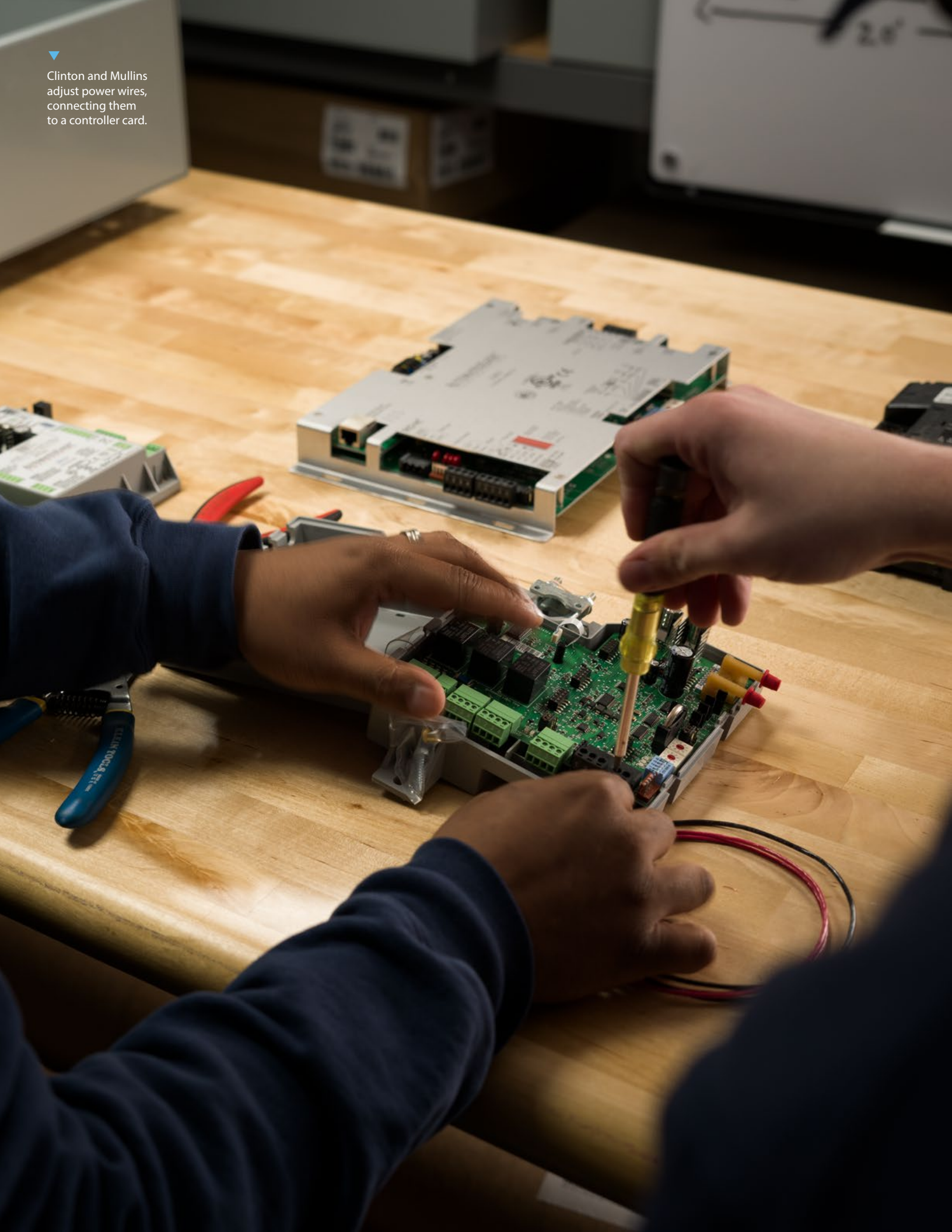


House Office Buildings DDC Mechanics, from left to right: Jakob Mullins, Christopher Clinton and Charles Day.



Day oversees Mullins' work on an HVAC control panel.

▼
Clinton and Mullins
adjust power wires,
connecting them
to a controller card.



▼
Clinton and Mullins work together to examine wiring in a Rayburn HVAC control panel. It's one of many they monitor throughout the House office buildings.



In 2014, via the AOC's Architect's Mobility Program, he could explore new roles. Clinton was selected to join the House Office Building Mechanical Systems Shop as a Maintenance Mechanic. In 2015, he became an A/C Mechanic and was selected as a DDC Mechanic in 2022. The entire time, Clinton's hard work propelled him forward.

On a typical day, Clinton says, he monitors for communications issues throughout all the House office buildings, collaborates with A/C mechanics to troubleshoot any temperature-related issues and works through to-dos on ongoing projects. No matter what, it's always busy. The team's stakeholders include: 435 Members of Congress and their staff, House

committees, AOC employees and building visitors — as well as anyone else who passes through the House office buildings.

Considering the amount of time Congress spends on the Hill, representatives often want their offices to feel like their home away from home. From drapes and carpets to paint colors and room temperature, much of the typical congressional office is customizable. There are limits, however, which protect the integrity of the spaces.

"It's important that we can satisfy the needs of Congress, but it's definitely an added layer of pressure," Day remarks. "We have to abide by best practices that take into consideration the health of these decades-old buildings."

A Member could request a significantly colder or warmer space, but adjusting the temperature outside the normal range could have adverse effects on the entire building and its historic assets. In the Ford Building, for example, where physical archives are stored, the threat of excess moisture is minimized. Using their monitoring systems, DDC mechanics measure humidity that could damage irreplaceable files. Without this oversight, infrequently referenced files could deteriorate and go undetected for years.

The DDC team — like every team at the AOC — is part specialist, part preservationist. The agency's work inherently requires respect for historic preservation; it's written into our mission. This

additional commitment is one reason why such mechanics are so valuable. Already, these positions are notoriously difficult to fill. Skilled tradespeople are in high demand, with robust competition between private and public sectors. While DDC mechanics are expected to have the same level of training and equipment mastery whether they work within government or outside it, candidates the AOC considers must also understand the intricacies of our campus buildings.

“These buildings are different than, say, commercial real estate,” Clinton says, “so the job description looks different, too.”

To cultivate a knowledgeable workforce, the AOC has developed class-based training and on-the-job opportunities to train in-house personnel in the nuances of DDC mechanics. These proactive offerings allow mechanics to grow into hard-to-fill positions, so teams aren’t waiting for outside candidates to arrive with years of knowledge and experience.

LOOKING AHEAD

The HVAC team’s work could be traced back to 1935, when Congress first approved funds for “chilled water” equipment that could create basic air conditioning to cool campus buildings. This was before personal computers, wi-fi, cellular technology or the expansion of amenities like dining services and exercise facilities — elements modern HVAC mechanics must consider every day. While their work looks quite different today — there’s less climbing around HVAC closets and more focus on safety — the goal is the same. The ins and outs of the job will no doubt continue to change as the field of mechanics evolves.

“We’re in the age of advanced technology — more stuff comes out every day,” Jakob Mullins, DDC Mechanic says. “I think it’s time we help the government come to the technological forefront with new equipment.”

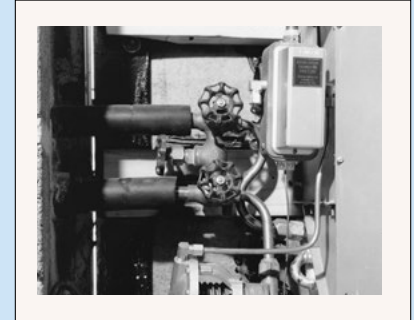
Alongside his leader, Day, and Clinton, his colleague, Mullins hopes that integrating cutting-edge technologies will help the team tackle their workload and maintain Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards. LEED is an industry-standard program that promotes environmentally friendly practices in building design, construction and operations. It serves as a benchmark for AOC teams to reach in their day-to-day work as well as large scale projects.

“The AOC is constantly growing, adapting and meeting the challenges to preserve these historic places while meeting the needs of the modern workplace,” said Dan Murphy, Supervisory General Engineer in the House Office Buildings. “Our people continue to rise and meet the challenges. We must support their growth in these areas, because it is the only way we will be able to serve our clients and provide the extraordinary services they have come to expect from us.”

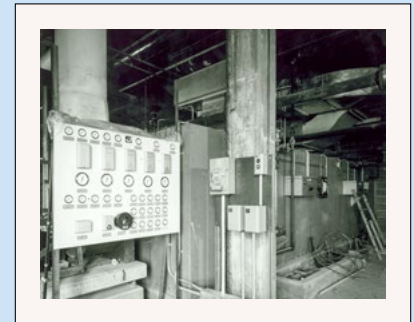
Thanks to experts like Day, Clinton and Mullins, the AOC can create and preserve environments that provide safe havens for historic property while empowering the future of work on Capitol Hill.

Throwback HVAC

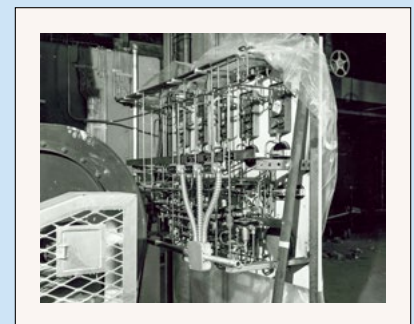
The AOC’s photo archives offer a peek into the HVAC systems in Rayburn during the 1960s.



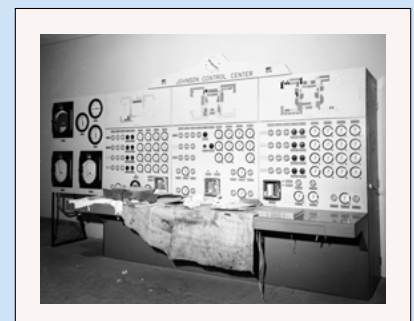
Close-up of an induction unit



Control panel for an AC unit



Back view of a control panel



Engineer control center



EMPLOYEE HIGHLIGHT

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

WRITTEN BY ERIN NELSON
PHOTOGRAPHY BY RODNEY NORMAN



Charles “Doc” Wheatley prepares to start the evening shift as Assistant Supervisor in the Capitol Building’s Plumbing Shop.

Charles “Doc” Wheatley, Assistant Supervisor of the Capitol Building Plumbing Shop’s evening shift, has been a constant presence on the Capitol campus since 1987. That’s when he accepted his first government position and began a decades-long career serving this treasured institution.

At the time Wheatley was attending Howard University; originally from the Virgin Islands, he was far from home and paying his own way while attending school and living in Fort Washington, Maryland. When the weather was nice,

he would walk past the U.S. Capitol, taking in the architectural details as he traveled to and from school. Wheatley had been looking for a job that would offer him stability. When he saw an opening with the United States Senate restaurants, he immediately applied. He had grown up in the hotel industry and was familiar with a commercial kitchen and restaurant setting. “I was hired and gave them my best for one year. During that time, I met lots of people, started networking and learned about the Architect of the Capitol. I quickly realized there was an entire community

within the agency that seemed to do a little bit of everything. There were so many trades; I knew I fit in somewhere,” Wheatley said.

The next year, Wheatley applied for a baler machine operator position with the Senate Office Buildings’ Night Labor Division within the Architect of the Capitol (AOC). He was responsible for operating the machine, compressing recyclable paper and cardboard into 1,500-pound bales. Wheatley worked with that team until 2001, when he joined the Capitol Building’s Plumbing Shop. He started as a helper and advanced quickly — he had studied and learned the plumbing trade while working with his uncle in the Virgin Islands. Wheatley also took training classes the agency offered and completed the Architect’s Mobility Program, an AOC program that allows employees the opportunity to apply for positions where they can gain a specialized skillset. To prepare himself for a leadership position, Wheatley completed an Associate Degree in general studies from the College of Southern Maryland in 2011. He has advanced to supervise a team of four pipefitters for the Capitol Building jurisdiction’s second shift.

To his colleagues, Wheatley is “Doc,” a nickname he earned his first week on the job in the Capitol jurisdiction. A coworker had a cold and was experiencing symptoms of congestion. Wheatley gave him his grandmother Vinita’s recipe

“...I quickly realized there was an entire community within the agency that seemed to do a little bit of everything. There were so many trades; I knew I fit in somewhere.”



Capitol evening shift pipefitters, from left to right, John Watts, Dale Mathis and Lloyd Lee prepare to clean and maintain a kitchen drain interceptor system.

of ginger, star anise and cloves. The coworker was soon on the mend and affectionately started calling him Doc, a nickname that much to Wheatley's surprise has stuck with him.

It's appropriate in more ways than one. Listening to Wheatley name the varied aspects of his team's role in maintaining, servicing, upgrading and protecting the many water systems at the Capitol is similar to the service one might expect from an emergency medical team.

"Whenever we receive a call about any water issues, we respond immediately and sometimes run to the location." Wheatley and his team are always prepared to make their work as seamless and effective as possible to prevent harm to the people and building they serve.

"We make sure we keep the water systems running and the water going where it's supposed to go. I have a

great team helping me do that — I cannot emphasize that enough. They always show up. They make the water systems work."

That work alternates between inspections, regular maintenance, upgrading systems and emergency repairs. Wheatley and his evening shift team coordinate with the day shift and schedule projects for times when they will have the least impact on building occupants and events.

Over the decades, Wheatley has witnessed many historical events — every presidential inauguration since George W. Bush, September 11th, the security impacts that soon followed and the opening of the U.S. Capitol Visitor Center in 2008. Through it all his love for the job and building has continued, "I've enjoyed every minute of my time working in the Capitol. The experience is invaluable."

"We make sure we keep the water systems running and the water going where it's supposed to go. I have a great team helping me do that — I cannot emphasize that enough. They always show up. They make the water systems work."

▼
Mathis operates specialized equipment to clean a grease interceptor.





Watts vacuums kitchen waste from an underfloor pit.

“There is so much talent here within the Capitol, and it’s amazing to see the results of our work, whether it’s the painters, masons, sheet metal workers, HVAC team or the plumbers in my shop, to name a few. We make it happen.”

When asked about his best day at the AOC, he couldn’t pick just one, “I have so many best days.” Wheatley enjoys events where the Capitol community joins together to honor those who have served our country, when they are lying in state. “On those days you have a chance to really read their accomplishments, and we give them this recognition — I really respect those occasions,” he said. “As a souvenir, I have a file collection of program booklets documenting my presence at these historical events, memories I hope to share with my grandchildren one day.”

Wheatley also appreciates his own community of coworkers. “There is so much talent here within the Capitol, and it’s amazing to see the results of our work, whether it’s the painters, masons, sheet metal workers, HVAC team or the plumbers in my shop, to name a few. We make it happen. We’re the ones

maintaining this historical building, which is not an easy task. On those days when you see the finished product, you can give everybody a thumbs up and say good job. Those things keep me going.”

Capitol Building Superintendent Mark Reed echoes that sentiment for both the Plumbing Shop and for Wheatley, “Whether it’s completing preventive maintenance work orders, responding to building leaks or staying to support a late session of Congress, the evening shift Plumbing Shop is professional, responsive and ready to help. Doc is the backbone of the shop; he is always supportive of his team and leads by example. He is the consummate professional, dependable and can always be relied upon to get the job done quickly and accurately.”

Throughout our interview, Wheatley noted his love of helping others and supporting his leadership, including Reed.

As Wheatley contemplates retirement, he reflected on that aspect of his career and how it has sustained his enthusiasm for his work, “I feel like I’m contributing to the preservation of the Capitol. After 37 years, there must be something that has kept me here this long. I think it has a lot to do with serving the people here at the Capitol — staffers, senators, representatives and my coworkers — helping them accomplish their goals.

“Every time I return to the Virgin Islands to visit my mom, brother and sisters, I often share my experience about the Capitol with my nieces and nephews. They see pictures of the Dome. I repeatedly take the opportunity to inform them that most of what happens in the world goes through the Capitol, and I’m doing my part to help others do their jobs. That brings me a lot of satisfaction. I’m just a small piece of the puzzle in making the building function. I’m very proud of that.”



Donna Klee and Jayashree Shamanna examine the ceiling fresco in the U.S. Capitol.

PRESERVATION SPOTLIGHT

MEET THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER

With the Architect of the Capitol's (AOC) mission to *Serve, Preserve and Inspire*, the charge for the continuity and longevity of our buildings is no small task. The AOC's commitment to preservation is essential. The heritage assets in its care are among the nation's most significant and are recognized around the world as an image of the United States government and its representative democracy.

WRITTEN BY AIMEE JORJANI
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JAMES ROSENTHAL



▼
Klee has worked for the AOC for more than 10 years and was named the agency's Historic Preservation Officer in the fall of 2023. In this capacity, she works to implement the agency's preservation policy.

There is a powerful feeling that emanates when you are on the Capitol campus. Part of that sense of place is created by the heritage assets, including artwork and architectural features that require a special kind of care to maintain and ensure that they endure. Understanding and maintaining high standards for preservation is central to the agency's work conducted on heritage assets. Actions and interventions conducted by the AOC every day impact the life of a building. Conscious of preserving the heritage assets in its care, the AOC implements appropriate design solutions to ensure modern-day safety and technology needs are met in order to serve and inspire.

Preservation Policy and the Historic Preservation Officer

The Capitol campus represents over 225 years of construction history as well as important moments for our country. It is the government's duty to ensure they remain for present and future generations. To do so, the AOC's Preservation Policy and Standards (Order 37-1) delegates the administration, interpretation and implementation to guide and inform the decision-making process to appropriately care for these assets, which brings us to the AOC's Historic Preservation Officer (HPO) — Donna Klee.

The Preservation Policy and Standards ensure that activities and projects are consistent throughout the vast Capitol campus. With over 25 years of experience, Klee administers the AOC's policy to maintain and preserve as much historic "fabric" as possible and to find efficient methods that are the least disruptive to it. She states that "as we look at the repair process

for either stone or plaster, the role of preservation is to find the least destructive, the minimal to stabilize and the maximum lifespan we can get out of the original material." Klee, who earned a Master of Architecture and a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Historic Preservation from the Savannah College of Art and Design, takes this to heart for the sake of continuity and care of the AOC's heritage assets. "I fell in love with architecture and historic preservation at a young age. I was raised with a preservation ethic since my parents often restored old houses. I could fetch the right tool for them at a young age and my love for woodworking and other historic materials was born." Having spent nine years working on the Cannon Renewal Project, most recently as the Project Executive, few people have a more intimate knowledge of the Capitol campus than Klee.

Preservation: The Heart of the AOC's Mission

The first preservation policy guiding the work of the AOC was developed in 2006 and over time has formalized values and philosophies to guide modifications, restoration and conservation efforts as well as the day-to-day work of the AOC (in 2016, certain collections and assets were delegated to the AOC Curator, and living botanical assets were delegated to the U.S. Botanic Garden Curator). Even maintenance work is preservation, so it is important for AOC employees to know what to preserve and why, including the type of cleaning products to use on different materials. With historic buildings and fabric, making the wrong choice may cause damage that is irreversible. The policy also guides the work of contractors involved in projects on the Capitol campus.

Over the past two decades, the AOC's Architecture and Preservation Branch has compiled Building Preservation Guides, Cultural Landscapes Reports, and other tools such as envelope studies, metal inventories and paint analyses to ensure that the preservation policy and goals are carried out by providing context, information and inventory. They contain information about historically significant spaces and elements while clarifying preservation priorities and include historical background and/or chronology that shows the original designer or owner's intent through correspondence, annual reports, maintenance reports, expenditures, physical descriptions, historic building zone classifications, and determinations of the national, cultural and architectural significance.

HPO: A Voice for Heritage Assets

Since becoming the HPO in 2023, Klee's goal is to expand the preservation culture by being both instinctive and proactive. Doing so requires information to be more accessible and consumable to those working and maintaining historic buildings on campus on a regular basis. In addition to everyday inquiries and current ongoing project considerations, foundational long-term projects are in development.

Klee sees more than most of us do. She avails of teachable moments around the Capitol campus for congressional staff, the public and AOC employees. She is eager to expand ways to educate and train, "We can honor these buildings by honoring the process in place to protect them. Beyond that, a robust maintenance and life-cycle planning program could avoid unintended losses and potentially decrease long-term costs."

Ultimately, the Historic Preservation Officer is the voice for the buildings. In her role, Klee with her innate curiosity and desire to seek root causes about why a building may look and act the way it does, is active in project planning when scopes of work are formulated, facilities assessments are created, and project development plans are crafted — all with an eye to minimize negative impact. Before any intervention is conducted, careful examination and thorough documentation of the condition is carried out. Klee facilitates research on an asset in question, including arranging for any needed scientific investigation, such as paint analysis or plaster survey to assess the significance or condition. She is also eager to identify and use the highly skilled artisans on the AOC staff.

As HPO, speaking to the protection of historic fabric when work is performed near it, a simple consideration is asking, "What might be irreplaceable around me?" goes a long way in the AOC's everyday work. She stresses, "We all need to be preservationists in our work here. Not only is it part of our mission, but there's also only so much historic fabric."

While the protection of heritage assets requires balance, it can be achieved by understanding the AOC's preservation policy and through thoughtful planning and consideration in implementing projects. As Klee stated, "Historic preservation is the intentional actions we take to identify, document, maintain or repair heritage assets for continued use into the future." In her role as HPO, Klee plays a critical role for the AOC to educate and provide a better understanding and to seek appropriate solutions for upholding the AOC's preservation goals.



▼
Klee examines the recently surveyed Constantino Brumidi fresco in the President's Room in the U.S. Capitol dating from 1860. Recent surveys are assessing the condition of numerous painting media including fresco, tempera, oil on plaster and gilding.



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