

Welcome Remarks, Special Joint Session
Monday, February 10, 2020

Dedication of statues of Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass

Elaine Rice Bachmann, Secretary, State House Trust

Governor Hogan, First Lady Mrs. Hogan, Lt. Governor Rutherford, President Ferguson, Speaker Jones, President Emeritus Miller, members of the General Assembly, and distinguished guests: My name is Elaine Rice Bachmann and I am the deputy state archivist and secretary of the State House Trust. It is my honor to welcome you to this evening's special joint ceremony, as we come together for an event that has been long in planning and anticipation--and long overdue in honoring the two most historically important native Marylanders in American history: Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass. The idea of adding statues of Tubman and Douglass to the State House has been advocated for for years by members of the Legislative Black Caucus, joined by colleagues in the General Assembly, and by members of the public. But the realization of that idea--and this night--would not have been possible without the leadership of the late Speaker Michael Busch, and President Emeritus Mike Miller. It is so regrettable that Mike Busch is not here with us tonite to finally see these statues--and so very gratifying that Mike Miller is.

The Department of General Services has led this project, and I commend Secretary Ellington Churchill, and most specifically the project manager, Mark Schneidman, who has masterfully overseen every aspect of the structural and technical work required to

add two 500 pound bronze statues onto the floor of a nearly 250 year old room. Our charge at the Archives was to imagine what it might have felt like, and looked like, for Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass to be present in the room where the abolition of slavery in Maryland finally occurred on November 1, 1864, with the ratification of the Constitution that included, in Article 24, the words “ hereafter in this State, there shall be neither slavery nor involuntary servitude...and all persons held to service or labor as slaves, are hereby declared free.” What I hope we’ve achieved is a faithful portrayal, and a fitting tribute, to the courage, dignity, and leadership of these two individuals who devoted themselves so fully to the pursuit of freedom and justice for their fellow men and women. I wish to thank the curatorial team at the Archives for their dedication to this task: Tim Baker, State Archivist; Catherine Rogers Arthur, Director of Artistic Property, Chris Kintzel, associate curator of artistic property; Chris Haley, Director of the Legacy of Slavery in Maryland research project; and Maya Davis, also of the Legacy of Slavery in Maryland project and a member of the Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture. Documenting the lives of the many enslaved, and formerly enslaved, people of Maryland has been the focus of the Legacy of Slavery in Maryland project at the Archives for the past twenty years, and it continues to support research not only in our state, but at institutions throughout the country--and the world. Part of that mission is making as much information as possible accessible to the public. And tonite, you are each being presented with the new edition of *The Guide to the History of Slavery in Maryland*, just off the press, with new images and information that document the scholarship and sources available for interpreting not only the history of

those who were enslaved, but also the lives of those who sought to make a life here after Emancipation, and the many challenges and obstacles that prevented so many from truly obtaining that promised freedom.

Frederick Douglass is only known to have visited this State House on one occasion--in June 1874. A newspaper account of that visit describes an extraordinary event--Douglass visiting the Old Senate Chamber just behind you, and there seeing the monumental painting of *Washington Resigning His Commission* which then hung in that room--and walking back and forth in front of it reciting from memory the speech Washington delivered to Congress on December 23, 1783--the original of which is displayed right here in the rotunda. We might ask ourselves, what made Douglass commit to memory the speech of a man who left this building that day in 1783 to return to Mount Vernon--where he enslaved over 300 individuals? Did Douglass really revere a man who, like many of the "founding fathers" lived a life in contradiction to the principle that "all men are created equal?" Did Douglass struggle with the same questions that we do when we consider how best to tell the truth of history yet also honor the legacies of those who formed our democracy? It is unlikely we can ever know the answers to how Douglass and Harriet Tubman felt about the history that came before them--but what is important is that we ask the questions and seek to better understand the context of their lives. Now visitors can be inspired to ask these questions themselves as they walk into the Old Senate Chamber to encounter the statue of George Washington, and imagine him reciting the resignation speech, and

then walk across the rotunda and into the Old House of Delegates Chamber to come face to face with Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass--and imagine what it might have meant to them when freedom finally was realized in their home state.

This moment of connecting with a figure from history is made more accessible by depicting them as fellow human beings--not set upon a pedestal--but instead occupying the same space with the visitor. The success of this moment is largely in the hands of the sculptor, and the State of Maryland was so fortunate to collaborate with StudioEIS and their team of artists in bringing Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass to life. Here to speak on behalf of these artists is Ivan Schwartz, the founder and president of StudioEIS.