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National Park Service and Gateway Arch Park Foundation reach next milestone toward Old Courthouse renovation

\$24,454,263 investment will restore and improve the historic site of the pivotal Dred Scott case and hundreds of [suits for freedom](#) as part of largest NPS public-private partnership

ST. LOUIS (November 28, 2022)—The National Park Service (NPS) and Gateway Arch Park Foundation are one step closer to kicking off the \$24.5 million renovation of the Old Courthouse at Gateway Arch National Park. In recent days, the NPS selected St. Louis-based Tarlton Corporation to lead the renovation, which focuses on increasing accessibility for all visitors, structural improvements to the historic building and new exhibitory. This renovation is a contributing project to the CityArchRiver project, the largest public-private partnership in the history of the National Park Service.

The Old Courthouse has served as the backdrop for some of America’s pivotal early legal cases: it was where Dred and Harriet Scott sued for their freedom, beginning in 1846, and where the case’s lower court trials were heard in 1847 and 1850. St. Louis Circuit Court records show that more than 300 other “freedom suits” were filed there by 1860. In another famous civil rights case, Virginia Minor sued for her, and by extension all women’s, right to vote in the 1870s.

“We are honored to preserve and protect the Old Courthouse and the many stories told within its walls – from Dred and Harriet Scott and hundreds of other enslaved people suing for their freedom, to Virginia Minor’s fight for a woman’s right to vote,” said **Gateway Arch National Park Superintendent Jeremy Sweat**. “These renovations will maintain the Old Courthouse’s historical integrity and safeguard its lasting legacy.”

This is the second significant renovation to the Old Courthouse since it was built between 1839 and 1862 (the original building was expanded during this time). The renovations are the final component of the \$380 million [CityArchRiver project](#), which has resulted in the revitalization of the Gateway Arch park grounds, Arch Visitor Center, Museum at the Gateway Arch, St. Louis Riverfront, Luther Ely Smith Square and Kiener Plaza. This project is jointly funded by the National Park Service and Gateway Arch Park Foundation. Private funding has been provided through Gateway Arch Park Foundation by generous donors to the CityArchRiver capital campaign.

The renovations include the installation of an elevator for greater accessibility within the building, in conjunction with accessible ramps that were previously installed at both entrances to the building during phase one of the CityArchRiver Old Courthouse renovations. Critical building system updates, which will help revitalize and maintain the building's integrity, include a new heating, ventilation, and air conditioning system; a new fire suppression system; and general restoration and improvements to the building's historically significant features such as windows, doors, ceilings, flooring and other decorative elements.

“As the philanthropic partner of Gateway Arch National Park, our mission is to ensure this national park site remains vibrant and welcoming for generations to come – and these renovations to the Old Courthouse will certainly accomplish that,” said **Gateway Arch Park Foundation Executive Director Ryan McClure**. “We are committed to creating a modern, accessible and inclusive Old Courthouse experience that demonstrates how important this building is to the story of America, and how our collective past can inform our future.”

During the renovation, artifacts from the Old Courthouse will be carefully moved and stored, along with the park's archives and library, at the Old Post Office in Downtown St. Louis. Hours of operation for researchers and students, as well as public to access the library to see artifacts on temporary display, will be announced once the move is completed.

An official groundbreaking ceremony will take place before renovations begin. More details will be announced in the coming weeks.

NEW MUSEUM EXHIBIT GALLERIES

Future Old Courthouse visitors will enjoy new and updated exhibit galleries designed by Haley Sharpe Design in conjunction with Gateway Arch National Park staff. Exhibits will include:

- **Northeast Gallery: Dred and Harriet Scott** – Focuses on the Scotts' fight for freedom, which began in the Old Courthouse, and how the legal and political environment at the time culminated in the infamous U.S. Supreme Court Decision. The exhibit gallery also reflects on the legacy and relevancy of their case today.
- **Northwest Gallery: Pathways to Freedom** – Explores African American life in St. Louis: slavery, the tortured legacy of enslaved individuals seeking freedom, post-Civil War civil rights and more.
- **Southeast Gallery: Designed for Justice** – Highlights the architectural features of the courthouse and the spirit of innovation of architects, artists, builders and craftsmen.
- **Southwest Gallery: See You in Court** – Focuses on the importance of courts in our society, our legal structure, and the daily activities in the courthouse from 1839 to 1930. Visitors will be able to experience an 1850s courtroom and re-enact mock trials that will further their understanding of how our court system allows us to settle disputes peacefully and provide a framework for how our society functions.

About Gateway Arch National Park:

[Gateway Arch National Park](#) is a park of the National Park System that commemorates Thomas Jefferson's vision of a unified continental nation and St. Louis' role as the gateway to the American West during the 19th century and preserves the Old Courthouse as the site of the Dred Scott case. The park includes the Gateway Arch, the Arch grounds and the Old Courthouse, located on the riverfront in downtown St. Louis. Admission to the Museum at the Gateway Arch is free, and most programs are free of charge and open to the public. Many programs and events at the park benefit from the generous support from park partners Gateway Arch Park Foundation, Jefferson National Parks Association, and Bi-State Development. The Gateway Arch is open daily from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. The Old Courthouse is currently closed. The park is closed on Thanksgiving, Christmas Day and New Year's Day. For more information about Gateway Arch National Park, visit NPS.gov/jeff.

About Gateway Arch Park Foundation:

[Gateway Arch Park Foundation](#) is the official philanthropic partner and conservancy for Gateway Arch National Park. Its mission is to ensure the Gateway Arch, its grounds, neighboring public spaces, and attractions are a vital, welcoming, well-supported resource to the community and nation for generations to come. It seeks to fulfill its mission by providing for ongoing conservation, preservation and education at the park, in addition to hosting, facilitating and promoting community programs that bring the park and its surrounding areas in Downtown St. Louis to life. The Foundation is part of an alliance that helps meet this mission, which includes the National Park Service, Bi-State Development, Great Rivers Greenway, Jefferson National Parks Association, and the City of St. Louis. For more information, visit ArchPark.org.

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