

Builder of First American Clock &

Surveyor of Nation's Capitol



Benjamin Banneker

The diversity of this person's genius is told in the titles above.

Benjamin Banneker—you would think would be a name known by school children and adults alike. Yet who has ever heard of his achievements?

Not only was he the first Black to engage in clock-making in the American colonies (his life spanned 75 years from 1731 to 1806) but he also was a noted astronomer, mathematician and linguist.

His mechanical inventiveness led him in 1761 to construct a wooden "string" clock. It was the first clock made in America and was so accurate that it kept perfect time and struck each hour unfailingly for more than 20 years.

Yet Banneker performed an even more astounding feat for the young America he helped found. He laid out the entire survey of Washington, D.C. by memory.

Banneker was a surveyor on a six-person team that helped lay out the blueprint for the city. When the chair of the committee, Major L'Enfant, abruptly resigned and returned to Paris with his plans, Banneker—using his precise memory—reproduced the plans in their entirety!

This message courtesy of

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