



54th Regiment Memorial



George Middleton House



Phillips School



Charles Street Meeting House



Lewis and Harriet Hayden House



Abiel Smith School at Smith Court

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The American Revolution was a turning point in the status of African Americans in Massachusetts. In 1783 the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts declared slavery unconstitutional. When the first federal census was counted in 1790, Massachusetts was the only state in the Union to record no slaves.

The free African American community in Boston was concerned with finding decent housing, establishing independent supportive institutions, educating their children, and ending slavery in the rest of the nation. Between 1800 and 1900, most African Americans in Boston lived in the West End, between Pinckney and Cambridge streets and between Joy and Charles streets, a neighborhood now called the North Slope of Beacon Hill. Many of these homes are part of the Black Heritage Trail.®

*Note: Historic homes on the Black Heritage Trail® are private residences and not open to the public. Please respect the privacy of homeowners.*

**54th Regiment Memorial**  
*Park and Beacon streets*  
Responding to pressure from black and white abolitionists, President Lincoln admitted African American soldiers into the Union forces in 1863. The 54th Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry was the first black regiment recruited in the North. On July 18, 1863, the 54th regiment led an assault on Fort Wagner in an attempt to capture Confederate-held Charleston, S.C. In this hard-fought battle, Col. Robert Gould Shaw and many of his soldiers were killed. Sgt. William Carney of New Bedford was wounded while saving the flag from capture. Carney was awarded the Medal of Honor for his bravery, the first black soldier to receive this honor. This bronze memorial by Augustus Saint-Gaudens was dedicated May 31, 1897, in a ceremony that included Carney and members of the 54th Regiment.

**George Middleton House**  
*5-7 Pinckney Street*  
Built in 1787 this structure is one of the oldest standing homes on Beacon Hill. George Middleton

(1735–1815), one of the original owners, was a Revolutionary War veteran. Middleton led the Bucks of America, one of three black militias that fought against the British. After the war he became an activist and community leader, helping found the Free African Society and serving as the 3rd Grand Master of the Prince Hall Masons, a fraternal order started by black Bostonian Prince Hall.

**Phillips School**  
*Anderson and Pinckney streets*  
This architecture is typical of 1800s Boston schoolhouses. Built in 1824, this was a white-only school until 1855. Black children attended school on the first floor of the African Meeting House or, after 1834, the Abiel Smith School. When the Massachusetts Legislature abolished segregated schools in 1855, the Phillips School became one of Boston's first integrated schools.

**John J. Smith House**  
*86 Pinckney Street*  
Born free in Richmond, Va., John J. Smith (1820–1906) moved to Boston in the late 1840s. He opened

a barbershop that became a center for abolitionist activity and a rendezvous point for people escaping on the Underground Railroad. During the Civil War, Smith was a recruiting officer for the all-black 5th Cavalry. He was later elected to the Massachusetts House of Representatives for three terms. Smith lived here from 1878 to 1893.

**Charles Street Meeting House**  
*Mt. Vernon and Charles streets*  
This meeting house was built in 1807 by the white Third Baptist Church of Boston. New England's segregationist tradition of church seating prevailed. Timothy Gilbert, church member and abolitionist, tested the tradition in the mid-1830s by inviting black friends to his pew one Sunday. Gilbert was expelled. Joined by other white abolitionist Baptists, Gilbert founded the First Baptist Free Church, which became Tremont Temple—considered to be one of the first integrated churches in America. After the Civil War, Boston's black population increased, and the largest of its churches bought the building in 1876. The African Meth-

odist Episcopal Church (A.M.E.) remained here until 1939, the last black institution to leave Beacon Hill.

**Lewis and Harriet Hayden House**  
*66 Phillips Street*  
Lewis Hayden (1816–1889), born enslaved in Lexington, Ky., escaped with his wife Harriet and settled in Boston. Lewis became a leader in the abolition movement, and the Hayden House became an integral stop on the Underground Railroad. The Haydens reportedly kept kegs of gunpowder in their home that they threatened to ignite if slave catchers tried to enter. Hayden also recruited for the 54th Regiment, was a Grand Master of the Prince Hall Masons, and was later elected to the Massachusetts House of Representatives.

**John Coburn House**  
*2 Phillips Street*  
John Coburn (1811–1873) was a clothing retailer and community activist. He served as treasurer of the New England Freedom Association, an organization dedicated to helping people escape from

slavery. In 1851 he was arrested, tried, and acquitted for the courthouse rescue of Shadrach Minkins, a freedom seeker who was caught in Boston by federal slave catchers empowered by the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850. Coburn was co-founder and captain of the Massasoit Guards, a black military company in 1850s Boston that was a precursor to the 54th Regiment.

**Smith Court Residences**  
*3, 5, 7, 7A, and 10 Smith Court*  
These five homes typify those of black Bostonians in the 1800s. • *Number 3* Owner James Scott's Underground Railroad activity is documented in the records of the Boston Vigilance Committee. Like John Coburn (see *2 Phillips Street*), Scott was arrested, tried, and acquitted for the 1851 rescue of Shadrach Minkins. William Cooper Nell, abolitionist and community leader, also lived at Number 3. Nell, the driving force in the struggle to integrate Boston's schools in 1855, is considered the nation's first published black historian. • *Number 5* Owner George Wash-

ington was a bootblack, laborer, and African Meeting House deacon. • *Numbers 7 and 7A* Joseph Scarlett, chimney sweep and entrepreneur, owned this building in the 1860s; it served as rental property. • *Number 10* Scarlett also owned this property next to the African Meeting House. At his death in 1898, Scarlett owned 15 properties in Boston, a testament to his hard work and success in business.

The brick apartment houses on the west end of the court and on the corner of Joy Street typify the tenements that developers built between 1885 and 1915. The apartments provided inexpensive, dense housing units for the waves of late-1880s European immigrants. Except for the Smith Court Residences, most wooden houses were torn down to make way for these four- and five-story apartments.

**Abiel Smith School**  
*46 Joy Street*  
White philanthropist Abiel Smith willed money to the city of Boston for educating African American children. The city built this school building with Smith's legacy. In

1835 Boston's black children attended the Smith School, which replaced the school in the African Meeting House. The school remained Boston's black public school until public schools were integrated in 1855.

**African Meeting House**  
*8 Smith Court*  
The African Meeting House, built by free black laborers in 1806, is considered the oldest surviving black church building in the United States. In the 1800s the building served as the center of religious, social, educational, and political activity for Boston's free black community. William Lloyd Garrison founded the New England Anti-Slavery Society here in 1832. Frederick Douglass spoke here, and it was a recruitment station for the 54th Massachusetts Regiment during the Civil War. At the end of the 1800s a Jewish congregation bought the building, and it served as a synagogue until 1972, when it was acquired by the Museum of African American History.

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## Planning Your Visit

Boston African American National Historic Site works in partnership with the Museum of African American History, the City of Boston, and private property owners to promote, preserve, and interpret the history of Boston's free African American community on Beacon Hill in the 1800s. It includes homes, businesses, schools, and churches of a community that struggled against the forces of slavery and injustice.

**Black Heritage Trail®** This 1.6-mile walking tour begins at the Robert Gould Shaw Memorial and ends at the Abiel Smith School (see *map*). Ranger-led tours are available year-round. For information about

tours, call 617-742-5415 or visit [www.nps.gov/boaf](http://www.nps.gov/boaf).

**Accessibility** Ask the park for details. Service animals are welcome.

**More Information**  
Boston African American National Historic Site  
14 Beacon Street, Suite 401  
Boston, MA 02108  
617-742-5415  
[www.nps.gov/boaf](http://www.nps.gov/boaf)

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**Museum of African American History** The museum preserves, conserves, and interprets the contributions of New England's African Americans from colonial times through the 1800s. It also honors those who found common cause with African Americans in the struggle for liberty and justice. The museum operates the Abiel Smith School and African Meeting House.

Museum of African American History  
14 Beacon Street, Suite 719  
Boston, MA 02108  
617-725-0022  
[www.maah.org](http://www.maah.org)

