



# Foundation Document Overview

## Boston African American National Historic Site

### Massachusetts



#### Contact Information

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## Purpose



*The purpose of BOSTON AFRICAN AMERICAN NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE is to preserve and interpret historic properties of outstanding national significance located in Boston, Massachusetts, that are associated with Boston's African American community and its leading role in redefining freedom and promoting the abolition of slavery prior to the Civil War.*

## Significance

Significance statements express why Boston African American National Historic Site resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

1. North Slope of Beacon Hill preserves and evokes Boston's primary African American community between the late-18th century and the Civil War. Developing some of the country's earliest African American institutions, this community was a center of the abolition, human rights, and equal rights movements and was a major Underground Railroad location.
2. The African Meeting House is the oldest extant African American church building in the United States. It served as a school and was a gathering space for abolitionists and equal rights activists.
3. Abiel Smith School is the first public school and the first school building intended for African Americans in the country.
4. Robert Gould Shaw and 54th Regiment Memorial commemorates the first African American regiment to fight for the Union Army in the Civil War.





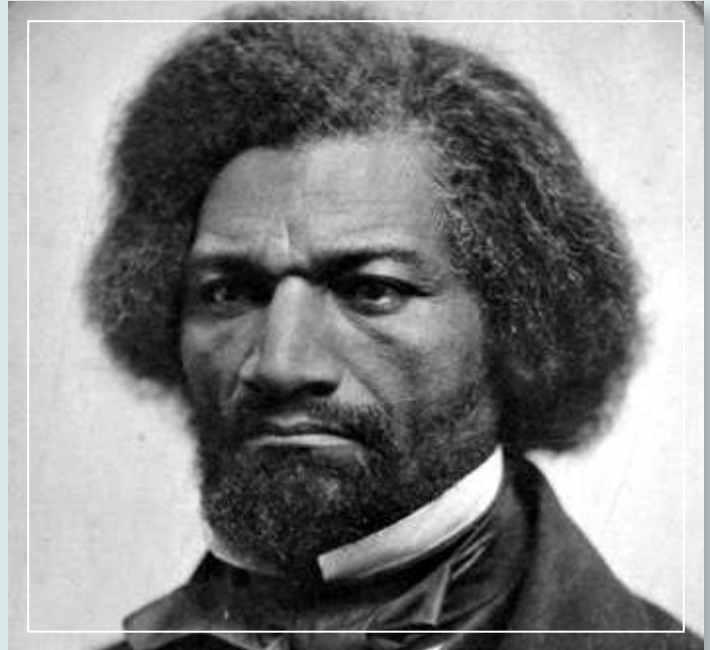
## Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Historic Buildings and Structures** – Boston African American National Historic Site comprises 13 historic properties related to African American settlement on Boston’s Beacon Hill prior to the Civil War.
- **African Meeting House and Abiel Smith School** – The African Meeting House is the oldest extant African American church building in the United States. Abiel Smith School is the first public school and the first school building intended for African Americans in the country. Both are managed by the Museum of African American History.
- **Robert Gould Shaw and Massachusetts 54th Regiment Memorial** – The Robert Gould Shaw and 54th Regiment Memorial commemorates the first African American regiment to fight for the Union Army in the Civil War.
- **Heritage Trails** – Black Heritage Trail®, a 1.6-mile walking route, links the 15 sites that are part of the Boston African American National Historic Site. Boston’s Trails to Freedom includes the Freedom Trail and the Black Heritage Trail®, both promoted through the Boston National Historical Park.
- **Beacon Hill Neighborhood** – The Historic Beacon Hill District is one of Boston’s oldest neighborhoods, being built up primarily between the American Revolution and the Civil War. Part of the neighborhood housed Boston’s social elite and part housed the city’s African American community.



## Interpretive Themes



Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- **Building community through faith, education, and activism** – Black Bostonians created a vibrant community through shared and sustained commitment to education, faith, and political and social activism.
- **Abolition and the struggle for human rights** – Boston’s African American community and its allies helped lead the city and the nation in the struggle against slavery and injustice, creating a second American Revolution that redefined freedom.
- **The Underground Railroad** – The North Slope of Beacon Hill was a center of the Underground Railroad and resistance to the Fugitive Slave Act.
- **54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry** – The 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, the first African American regiment established in the North (1863), served with honor and helped secure Union victory, contributing to the end of slavery in the United States.

# Description

As defined in the enabling Public Law 96-430 on October 10, 1980, Boston African American National Historic Site comprises historic properties related to African American settlement on Boston's Beacon Hill prior to the Civil War that are located with a boundary depicted on the "Boundary Map, Boston African American National Historic Site," numbered BOAF-80,000, March, 1980. Each identified historic property is on the Black Heritage Trail®.

Boston African American National Historic Site, located primarily on the North Slope of Beacon Hill in Boston, was one of the largest 19th-century African American neighborhoods in a northern US city.

Massachusetts became the first state, in 1783, to declare slavery unconstitutional. This led free blacks to settle in Boston on the North Slope of Beacon Hill, where they formed a thriving community. Boston African American National Historic Site includes 15 historic sites stretching along the 1.6-mile Black Heritage Trail®. The Museum of African American History is located in the African Meeting House and the adjacent Abiel Smith School.

The African Meeting House (1806) is the oldest documented African American church building in the United States. It served as a forum for the abolitionist movement. William Lloyd Garrison founded the New England Anti-Slavery Society here in 1832. Boston's North Slope residents were deeply involved with the Underground Railroad and assisting fugitives from slavery. One of the sites of the Boston African American National Historic Site, the Lewis Hayden House, was the home of a fugitive slave who became Boston's most daring fugitive assistant. The Abiel Smith School (1835) is an outgrowth of one of the nation's first schools for African American children. Nearby, the Phillips School became one of Boston's first integrated schools after a successful struggle to end segregated schools in 1855. Other buildings of the Boston African American National Historic Site were either homes or meeting places of African Americans active in community and antislavery activities.

The Robert Gould Shaw and 54th Regiment Memorial, which memorializes the African American Civil War regiment that was enlisted on the North Slope of Beacon Hill and was the first such regiment from the North, also is part of the park. It is located on Boston Common.

The visitor experience of Boston African American National Historic Site entails visits to the Museum of African American History, walking tours guided by park rangers, and self-guided tours following the Black Heritage Trail®. Park visitation in 2013 was 386,084.

