



PARTNERS WITH PURPOSE



AN ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORY OF BOSTON AFRICAN AMERICAN NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE, 1980–2015

Teresa Dujnic Bulger
and
Nedra Lee

Cover Image: (Left) African Meeting House Circa 2020; (Upper Right) Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick takes a tour of the restored interior of the African Meeting House in September 2011; (Lower Right) Wayfinding sign for the Black Heritage Trail. *National Park Service Boston African American National Historic Site.*

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Boston African American National Historic Site,
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PARTNERS WITH PURPOSE

*An Administrative History of
Boston African American National Historic Site,
1980–2015*

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BNHP	Boston National Historical Park
BOAF	Boston African American National Historic Site (in notes only)
BOST	Boston National Historical Park (in notes only)
FY	Fiscal Year
GMP	General Management Plan
MAAH	Museum of African American History (in notes only)
NARA	National Archives Records Administration (in notes only)
NHP	National Historical Park
NHS	National Historic Site
NPS	National Park Service
ONPS	Operations of the National Park Service
RMR	Resource Management Records

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The Museum of African American History deserves special thanks for their generosity throughout this project. As this report documents the intertwined development of both a national historic site and a history museum, the Museum's participation has been essential to telling the full story. The Museum opened up its archives unreservedly and provided time for our researchers to visit remote repositories. Curator Cara Liasson's knowledge of the collection was much appreciated. Many former Museum staff members also agreed to participate in this project, offering much needed perspectives from outside the park service.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

In 1980, President Jimmy Carter signed into law legislation establishing Boston African American National Historic Site (Boston African American NHS). The new site shined a spotlight on a historic Black community in Boston which played a vital role in the anti-slavery and abolitionist movements of the nineteenth century. Built around the Black Heritage Trail®, the site comprised “the largest group of antebellum Afro-American historic sites in any urban area of the United States,” arrayed along the narrow streets of Boston’s Beacon Hill.¹ During his remarks at the joint signing ceremony—shared with the new Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site—President Carter expressed optimism that the new historic sites would help Americans better understand Black history. The sites promised to “provide all Americans with new sources of knowledge and inspiration” while also giving “black Americans new insights into their own roots.”²

Politicians, legislators, and activists alike hoped that the creation of Boston African American NHS signaled a progressive move toward the meaningful inclusion of Black history in the National Park System. To establish this site, the National Park Service (NPS) partnered with a private history museum with its roots in social activism, the Museum of African American History (Museum).³ Both the NPS and the Museum saw the new site as an opportunity to underscore the relevance of the abolitionist movement for the civil rights struggles which followed in the twentieth century. President Carter hoped that the site would “help present and future generations appreciate not only the events of the past, but the principles and dreams that gave those movements power and allowed them to overcome great obstacles.”⁴ After the signing, a similar optimism was echoed by National Park Service Director Russell Dickenson, who expected the site to help

¹ Deputy Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks [James D. Webb] to Legislative Counsel, memorandum, re: Draft legislation “To provide for the establishment of Boston African American National Historic Site in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and for other purposes,” June 19, 1980. Folder 5, Box 14, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA. Hereafter: “Legislative Counsel Memo,” June 19, 1980.

² “Martin Luther King Jr. and Boston African American Historical Sites Bill Signing Ceremony.” Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, Collection, Office of the Staff Secretary, Series: Presidential Files, Folder October 10, 1980, Container 180.

³ The site’s primary partner has had several name changes over the years. When founded, the Museum was incorporated as “The American Museum of Negro History” on February 23, 1967. The name was changed to the “Museum of Afro-American History” on April 10, 1970, though the name most frequently appears on institutional documentation without a hyphen in “Afro-American,” and then changed again to the “Museum of African American History” on September 8, 2006. Suffolk County Registry of Deeds, Certificate of Incorporation, December 9, 2014. Deed Book 53823: 246. On file, Suffolk County Registry of Deeds, Boston, MA.

⁴ “Martin Luther King Jr. and Boston African American Historical Sites Bill Signing Ceremony.” Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, Collection, October 10, 1980.

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Americans “recognize the role of black history as an intrinsic part of the mosaic of American history.”⁵

The stories and sights which made up Boston African American NHS promised to educate and inspire. The site today comprises fourteen historic properties associated with the free African American community that lived on the north slope of Beacon Hill between the late eighteenth and early twentieth centuries (Figure 1; see Appendix A). These properties are significant for their association with the nineteenth-century community’s “struggle against slavery and for self-determination,” which manifested itself in a variety of community institutions, such as churches and schools, and social movements, such as abolitionism, school desegregation, education reform, and the fight for equality in the military.⁶ The fourteen properties, thirteen buildings, and one structure are arranged along the Black Heritage Trail.^{®7} A history-based interpretive trail created by the Museum of African American History, the Black Heritage Trail serves to “help visitors understand and appreciate the history of the North Slope community and the contributions African Americans made in the struggle for equal rights, both within the city of Boston and in the nation generally.”⁸

As imagined by legislators in 1980, the site would execute its mission to preserve the historic properties associated with Boston’s abolitionist history and educate visitors on this history without the acquisition of property or the allocation of base NPS operating funds. Instead, Congress intended Boston African American NHS to be a partnership park. The site would manage its architectural resources and historical interpretation through partnerships with organizations outside the NPS, such as the Museum of African American History, and active cooperation between parks within the National Park System. Legislators designed the site to operate with no permanent staff and imagined that Boston National Historical Park (Boston NHP) would manage any administrative work, with that park’s superintendent also serving as superintendent of Boston

⁵ Department of the Interior News Release. “National Park Service Announces Addition of Black Historic Site.” NPS Press Release, October 24, 1980. Folder National Park Service, Box A008.22, Executive Director Files: Sylvia Watts-McKinney, Institutional Archive, Museum of African American History Archives, Boston, MA.

⁶ Tara Dudley, Kristina Kupferschmid, and Emily Payne, *Boston African American National Historic Site National Register Nomination*, Suffolk County, Massachusetts (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 2017), 8-1. The 14 contributing resources within the park today include: George Middleton House (5–7 Pinckney Street), Holmes Alley House (7A Smith Court), William C. Nell House, James Scott/William Nell House (3 Smith Court), Joseph Scarlett Tenant House, Peter Guss House (7 Smith Court), African Meeting House (8 Smith Court), Charles Street Meeting House (70 Charles Street), George Washington House (5 Smith Court), Phillips School (65 Anderson Street), Lewis and Harriet Hayden House (66 Phillips Street), Abiel Smith School (46 Joy Street), John J. Smith House (86 Pinckney Street), John Coburn House/Coburn’s Gaming House (2 Phillips Street), Joseph Scarlett House (2/2A Smith Court), and the Robert Gould Shaw /Mass. 54th Regiment Memorial (Beacon at Park Street).

⁷ The Black Heritage Trail[®] is a registered trademark of the Museum of African American History. For readability, the ® symbol has been omitted elsewhere in the document.

⁸ National Park Service, *General Management Plan and Environmental Assessment: Boston African American National Historic Site* (Boston: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2008), 1. Hereafter: NPS, GMP: BOAF 2008.

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African American NHS.⁹ As a result, the staff of Boston NHP would play a large role in dictating Boston African American NHS's interpretive, stewardship, and administrative goals.

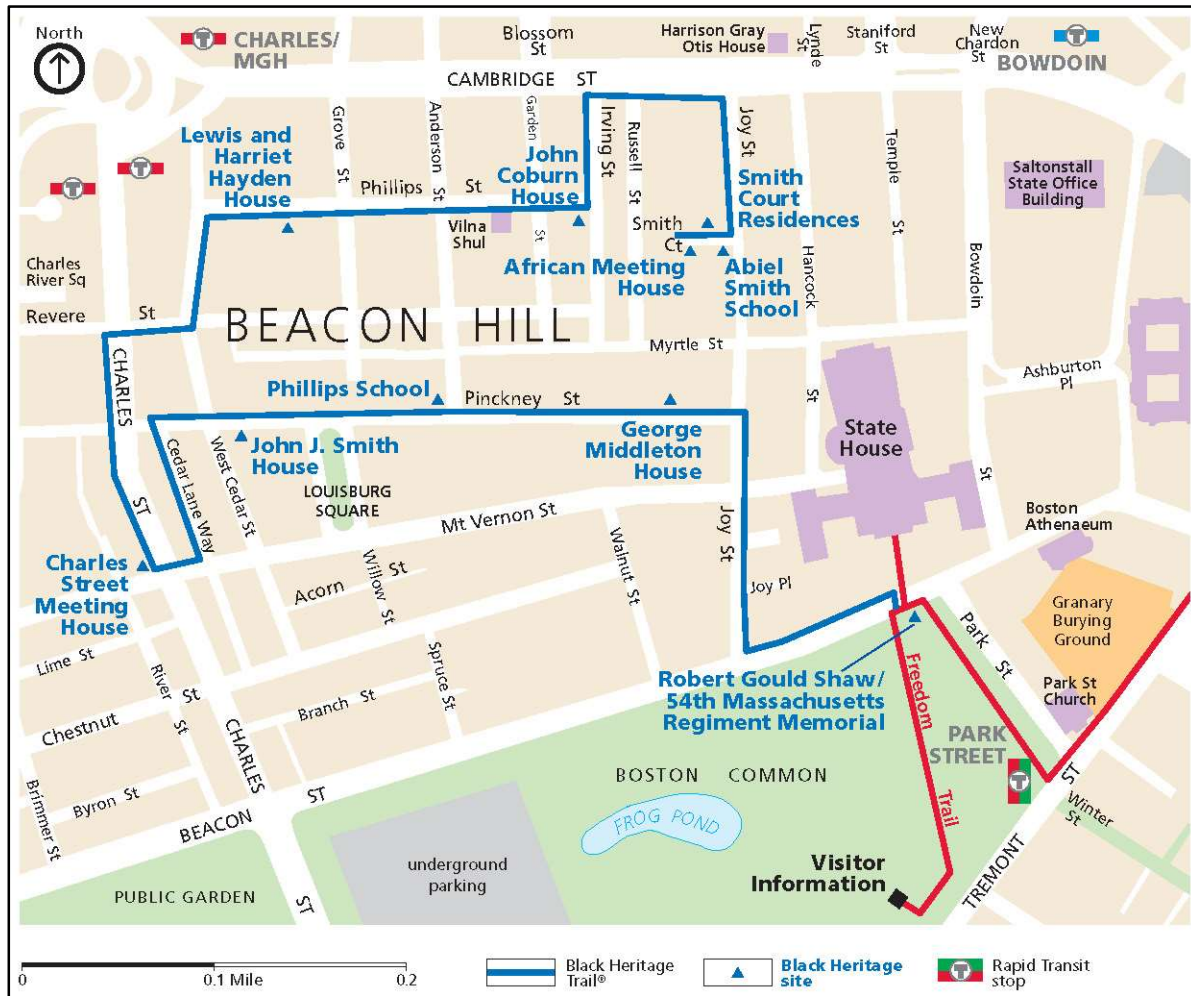


Figure 1. Boston African American National Historic Site, location map. *National Park Service, Boston African American National Historic Site.*

The Museum of African American History, the site's primary park partner, expected that Boston African American NHS would first and foremost be a conduit for preservation funds for Black history sites on Beacon Hill. Chief among these sites was the Museum's own African Meeting House, the oldest extant Black church in the country. The site's seasonal interpretive park rangers could supplement the Museum's staffing of the Black Heritage Trail, provide program funding and technical support, and over time, the themes of the site could be extended beyond the hill to other sites in the city and region.

⁹ "Legislative Counsel Memo," June 19, 1980.

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The vision that the managers and park rangers of Boston African American NHS would come to define in the early years of the site diverged from both of these expectations. Afforded the latitude to form the site as they saw fit by their superintendent, the all-Black staff imagined a future where the site functioned as a financially and operationally independent entity, maintaining relationships with Boston NHP and the Museum in ways that did not impede the pursuit of its own goals. In this vision, the site would fulfill its preservation and education missions while also achieving a level of self-sufficiency that could ensure that this Black history park remained focused on the needs of the Black community and in the control of Black professionals in the field.

Over time, the disjuncture between these differing views of the site's roles, responsibilities, and potential caused great tension between the site staff, the Museum, and Boston NHP. Insufficient funding represented a major factor in determining the direction of the site and its partnerships. The site faced chronic shortages with respect to both base operating funds and project-specific funds for preservation needs. Personal relationships with politicians, NPS regional and Washington offices, and a variety of preservation organizations often became the deciding factor when it came to gaining access to NPS funding. Whereas the site staff had big ideas as to what the site could or should be, the people most able to gain attention for the site's financial needs were in leadership positions outside the site (in the case of the Museum) or were leaders who maintained a split allegiance, as in the case of the superintendent. Boston African American NHS is not unique in this circumstance. Congress has systematically underfunded the National Park Service, severely limiting the agency's ability to operate facilities, maintain infrastructure, and execute needed preservation projects.¹⁰

Another major factor in the development of the site was the partnership model itself. National parks based on a partnership model were relatively new in 1980 and the model had not yet been used for a collaboration with a private Black or minority cultural institution. The Museum at once brought critical historic resources and a measure of cultural and social diversity that the Park Service desperately needed. With these benefits, however, it also brought high financial needs for operations and programming which Congress and the NPS did not anticipate. The Museum and the site used a cooperative agreement as a tool to define the responsibilities of the two parties. In practice, however, the text of these agreements left a lot open to interpretation, especially concerning the everyday operation of both the new site and the needs of the Museum. Both the site and the Museum faced significant difficulties meeting their respective goals and responsibilities. At times the Museum set unrealistic fundraising, research, and interpretation goals which resulted in increased pressure on the NPS to support the Museum. Similarly, the site set lofty goals which its financial and staff resources could not always meet. The functionality of the partnership over

¹⁰ Dwight Pitcaithley and Denis Galvin, "It's not a matter of money—It's a matter of priorities." The Coalition of National Park Service Retirees. Professional Report Series No. 9 (2008).

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time would come down to ongoing communication and mutual respect which went beyond what could be hammered out in an official document.

As an NPS unit tightly interwoven with a number of other institutions, organizations, and entities, Boston African American NHS's development has been complicated and at times contentious. This administrative history traces the development of the site from 1980 through 2015; identifies key issues that defined its trajectory; and puts the site's growth into the context of the development of the Museum of African American History, Boston National Historical Park, and the wider National Park System as these institutions also changed over time. Finally, with an understanding of the many large- and small-scale factors that impacted the development of the site, this administrative history hopes to offer perspective on what could be done better in the future.

The establishment of Boston African American NHS represented a step toward the preservation and promotion of cultural resources associated with an important chapter of American history related to the themes of freedom, race relations, social justice, Black history, and ethnic heritage. The development of the site since its inception, however, suggests that the NPS was not always prepared to follow through. The site often had difficulty attracting the attention and financial resources that were needed to execute its mission. In spite of this, the dedication and leadership of its staff and its park partners have empowered the site to continue to elevate the stories of Black Bostonians and their struggle for equal rights from which we all benefit today.

Overview of Chapters

Our story of Boston African American NHS does not begin with the National Park Service but with the development of the Museum of African American History. Chapter two details how a group of Boston civil rights leaders and social activists conceived of the Museum in the early 1960s as an institution which could be a tool for community uplift, education, and inspiration. Sue Bailey Thurman, Ruth Batson, Henry Hampton, Vivian Johnson, and other Black leaders researched a new social history for Boston focused on the contributions of Black people. This history acted as a recuperative history, serving the needs of the Black community that was routinely excluded from stories of Boston's revolutionary past. The Black Heritage Trail was their answer to the gaps they found in Boston's Freedom Trail.

The Museum expanded its reach in the 1970s. The Museum's first full-time executive director, Byron Rushing, facilitated the purchase of the African Meeting House in 1972 and began to offer regular programming. At the same time, the National Park Service began to firm up their plans to establish Boston NHP, a partnership park at once focused on the American Revolution and the nineteenth-century maritime history of the Charlestown Navy Yard. Without a place for the history of Black and Indigenous people figured into the proposed park, Boston's activist community spoke

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out against it, with Rushing as one of the most vocal critics. Park planners invited Rushing to step into a role as one of the advisors for the Boston park. Advocating for Black history from his position on the advisory commission, Rushing pivoted to support the founding of the Boston NHP, with the hope it would be able to facilitate the preservation of the African Meeting House. When this became untenable, Rushing imagined an independent unit of the NPS, dedicated to the city's history of abolitionism and civil rights activism, with a focus on the Black history sites on the north slope of Beacon Hill. The seed of Boston African American National Historic Site was planted.

Chapter three traces the path that Rushing and his supporters within the NPS took as they shaped Boston African American NHS. Over the course of a frenetic fourteen months between July 1979, when NPS Deputy Director Ira Hutchinson visited Beacon Hill, and October 1980, when President Carter signed legislation establishing the site, the team drafted and redrafted the legislation to meet the needs of both the NPS and the Museum. The speed with which the process progressed is notable. In contrast, Boston NHP was first proposed in the late 1930s, but it wasn't until 1974, on the eve of the American Bicentennial, that the park was finally established. A variety of stakeholders with overlapping interests came together to facilitate the speedy approval of the Boston African American NHS legislation: a Congress and President who were eager to demonstrate support for the values that underwrote the civil rights movement; a Black history museum looking for a partner to help preserve its keystone historic property; and an existing park that could both benefit from stronger relationships with Black history institutions and absorb some of the financial needs of a new park.

Chapter four details Boston African American NHS's development between 1980 and 1988: from the passage of its enabling legislation, through the bumpy process of its activation, to the completion of its first major restoration project. These years were busy with the negotiation of cooperative agreements with property owners, drafting a General Management Plan, and establishing relationships needed to secure restoration funds. The site benefited from the strong relationships its early leaders maintained with politicians, especially Congressman Joe Moakley, who were in a position to advocate for the site. The Museum and the Park Service maintained parallel, but distinct, goals for the site. The Museum imagined the site as a consulting party and financial supporter of the Museum's preservation goals. The Park Service saw their role as somewhat broader, with preservation as just one of the many goals of the site. Especially in the late 1980s, Boston African American NHS's superintendent tended to see the NPS—as the federal body and funding agency—as the natural leader when it came to decision making about preservation goals. Meanwhile, the site's first site manager, Dorothea Powell, was trying to establish an institutional identity separate from both the Museum and Boston NHP, which she saw as the only way for the site to reach its full potential. Despite these differences, the common goal of restoring the African Meeting House strengthened the relationship between the site and the Museum.

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Following the opening of the African Meeting House to the public in 1988, leadership at the Museum and the site shifted. Chapter five documents the ways that the site and the Museum attempted to build a stable base of programming, finances, and visitorship during the 1990s. Site managers Carter Lowe and Ken Heidelberg continued to pursue an independent site identity, undertook research in support of stronger and more diverse interpretive programming, and sought to establish a “Friends” group which could financially support the site. Boston African American NHS maintained a small but close-knit staff, made up of African American park rangers and administrators, who shared office space with the Museum on Beacon Hill. This organizational structure allowed the site manager and his staff to operate independently from Boston NHP on an everyday basis, although the superintendent remained the point person for higher-level decision making and funding. The site managers felt the site should have more formal financial and administrative independence, to mirror the operational independence they already felt they had.

After the opening of the African Meeting House, the Museum struggled to find long-term leadership which could grow its base of support, expand its programming, and fundraise for the second phase of the restoration. In this context, the site’s attempts at establishing a strong separate, and in some ways competing, institutional identity were at odds with the cooperative nature of its relationship with the Museum. An independent site could detract from the Museum’s ability to maintain intellectual control of the park’s historical themes and access to financial sponsors. Superintendent John Burchill was similarly unenthusiastic about Boston African American NHS’s pursuit of programmatic and operational independence as he saw the site’s mission as narrowly focused on the letter of the founding legislation, which pointed to preservation as its primary mandate. During this period, Burchill was able to deliver project funds for the preservation of the African Meeting House and Abiel Smith School, a school building constructed in 1835 for the education of the city’s Black children. After the school restoration costs ballooned, however, the Park Service again postponed the restoration of the meeting house.

With the Black Heritage Trail seen as a sufficient interpretive tool, NPS managers at the site and on the regional level postponed addressing the site’s research and documentation needs during the early years of the site’s development. These needs finally gained some attention and support with the arrival of Historian and Cultural Resource Manager Marty Blatt at Boston NHP in the mid-1990s. In addition to calling for a long-overdue historic resource study for the site, Blatt staged the largest public history program in site history, focused on the centennial anniversary of the installation of the Robert Gould Shaw/Massachusetts 54th Regiment Memorial on Boston Common in 1897. Well-received and attended, the event brought together a vast array of Black reenactors, academics, and civilians interested in military and Black history. Still, with Boston NHP as the centerpiece of the event, Boston African American NHS staff found themselves in a secondary position during a celebration of one of their site’s own resources. This continued a pattern established throughout the 1990s as the site manager and staff increasingly felt that the site’s resources—both personnel and historic architecture—went underappreciated and were

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routinely treated as secondary to the needs and goals of Boston NHP. The site finally gained some relief with an increase in base funding in 2000. With the Abiel Smith School opening to the public in 1999, the increase represented a lifeline to keep up with the soaring visitation to the site and thus the increased needs of the Museum.

At the end of the 1990s, the Museum and site again saw important shifts in management which redefined their approaches to resource stewardship, education, and partnerships. Chapter six details the changes to the site implemented under Superintendent Terry Savage, who arrived in 2000 to find a host of funding and preservation challenges. The challenges inherent in NPS's budget austerity were compounded in Boston by weakened ties between the Park Service and the City's congressional representatives after Congressman Joe Moakley died in 2001. Savage turned inward to focus on Boston NHP's problems, encouraged park partners to act independently, and sought financial support from park partners to help ease the financial strain on Boston NHP and Boston African American NHS. This strategy strained the Site-Museum relationship during the first decade of the 2000s. Infrequent meetings, poor communication, and the seeming indifference of the site superintendent to the urgency of the African Meeting House restoration tested the patience of Museum staff.

Under Superintendent Savage, Boston African American NHS operated its interpretive program independently with existing funds; however, calls from Site Manager Heidelberg for increased base funds or project funds for the site's restoration needs fell on deaf ears. During this period, new park rangers began to take more active roles in formulating new research and programming for the site. These projects were not fueled by additional base funding but through the initiative and extra-professional efforts of individual rangers, often in collaboration with Boston NHP Historian Marty Blatt and with the support of Boston African American staff such as Bernadette Williams and Ken Heidelberg. The reorganization of the site in 2008 somewhat derailed these efforts, which resulted in the reassignment, retirement, or transfer of several senior members of the site staff. While undertaken for financial reasons, the consolidation of some Boston NHP and Boston African American NHS positions had the effect of hollowing out the sense of operational independence the site staff had worked hard to establish. At the same time, the site and the Museum signed a new cooperative agreement which formally drew down programming support and shifted more costs away from the site.

As the site entered its fourth decade in 2010, incoming superintendent Cassius Cash reimagined its relationship with Boston NHP and its partners. Superintendent Cash also became the first African American to serve in that position. Chapter seven traces the ways that Superintendent Cash recast the consolidation of Boston NHP and Boston African American NHS as an intentional ideological unification of Boston's historical parks. While this change extinguished the site's previous hopes for an independent institutional identity, the site staff embraced the positive aspects of a cooperative approach.

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Superintendent Cash conceived of the “Boston’s Trails to Freedom,” a framework intended to elevate the visibility of the Black Heritage Trail to be on par with the Freedom Trail. His vision for a unified interpretive program, shared by both Boston African American NHS and Boston NHP, promised to bring Black history to areas of Boston NHP which had not yet been examined, and hopefully to attract new audiences to both NPS units via the new Faneuil Hall Visitor Center. Hired in 2019, Site Manager Terry Brown filled a post that had been vacant for two years and introduced new ideas for programming that could help to fulfill Cash’s vision. Brown also set the stage for future programs which extended beyond the scope of this study (which ends in 2015), such as the restoration of the Robert G. Shaw/54th Massachusetts Regiment Memorial.

An additional dimension to Superintendent Cash’s management strategy was open communication among the many park partners, including the Museum of African American History. Regular meetings strengthened the Site-Museum relationship, which enabled the Museum to tap Cash and Deputy Superintendent Celeste Bernardo for support in filing for American Recovery and Reinvestment Act project funding in the summer of 2010. The efforts of the Museum, on behalf of the historic properties within the site, resulted in the completion of the full restoration of the African Meeting House in 2011. The relationship between the site and the Museum remained positive, although they generally operated in different spheres, with the site limited to interpretive services along the Black Heritage Trail and independent tours developed by site staff.

Boston NHP and Boston African American NHS experienced financial strain in the second decade of the twentieth century as utility and personnel costs continued to grow at a rate faster than inflation. In 2013, Superintendent Cash moved to further consolidate the administration of the two Boston historical parks. Multiple personnel received redistributed site manager responsibilities and the site phased out the position of “site manager” at Boston African American NHS when the administrative and interpretive divisions of Boston NHP and Boston African American NHS were consolidated in 2015.

Boston’s national parks received a new superintendent in 2015, when Michael Creasey came to the city to help implement the new NPS “Urban Agenda.” This organizational and interpretive framework proposes that the Park Service in Boston establish active collaborations with partners, seek out the complicated stories of Boston’s past, and engage with local communities. In an effort to unite the NPS units in Boston under one identity for implementing the Urban Agenda, NPS launched the “National Parks of Boston” concept, which included Boston African American NHS, Boston National Historical Park, and Boston Harbor Islands National Recreation Area. The Urban Agenda also calls for NPS units to ask how the experiences and struggles of past Americans connect with present-day social issues and ongoing civil rights struggles. In seeking the contemporary relevance of history, the National Parks of Boston have begun to find new ways of telling the story of Boston African American NHS.

Introduction

The mission of the site has remained the same over the course of its first 35 years: to elevate and prioritize the preservation of Black historic sites while telling the stories of the struggle for equal rights taken on by the Black community and their white allies on Beacon Hill in the nineteenth century. What has changed over the course of its first decades, however, is the site's ability to independently define how this story is told and who would tell it. Early in the site's history the site manager, the site's representative and advocate in the community, could act to pursue a variety of educational programs and outreach initiatives. Over time, the operational independence of this position dwindled, with many of the site manager's responsibilities redistributed to other positions. The increased interconnectivity between the two Boston parks has allowed the site's core themes and messages to be more broadly applied in other NPS units. At the same time, the trend toward consolidation has reduced the site's capacity to make and maintain connections with the Black community in Boston, whether through job recruitment, school programs, or other activities. Concurrently, the once primarily Black staff of Boston African American NHS has dwindled, and few African Americans are members of the National Parks of Boston interpretive team.

Boston African American NHS, founded as a progressive unit of the National Park Service, drew attention to the accomplishments of Black Americans in antebellum Boston and helped to question the extent to which Boston lived up to the political and social ideals of the Revolutionary Era. Today, contemporary observers have commented that interpretive tools such as the Black Heritage Trail have not kept pace with social history scholarship, which explores the complicated ways that race, gender, and politics intersected in the past and affected the course of history.¹¹ As the National Parks of Boston implements the Urban Agenda, the site's new interpretive structure and programming are designed to address some of these shortcomings. With the dedication of site staff and continued support from other parks, the site hopes to continue to fulfill its ambitious mission and find ways to connect with the experiences of visitors today, who continue to see the struggle for civil rights unfolding around them every day.

¹¹ Suzanne Spencer-Wood, "Creating a More Inclusive Boston Freedom Trail and Black Heritage Trail: An Intersectional Approach to Empowering Social Justice and Equality," *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 25:207–271; Samantha Ferello, "Show Me Soul, America!: Memory and Representation in Massachusetts Museums of Black History" (Undergraduate thesis, Tufts University, 2015).

CHAPTER 2. EARLY DAYS OF THE MUSEUM OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY, 1964–1980

Boston African American National Historic Site represents a “partnership park,” managing operations and programming through its primary collaboration with the Museum of African American History, and secondary partnerships with the City of Boston and other smaller entities. The Museum is the leading Black history institution in New England, the owner of the African Meeting House, and retains a long-term lease on the Abiel Smith School. The African Meeting House is a key site resource and the only historic resource named specifically in the site’s enabling legislation. Founded in 1980, the site owed its establishment in large part to the background research and lobbying efforts of Museum staff. Additionally, the Museum’s Black Heritage Trail continues to be a central interpretive tool for the site. As will be seen, since 1980 the needs, priorities, audiences, and goals of the two institutions have intersected and diverged at various points in their histories. Still, as they share the bond of a dedication to Black history and to the preservation of historic resources associated with this history, the partnership endures.

The social and political history of the Museum’s founding and development provides key context for understanding the original promise of Boston African American NHS. The Museum’s intersecting goals of historical preservation, education, and activism underwrote the mission of the site upon its founding. As separate institutions, however, the Museum and the site have dealt with distinct challenges over the years. Throughout its development, the site has struggled to maintain an active connection with Boston’s Black community and engage with contemporary social and political conversations. This engagement is central to the Museum’s mission and operation. The Museum recognizes that the past is inherently political—an objective position is not possible, and what is remembered is never an accident.¹² With this in mind, the Museum seeks to shine a spotlight on Black history and recognizes that those stories both fill in historical gaps and uplift a community that has been historically maligned. The recuperative history that the Museum is able to present and broadcast underpins its mission and the missions of Black museums more widely.

This chapter traces the development of the Museum of African American History in the decades preceding the establishment of Boston African American NHS. It is these early years that set the foundation for the Museum’s mission which today is based on historic preservation, education, and the promotion of racial equality. As such, the Museum’s current mission reads:

The Museum of African American History inspires all generations to embrace and interpret the authentic stories of New Englanders of African descent and those who found common cause with them, in their quest for freedom and justice. Through its

¹² Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

historic buildings, collections, and programs, the Museum expands cultural understanding and promotes dignity and respect for all.¹³

Black cultural leaders in Boston established the Museum of African American History during a period when most American history scholarship lacked information or analysis of the historical experiences of Black Americans. In the post-World War II years, Black communities increasingly looked to this history as part of a process of forging shared Black cultural and political identities. The Museum, at its heart a neighborhood museum, developed as a resource for Black Bostonians who faced widespread racism in the city and beyond. As a history-focused museum, this institution was from the start making a political statement about the importance of Black history in New England in order to counter routine racial misrepresentation and exclusion. Beginning as early as the 1920s, Boston's predominantly white preservation community honed an acute focus on Boston's Revolutionary War past. This community forged a heritage narrative that elided the contradictions of the Revolutionary Era and excluded the stories of Black people, women, and other groups, and instead focused on the efforts of "white entrepreneurs and property owners in earnest struggles against the imperial excesses of a distant monarch."¹⁴ Underwritten by progressive values, but not plumbing the contradictions therein for people of color or women, this narrative was not useful for the Black community seeking to understand its past. The Museum sought to move beyond the Revolutionary heritage narrative and unpack the ways that Black people and others helped to build the city.

The Museum's revisionist focus on history resonated with the themes of the 1960s Black arts and culture movement in Boston, one wing of the broader Black Freedom Movement. The Museum's founders, Howard and Sue Bailey Thurman, sought to create an outlet for fostering a sense of Black community pride and shared purpose in the early 1960s when they began Black history and arts programs, and later established the Museum. The Museum's first executive director, Byron Rushing, envisioned the Museum as a repository for art, literature, and cultural objects and a focal point for political conversations and education. Rushing designed the Museum as an institution which maintained a multitude of partnerships to achieve its mission. While these partnerships began with the Roxbury Historical Society and Suffolk University, he also sought connections with the wider world of historic preservation. The documentation programs of the NPS—the National Register of Historic Places and the National Historic Landmarks program—proved to be important avenues for boosting the visibility of the Museum and documenting the national significance of its resources. After the Museum acquired the African Meeting House, Rushing engaged more actively with the NPS and became involved in the establishment of Boston NHP. Federal programs that supported historic preservation, the early involvement of Rushing with the

¹³ Museum of African American History (website), accessed August 20, 2020, www.maah.org/about.

¹⁴ Seth Bruggeman, *Lost on the Freedom Trail: The National Park Service and Urban Renewal in Postwar Boston* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2022), 20–22.

establishment Boston NHP, and the Museum's foundational research and outreach set the groundwork for the establishment of Boston African American NHS and the long-term partnership of the Museum and the site.

The Changing Landscape of Black Boston after World War II

In the years following World War II, the demographic, geographic, and economic landscape of Black Boston shifted dramatically. Black Southerners came to the city during the post-war decades as part of the Second Great Migration to escape the violence and legalized discrimination that were wrought by Jim Crow laws.¹⁵ In 1930, Black residents in Boston had comprised only a small percentage of the city's population, less than three percent.¹⁶ This population was made up of a high proportion of locally born and foreign-born residents, with few Black migrants from Southern states. After World War II, Boston's Black population grew quickly—tripling from 20,000 to 63,000 between 1940 and 1960, then doubling from 63,000 to 127,000 between 1960 and 1970. These newcomers were primarily Southern-born Black families and settled in Roxbury, Lower Roxbury, and Dorchester in high numbers.¹⁷ The influx of new residents continued and amplified the shift of the Black community from Beacon Hill to Roxbury which began around 1900. In the late nineteenth century, Beacon Hill had been home to the city's Black upper class. At the turn of the century, however, these families began to move southward toward the South End and into the present-day Washington Square section of Roxbury.¹⁸ By the 1940s, few Black families continued to live in Beacon Hill (also known as the "West End").

At the same moment that Boston's Black population swelled, the city instituted urban renewal policies that increasingly pushed Black Bostonians into new areas of the city. Federal legislation, such as the 1949 expansion of the Housing Act and the 1956 Federal-Aid Highway Act, created opportunities for local governments to designate areas as blighted, claim eminent domain, utilize federal funds to demolish them, and then use government-backed loans to rebuild.¹⁹ A diverse coalition of local anti-highway activists protested the demolition of neighborhoods in the name of progress. Despite this, many dramatic changes to the physical and economic landscape of Boston proceeded, disproportionately affecting African American and immigrant neighborhoods in the

¹⁵ Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns* (New York: Random House, 2010).

¹⁶ Jim Vrabel, *A People's History of the New Boston* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2014), 41.

¹⁷ Daniel N. McClure, "A Woman of Action: Elma Lewis, the Arts, and the Politics of Culture in Boston, 1950–1986" (PhD diss., Department of Afro-American Studies, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 2009), 75–76; Vrabel, *A People's History*, 41.

¹⁸ Adelaide M. Cromwell, *The Other Brahmins: Boston's Black Upper Class, 1750–1950* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1994), 57, 63, 235.

¹⁹ Thomas O'Connor, *Building a New Boston: Politics and Urban Renewal, 1950 to 1970* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993), 67–72; Vrabel, *A People's History*, 10.

West End and South End.²⁰ The demolition of a large stock of affordable housing downtown, along with exclusionary housing covenants and discriminatory lending practices, led to the concentration of Boston's Black community into a few discrete neighborhoods of the city: Lower Roxbury, Roxbury, and North Dorchester.²¹

Urban renewal policies and systemic racism took a toll on the well-being of the city's Black community. In addition to redlining in the housing market, African Americans faced discrimination in the job market, roadblocks to the accumulation of political power, and a lack of resources for Black schools and public services. Similar problems confronted Black communities throughout the country, and these shared negative experiences also created a shared sense of purpose which came to underwrite the modern Black Freedom Struggle.²²

A wide array of community groups worked in Boston as part of the Freedom Struggle, in part fueled by and in conjunction with the emerging civil rights movement. These groups included long-established organizations such as the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), as well as younger organizations such as the Northern Student Movement, the Boston Action Group, the Massachusetts Freedom Movement, the Urban League, and Freedom House.²³ These organizations used non-violent, direct action strategies to address economic, educational, and housing inequalities as well as police brutality. Community activists undertook settlement house work, voter registration, protests against urban renewal, and school boycotts in order to push back against inequalities that were solidifying in Boston along racial lines. Community leaders such as Mel King and Ruth Batson were on the front lines of this fight.²⁴ The Black cultural and arts movements further enhanced a sense of community purpose. Institutions such as the Elma Lewis School for Fine Arts, the National Center of Afro-American Artists, the Boston Negro Artist's

²⁰ Crockett, Karilyn. *People before Highways: Boston Activists, Urban Planners, and a New Movement for City Making* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2018), 12–16; O'Connor, *Building a New Boston*, 75.

²¹ Cromwell, *The Other Brahmins*; McClure, *A Woman of Action*, 76.

²² Waldo Martin. *No Coward Soldiers: Black Cultural Politics in Postwar America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 14.

²³ Vrabel, *A People's History*, 41–42; Byron Rushing, Oral History Interview conducted by Robert Hayden, February 8, 2006, The History Makers Digital Archive. Session 1, Tape 4, Story 7, The Honorable Byron Rushing describes the Museum of Afro American History (2006).

²⁴ Ruth Batson was instrumental to the equal education movement. Beginning in the early 1950s, Batson recognized disparities between the education her daughters received in comparison to white students. Batson went on to chair an NAACP subcommittee on schools in the 1950s, made demands to improve the quality of education for Boston's Black students beginning in the early 1960s, and co-founded the Metropolitan Council for Education Opportunity, a voluntary school busing program which served to implement the mandate of the 1965 Racial Imbalance Act; Lyda S. Peters, "Reclaiming the Narrative: Black Community Activism and Boston School Desegregation History, 1960–1975" (PhD diss., Boston College, 2017), 9; Ruth M. Batson and Robert C. Hayden, *A History of METCO: A Suburban Education for Boston's Urban Students* (Boston: Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity, 1987).

Association, and the Black Arts Reparatory Theater served as a source of cultural empowerment and community consciousness.²⁵

Black cultural organizations “shared goals, tactics, and members” with the non-violent direct-action campaigns of the civil rights movement.²⁶ Rather than focus on legalistic measures, however, artists and historians largely focused their cultural work on fostering racial pride and empowerment. Charles Wright, who established the International African American Museum in Detroit in 1967, found that political and cultural activism worked hand in hand. Museums, however, had a special role to play in that they could be used to help heal generations of hurt and violence. Museums and other cultural organizations were tasked with the reeducation of Americans on the importance of Black history and culture, as “civil rights are not enough” to counter the negative racial ideologies that had become entrenched in American culture.²⁷

This reimagining of American history with the meaningful consideration of Black history began with a critique of representation. Agitation for Black representation in mainstream cultural institutions such as museums, universities, and national parks increased in the late 1950s and 1960s as the Civil Rights Movement gained momentum throughout the country.²⁸ Within the discipline of history, critiques of traditional American history narratives set off a social history revolution, through which historians sought to give “voice to the voiceless.” Lamenting the absence of Black history in standard history books, Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton argued in *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* that Black Americans needed to recognize their shared African American history: “it is absolutely essential that black people know this history, that they know their roots, that they develop an awareness of their cultural heritage.”²⁹

African American museums stood in contrast to traditional, predominantly white, museums because their starting point was respect for Black culture and history. Too often, traditional museums “maintain[ed] and reinforce[ed] stereotypical depictions of black history even as they

²⁵ McClure, *A Woman of Action*, 8, 77, 159–61.

²⁶ James Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2006); McClure, *A Woman of Action*, 6. McClure’s study represents a notable exception. Focusing primarily on the ways that Elma Lewis and other cultural figures laid the groundwork for civil rights-era cultural institutions, McClure’s treatment successfully argues that cultural work in Boston’s Black community worked hand in hand with political activism.

²⁷ Charles Wright, as quoted in Andrea A. Burns, *From Storefront to Monument: Tracing the Public History of the Black Museum Movement* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013), 29.

²⁸ James O. Horton, “Social History and the African American Experience,” in *African American Historic Places*, ed. Beth L. Savage (New York: The Preservation Press and John Wiley and Sons, 1994), 17.

²⁹ Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 38, 44.

offered shallow gestures towards inclusivity.”³⁰ The misrepresentation, absence, or superficial inclusion of Black people and their history constituted political statements of white supremacy. With whiteness presented passively as the standard for American culture and aesthetics, these institutions nonetheless contributed to the discourse on who deserved representation and what constituted worthwhile art.

African American museums celebrated Black culture and history and acted as resources for the needs of the Black community. Black “neighborhood museums” established themselves as a “free space” wherein Black heritage could be celebrated apart from the white supremacist value structures that organized traditional museums. The early 1960s saw the rise of Black museums and other cultural institutions in cities like Washington, DC, Detroit, and Boston.³¹

Founding of the Museum of African American History

The Museum of African American History in Boston was one of the earliest Black museums in the country, founded in 1965 by Howard and Sue Bailey Thurman. Howard Thurman, a Black theologian, author, and philosopher, rose to prominence after co-founding the first interracial and interfaith congregation in America, San Francisco’s Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples (Fellowship Church), in 1944.³² Sue Bailey Thurman was also a scholar, having published a book in 1953 on the Black settlers of California and served on the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW) as chair of that organization’s national library.³³ The Thurmans brought their family to Boston in 1953 when Howard was offered a position as Dean of the School of Theology at Boston University (Figure 2). Prior to the founding of the Museum of African American History, little popular awareness of Boston’s Black history existed, nor were Black figures part of the narrative of the Freedom Trail (founded 1951) or other stories of “Revolutionary Boston.”³⁴ Still, a few researchers had documented some aspects of Boston’s Black past.

³⁰ Burns, *From Storefront to Monument*, 3.

³¹ Bettye Collier-Thomas, “An Historical Overview of Black Museums and Institutions with Museums Functions 1800–1980,” *Negro History Bulletin* 44, no. 3 (1981): 56–58.

³² Rich Barlow, “Who Was Howard Thurman?: Remembering Marsh Chapel’s path-breaking black dean,” *BU Today*, Jan 7, 2020.

³³ National Council of Negro Women, *The Historical Cookbook of the American Negro*, ed. Sue Bailey Thurman (1958; repr., Boston: Beacon Press, 2000); Sue Bailey Thurman, *Pioneers of Negro Origin in California* (San Francisco: Acme Publishing Company, 1952).

³⁴ Seth C. Bruggeman, *Trails to Freedom: An Administrative History of Boston National Historical Park*. Prepared for the National Park Service (Boston: Northeast Region History Program, 2019).



Figure 2. Dean Howard Thurman, Sue Bailey Thurman, and their daughters Olive and Anne in the 1940s. *Courtesy of the Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center at Boston University; used with the permission of the Thurman Family.*

In 1914, John Daniels had written the Progressive Era book *In Freedom's Birthplace*, which offered a cultural history of Black Boston from 1638 to the early twentieth century, with numerous historical details about the church on "Smith Court" and the community that grew up around it.³⁵ African American historian Lorenzo Greene published *The Negro in Colonial New England* in 1942, one of the earliest works to break down the myth of New England slavery as a "gentler," beneficial institution for Africans in the Americas.³⁶ This groundbreaking book became one of the first to look critically at the institution of slavery and its place in the economy of New England. Two decades later in 1961, Leon Litwack published his account of free Black northerners, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790–1860*, which recounted the differences between Northern and Southern conceits of white supremacy and the potential differences in experiences between Black people in each region.³⁷ Despite these works, awareness of the historic Black

³⁵ Historic American Building Survey (HABS), Abolition Church, 8 Smith Court, Boston, Suffolk County, MA: HABS-MA-0987 (Washington DC: National Park Service and Library of Congress, 1935; edited 1973); Gilbert Osofsky, "Progressivism and the Negro: New York, 1900–1915," *American Quarterly* 16, no. 2 (1964), 153–68; John Daniels, *In Freedom's Birthplace: A Study of Boston Negroes* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1914).

³⁶ Lorenzo Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942).

³⁷ Leon Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790–1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

community on Beacon Hill and in the West End among laypeople in Boston was almost non-existent.³⁸

Howard and Sue Bailey Thurman began to change this in the 1960s. In 1963, the Thurmans organized history and cultural events at Boston University to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation.³⁹ This anniversary encouraged a wide range of Boston intellectuals, activists, and artists to commemorate the event throughout 1963, and the City of Boston organized a nine-person panel to coordinate a year-long celebration.⁴⁰ Events celebrating the Emancipation Proclamation featured local African American scholars like Dr. Adelaide Cromwell, who delivered lectures on the history of the Black community in the West End/Beacon Hill, and activists such as Robert C. Weaver, who in 1966 would become the secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the first African American member of the United States Cabinet.⁴¹

At the Charles Street Meeting House, the Thurmans organized a series of presentations as well as exhibits featuring contemporary and past Black artists. The Thurmans also collaborated with Black cultural organizations such as the Boston Negro Artists Association (BNAA; later the Boston Afro-American Artists Association), a group which also made Black history central to its mission.⁴²

Through the work of the Thurmans and like-minded scholars and activists, local Black history began to become more visible to the Boston public. Sue Bailey Thurman and her daughter Anne Thurman Chiarenza advanced the visibility of Black history in Boston with the publication of the *Freedom Trails of Negro History in Boston* map (*Freedom Trails* map) in the summer of 1963 (Figure 3).⁴³ Sue Bailey Thurman had already published the *Historical Cookbook of the American*

³⁸ Marcus Mitchell, WGBH: “Studio Talk; The History and Development of Negro Art,” February 8, 1968. American Archive of Public Broadcasting, (Boston, MA and Washington, DC: WGBH and the Library of Congress, 1968); Johnson, Oral History, 2012.

³⁹ This according to Susan Wilson who notes that she “convened a series of programs by civil rights activists and scholars in 1963 to commemorate and celebrate the achievements of the community of free blacks who lived in Boston’s North Slope and Beacon Hill.” See Susan Wilson, *Boston Sites and Insights: An Essential Guide to Historic Landmarks In and Around Boston* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003), 230; Caldwell Titcomb, “Negro History Museum Opens New Exhibit,” *The Harvard Crimson*, July 21, 1967. Titcomb’s article indicates that the early lecture series was held at Boston University.

⁴⁰ “9 Named in City to Plan Lincoln Observance,” *Boston Globe*, January 11, 1963: 4.

⁴¹ “Negro History Traced,” *Boston Globe*, April 28, 1963: 122; “Tomorrow’s Events: Lectures,” *Boston Globe*, January 21 1963: 16.

⁴² The BNAA was founded in 1963 to “stimulate the development and appreciation for the visual arts within the Black community.” Robert Hayden, *African Americans in Boston: More than 350 years* (Boston: Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston, 1991), 72.

⁴³ Cromwell, *The Other Brahmins*. Notably, Cromwell’s 1950 dissertation “The Other Brahmins” (published 1994) included a map of “Residential and Institutional Locations of Significance in a Study of Boston’s Upper Class — Past and Present” but it is unclear if this research was incorporated into Thurman’s work.

Negro in 1958 and had been researching Boston landmarks of Black history since her arrival in the city.⁴⁴ Thurman recognized that the historic preservation movement in Boston focused on the accomplishments of white Bostonians during the Revolutionary era, as best exemplified by the Freedom Trail Foundation’s programming. The *Freedom Trails* map represents the first iteration of what is today known as the Black Heritage Trail and explicitly focused on a reimagining of the Freedom Trail through the lens of Black contributions to the city’s history.

The creators of the *Freedom Trails* map intended it to intersect with Revolutionary era sites on the Freedom Trail and reimagine these sites from the perspective of African American history. For example, Faneuil Hall became recast as not only the “Cradle of Freedom,” but also the site where Crispus Attucks lay in state after being the first man to die in the Boston Massacre in 1770 and the site of abolitionist meetings in the nineteenth century. The trail also brought to the forefront lesser-known landmarks of Black history—such as Symphony Hall and Marsh Chapel—to underscore the continuing contributions of Black Bostonians in the modern era. The *Freedom Trails* map first debuted as part of the kits of the 800-member Boston delegation to the August 1963 March on Washington. Early the following year, the map was put on display at the Massachusetts State House on Beacon Hill for Negro History Week in February 1964.⁴⁵ Responses to the map encouraged the Thurmans to “press for the immediate establishment of a museum on Beacon Hill.”⁴⁶

While the Thurmans published the *Freedom Trails* map, J. Marcus Mitchell of the BNAA and Guanzetta Mitchell were researching and developing a Black history trail that focused on Beacon Hill and Boston’s West End and which highlighted Black history and artists.⁴⁷ The Thurmans and Mitchells partnered to establish a museum that could highlight both Black history and art. The American Museum of Negro History (AMNH) began in 1965 and officially incorporated in 1967.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ The *Historical Cookbook of the American Negro* proved innovative in that it was presented as a cookbook but arranged chronologically by historical events and was functionally a historical text. Lacking an index or a table of contents, the reader needed to search through the book if a recipe was desired, all the while picking up historical facts about Black history. It was Ms. Thurman herself who described the book as “a palatable approach to history.”; Vivian Johnson, a prominent professor of education in Boston at the time, recalled that Ms. Thurman was also undertaking research on the African Meeting House in the late 1950s; Johnson, *Oral History*, 2012.

⁴⁵ Jennifer Harriman, “Exhibit Own ‘Freedom Trail’,” *Boston Globe*, February 10, 1964:14; “Negro History on New Hub ‘Freedom Road’,” *Bennington Banner* (Bennington, VT), January 28, 1964: 2.

⁴⁶ Sue Bailey Thurman [Honorary President], to Board of Directors of the American Museum of Negro History, letter, October 10, 1969. Folder 16, Box 11, Sue Bailey Thurman Collection, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center at Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts.

⁴⁷ Wilson, *Boston Sites and Insights*, 230.

⁴⁸ Suffolk County Registry of Deeds, Certificate of Incorporation, December 9, 2014. Deed Book 53823: 246. On file, Suffolk County Registry of Deeds, Boston, MA.

Early Days of the Museum of African American History, 1964–1980

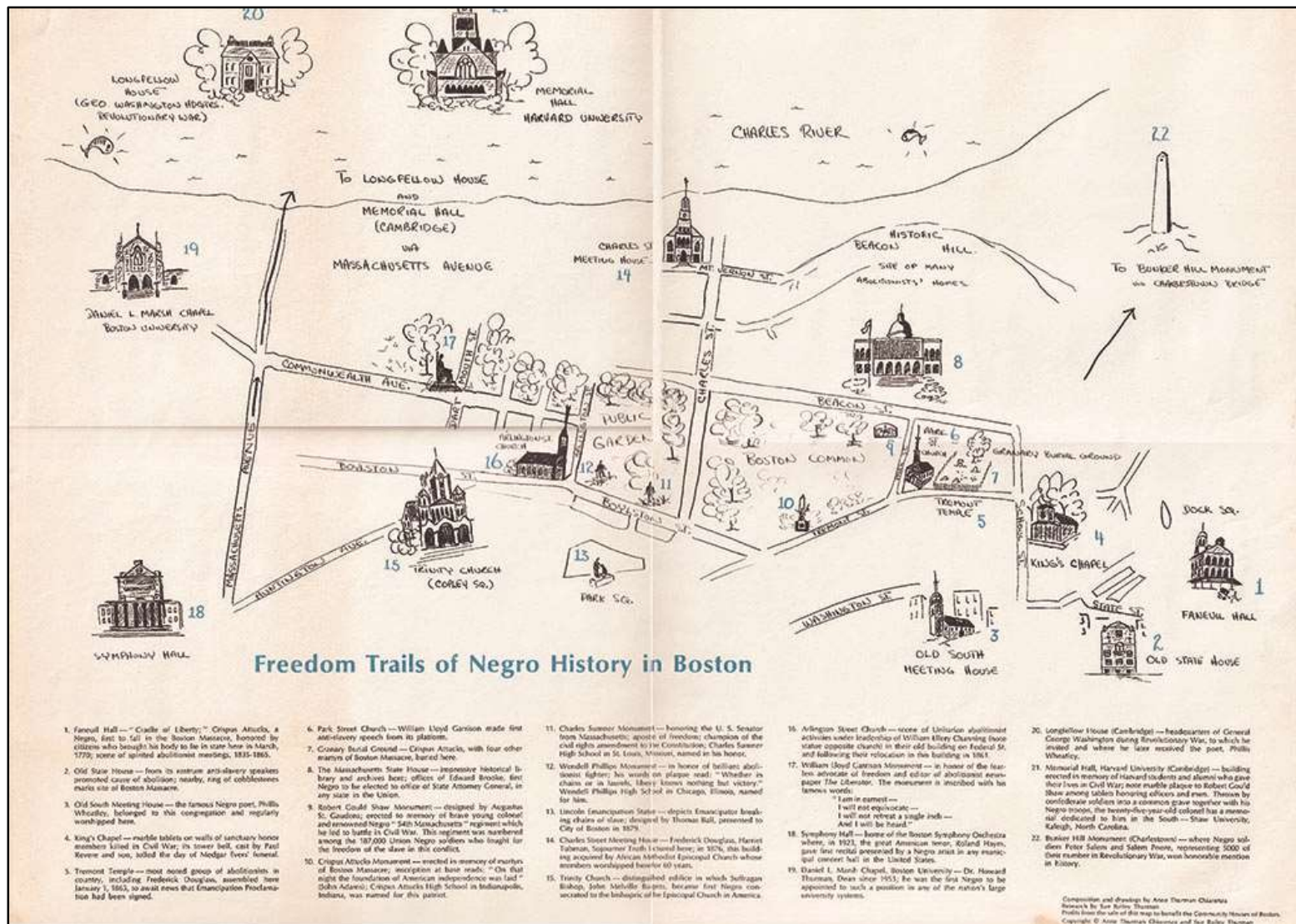


Figure 3. *Freedom Trails of Negro History in Boston* map, 1964. This map was created by Sue Bailey Thurman and her daughter Anne Thurman Chiarenza in the wake of the 1963 centennial of the Emancipation Proclamation. This map represents the precursor to the Black Heritage Trail. *National Park Service, Boston African American National Historic Site, Resource Management Records.*

The early goals of the AMNH were to “exhibit artifacts pertaining to Negro American history” and “sponsor historical education programs.”⁴⁹ Just as the Thurmans had connected nineteenth-century and modern Black history in the *Freedom Trails* map, Museum president Nathaniel I. Huggins underscored that the Museum sought to be a museum engaged with its community and not simply to be an antiquarian pursuit.⁵⁰

As the Museum developed, it expanded programming beyond the Black Heritage Trail. The Museum sought to use exhibits and programs to retell Boston’s early history through an emphasis on the Black community’s involvement in the abolitionist movement and Black contributions to the Revolutionary War and Civil War, as well as contributions to art and literature. In doing this work, the Thurmans and the leaders who followed them continued a tradition of recuperative curation that extended back to at least as early as the late nineteenth century. During Reconstruction, with newfound freedom to take control of their own lives and homes, formerly enslaved Black families began curating artifacts of historical and cultural value.⁵¹ Black neighborhood museums of the mid-twentieth century continued and expanded upon this tradition.

The Museum actively incorporated and prioritized the research of Black scholars in its interpretations of the past. The Thurmans drew on the early research of Adelaide Cromwell, including her 1950 dissertation on race and caste in Boston’s nineteenth- and twentieth-century Black community.⁵² While at Boston University in the 1950s, Cromwell and the Thurmans both focused on Black history and helped to co-found the Africana Studies department.⁵³ Additionally, the Museum drew on the work of Nathaniel I. Huggins, and his research on Frederick Douglass and other abolitionists became the basis for a Museum’s exhibit. The researchers and authors who wrote the African Meeting House’s 1974 National Historic Landmark nomination form drew on a variety of sources, especially John Hope Franklin’s landmark *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans* (3rd edition, 1967) and Carter Woodson’s *The History of the Negro Church*

⁴⁹ “Ask the Globe,” *Boston Globe*, July 18, 1966: 2.

⁵⁰ Johnson, “American Negro History,” 17, quoting Nathaniel Huggins.

⁵¹ Jeff Hayward and Christine Larouche, “The Emergence of the Field of African American Museums,” *The Public Historian* 40, no. 3 (2018): 163–72; James O. Horton and Spencer R. Crew, “Afro-Americans and Museums: Toward a Policy of Inclusion,” in Leon and Rosenzweig, eds. *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment*, ed. Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 217; Horton, *Social History*, 15–24.

⁵² Cromwell, *The Other Brahmins*. Cromwell completed her dissertation at Radcliffe College in 1952 and brought her research to her professorship at Boston University. She continued to lecture of the history of Boston’s Black community in the decades to come. Cromwell and Reverend Thurman were involved in the establishment of an Africana Studies Department in the mid-1950s at BU.

⁵³ Ken Heidelberg, personal communication, October 7, 2020. Heidelberg underscored Cromwell’s ongoing involvement with the site and the close relationship between Sue Bailey Thurman and Adelaide Cromwell.

(1945).⁵⁴ Museum programs incorporated curator J. Marcus Mitchell's study of the Paul Family (1973), Donald Jacobs's (1968) dissertation "History of the Boston Negro from the Revolution to Civil War," and Elizabeth Pleck's *Black Migration and Poverty: 1865–1900* (1979).⁵⁵ John and Lois Horton's landmark book, *Black Bostonians: Black Life and Community Struggle in the Antebellum North* (1979), synthesized many of the findings of the above research and came to play an important role in the Museum's interpretive narratives.

In addition to reimagining Black history, the Museum sought to empower the local Black community through showcasing African American artists. In 1967, the Museum launched its first major exhibit at the Charles Street Meeting House, where many pieces of artwork, portraiture, African sculpture, and quilts stood on display, in addition to rare books and letters.⁵⁶ Some contemporary artists represented include Joel Hannah, Calvin Burnett, Harriet Kennedy, and Henry Washington. The Museum pursued the work of local artists such as painter and pen-and-ink artist Allan Crite, sculptor Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller, and photographer Hamilton Sutton Smith.

As the Museum grew, it became a focal point for Black Bostonians committed to the preservation of Black history and the advancement of civil rights. Community leaders such as Ruth Batson and Mel King served as both civil rights activists and Museum affiliates as the mission of the Museum overlapped with those of civil rights organizations. For example, Batson's Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity (METCO) began as an organization focused on the busing of Black children to better-resourced suburban schools. In 1968, however, Batson proposed that the organization expand its efforts to lobby for the inclusion of Black history in the Boston school curriculum for the benefit of Black and white students alike.⁵⁷ The Museum was also supported by community leaders such as Henry Hampton, Vivian Johnson, Horace Seldon, Byron Rushing, and others. The overlap in membership of the Museum and organizations such as Blackside, Inc.,

⁵⁴ John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans*, 3rd ed. (New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 1967); Wendell Phillips Garrison, *William Lloyd Garrison, 1805–1879* (New York: Arno Press, 1969); Louis Ruchames, ed., *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison, Volume II, 1836–1840* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1971); Carol Ann Poh and Robert C. Post, *African Meeting House, National Historic Landmark Nomination* (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1973); Carter G. Woodson, *The History of the Negro Church* (Washington, DC: Associated Publishers, 1945).

⁵⁵ Donald M. Jacobs, "History of the Boston Negro from the Revolution to Civil War" (PhD diss., Boston University, 1968); Elizabeth Pleck, *Black Migration and Poverty: 1865–1900* (New York: Academic Press, 1979); J. Marcus Mitchell, "The Paul Family," *Old Time New England*, 63 (Winter 1973): 73–77; Donald Jacobs, Elizabeth Pleck, and John and Lois Horton were identified by the Museum as potential conference participants in 1981 budget talks with BOAF (Folder 11, 1980–1984 Budgets, Box 14, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA).

⁵⁶ Johnson, "American Negro History," 17; Titcomb. "Negro History Museum," 1.

⁵⁷ "Black History Stressed at Metco Conference," *Boston Globe*, June 12, 1968: 25.

the NAACP, and METCO underscores the ways that Boston's Black community's cultural, political, and educational institutions were interconnected.

Byron Rushing and the Expansion of the Museum

In the early 1970s, Boston's Black community increasingly recognized the value of a shared community identity to help combat racism. Within this context, the Museum took steps to move from being a part-time museum, staging occasional educational programs and exhibits, to a full-time institution with a staff that could better address the needs of the community. As part of this shift, the Museum chose a new name, one that would acknowledge the shared African heritage of Black Americans. In 1970, the Museum changed its name from the American Museum of Negro History to the Museum of Afro American History.⁵⁸ The young Museum then sought to establish a central, downtown location in Boston's Beacon Hill neighborhood.⁵⁹

In the late 1960s, J. Marcus Mitchell and Sue Bailey Thurman hoped the Museum would permanently occupy one of the historically Black public buildings on Beacon Hill, such as the African Meeting House on Smith Court or the Charles Street Meeting House.⁶⁰ At the time, the Congregation Libovitz owned the African Meeting House and the Unitarian Universalist Church owned the Charles Street Meeting House. Many of the Museum's programs and activities took place at the Charles Street Meeting House until the Museum required more space. In 1967, the Museum set its sights on the African Meeting House and "began seeking funds and trying to persuade the aging, declining [Congregation Libovitz] to sell the building."⁶¹ In 1971, the congregation agreed and the Museum Board hired the young activist and political fundraiser Byron Rushing to raise money for the purchase.⁶²

⁵⁸ Museum of Afro American History, "Incorporation Papers," 1980. Folder 4, Box 5, A4415—MAAH-General, 1971–1980, Central Files, Boston African American National Historic Site Resource Management Records, Boston National Historical Park, Charlestown, MA. [Hereafter: BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA].

⁵⁹ Museum of Afro American History, "Interpreting Black History in New England: A Planning Study" (Boston: Museum of Afro American History, On file at the National Park Service, Electronic Technical Information Center (ETIC), 1979), 3; "Abolitions Story to be part of Restored Hill Museum," *Boston Globe*, March 3, 1973: 27. In 1970, members of the Board of the Museum at that time included John M. Burgess (Episcopal Bishop), Ruth Batson (executive director of METCO), and Joyce King (wife of MA State Representative Mel King of Boston). Henry Hampton was president.

⁶⁰ Mitchell, WGBH "Studio Talk: The History and Development of Negro Art," February 8, 1968.

⁶¹ "Abolition Story to be part of Restored Hill Museum," *Boston Globe*, March 3, 1973: 27.

⁶² Rushing, Oral History, 2006; MAAH, "Interpreting Black History," 3. Also in 1971, the African Meeting House was added to the National Register of Historic Places, though the authors may not have been associated with the Museum; "Four Local Sites Find Their Place in History," *Boston Globe*, October 19, 1971: 3; Poh and Post, *African Meeting House NHL Nomination*.

In the 1960s, Byron Rushing, a rising civil rights activist, worked at a variety of community organizations in Boston's Roxbury neighborhood. Rushing first became involved in Boston civil rights activism when, as part of the Northern Student Movement, he headed the Community Voter Registration Project, followed by a position as a community organizer working for the scholar and social activist Hubert Jones in the late 1960s.⁶³ In later years, Rushing became the executive director of the Museum and one of its most vocal and active political boosters, as will be discussed below.

With Rushing at the helm, the Museum purchased the African Meeting House in July 1972 for \$40,000, with \$20,000 of the funds coming from a National Historic Preservation Grant, and the balance funded by a combination of private donations and a \$16,000 mortgage held by the Episcopal City Mission.⁶⁴ Shortly thereafter, the Museum hired Rushing as its first executive director and first full-time employee. With the fledgling Museum just getting on its feet in its new space, bad luck struck in February 1973 when a fire broke out during repairs, causing major damage to the roof of the building.⁶⁵ The Museum recognized the need to continue programming and established a second campus, including offices and exhibit space, in Roxbury.⁶⁶ Roxbury, the heart of Boston's Black community and a center for civil rights activism, provided an ideal location for the Museum's second headquarters.

Rushing and the Museum's founders believed in the potential of the Museum to be a true "neighborhood museum," which could serve as both a space for curation and a positive force for social change and community uplift. Rushing consulted with the figurative father of neighborhood museums, John Kinard, and Michael Seif, a museum consultant, to facilitate the planning process during the early 1970s.⁶⁷ A "pre-planning" grant from the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities facilitated the production of the Museum's first "Program Statement" in 1973.⁶⁸ The program statement noted that until that point, the purpose of the Museum had primarily been to "exhibit, preserve and collect material pertaining to Afro American History." Moving forward

⁶³ MAAH, "Interpreting Black History," 3.

⁶⁴ "Abolition Story," *Boston Globe*, March 3, 1973: 27; MAAH, "Interpreting Black History," 4; Suffolk County Registry of Deeds, Mortgage Release, Mortgagor Museum of Afro-American History, Mortgagee, Episcopal City Mission, January 28, 1974. Deed Book 8695:604, On file at the Suffolk County Registry of Deeds, Boston, MA; Suffolk County Registry of Deeds, Deed of Sale for 8 Smith Court, Grantor, Congregation Libovitz, Grantee Museum of Afro American History, July 12, 1972, Deed Book 8458: 716. On file at the Suffolk County Registry of Deeds, Boston, MA.

⁶⁵ "Afro Museum on Beacon Hill Destroyed by 3 Alarm Fire," *Boston Globe*, February 15, 1973: 51. The fire occurred on the night of February 14, 1973.

⁶⁶ Rushing, Oral History, 2006.

⁶⁷ MAAH, "Interpreting Black History in New England: A Planning Study," 2.

⁶⁸ MAAH, "Program Statement, Adopted April 2, 1973." On file at the National Park Service, Electronic Technical Information Center (ETIC), (Boston: Museum of Afro American History, 1973), 1–4.

under Rushing's leadership, the Museum sought to explicitly prioritize the needs of the Black community, define New England as its specific geographical focus, and create educational programs that showed the relevance of history to the present.

The Museum's ambitious 1979 planning study, "Interpreting Black History," identified a wide range of programming, collection, educational, and accessibility goals.⁶⁹ The planning study outlined a vision for the Museum that included a professional research facility, a repository, and an interpretive center. To achieve this vision, the Museum would operate with campuses in both Roxbury and downtown Boston; establish partnerships with Suffolk University and the Roxbury Historical Society; pursue historical research to update the Black Heritage Trail and create additional heritage trails throughout New England; and initiate outreach programs for high school students in Roxbury. In short, Rushing planned to build the Museum as a community cultural center focused on history, rather than a historical museum with some community cultural events.

The Museum established a number of partnerships to expand its reach and effect change in as many venues as possible. In 1968, Museum board member Henry Hampton teamed up with Suffolk University historian Edward Clark to establish the Afro-American Literature Collection, a collaboration which was formalized in 1971.⁷⁰ The founders planned for the collection to be controlled by a Board of Overseers and owned by the university, while the director of the collection also coordinated a biannual writers' forum, raised money, and managed publicity and publications.⁷¹ By 1976, the collection comprised 2,400 volumes. Edward Clark, professor emeritus of history at Suffolk University, turned over management of the collection to Robert E. Fox in 1986.⁷² The National Park Service published Clark's annotated bibliography of the collection's holdings in 1985.⁷³

The Museum's partnership with the Roxbury Historical Society (RHS) was focused on local research and community outreach. In 1973, the two organizations planned to co-sponsor a "Living History Center" in Roxbury where an appreciation for the recent past and local history would be promoted in tandem with broader historical themes.⁷⁴ By 1976, the Museum had moved its central

⁶⁹ MAAH, "Interpreting Black History;" 16–25.

⁷⁰ Thomas A. Fulman, President of Suffolk University to Henry Hampton, President of the Museum of Afro American History, letter, December 20, 1971. Moakley Archive and Institute, Reference File (subject), Suffolk University, Afro-American Literature Collection. On file, Suffolk University, Boston, MA.

⁷¹ Clark Notes, September 25, 1984. Moakley Archive and Institute, Reference File (subject), Suffolk University, Afro-American Literature Collection. On file, Suffolk University, Boston, MA.

⁷² Memorandum, Edward Clark to Robert E. Fox and the Board of Overseers. Re: Archives of Collection of Afro-American Literature, 1968–1986. October 9, 1986. Moakley Archive and Institute, Reference File (subject), Suffolk University, Afro-American Literature Collection. On file, Suffolk University, Boston, MA.

⁷³ Edward Clark, *Black Writers in New England* (Boston: National Park Service, 1985).

⁷⁴ MAAH, "Program Statement," 2.

headquarters to the Dillaway-Thomas House, also home of the RHS, and Museum staff were helping to revitalize the society through local history programming and historical preservation advocacy.⁷⁵

Rushing argued that the Museum's role in the realm of history was to reinterpret the facts of American history through the lens of Black experience. While he remained committed to the Museum's more traditional collection and exhibition goals, he also sought to integrate knowledge about Black history gained from archaeological research.⁷⁶ In 1975, Rushing and Vivian Johnson, in coordination with the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA), initiated the first public archaeology excavations in Boston.⁷⁷

The Museum offered a range of programs related to Black culture and history. For example, the 1977 event series "Blackstuff" presented a sampling of music, crafts, films, and cooking associated with Black heritage.⁷⁸ The Museum continued to stage more traditional exhibits as well, including a retrospective on the artwork of Allan Crite and a display of the photographs of Hamilton Smith, both presented as part of the 1977 Black History Month programming. Historical lectures such as "Blacks in the Westward Movement" presented aspects of Black history that were unlikely to have made it into public school history classes. Additionally, local history exhibits, such as the 1976 "What Time Is This Station?" and the 1977 "Meetinghouse Hill" programs, catered to the curiosity of people interested in learning about the history in their own backyards.⁷⁹

Museum of Afro American History and Historic Preservation

Under Rushing's leadership, the Museum became the leader of the Black historic preservation movement in Boston, advocating for the preservation of historic landmarks in Roxbury and other contemporary African American neighborhoods. Rushing envisioned the Museum to be "a museum without walls," which celebrated black community histories.⁸⁰ In Roxbury, the Museum promoted the historical importance of the Roxbury fire station, the colonial-era Shirley-Eustis House, and the Roxbury Standpipe. In addition, the Museum lobbied for the inclusion of the

⁷⁵ MAAH, "Statement of Case," On file at the National Park Service, Electronic Technical Information Center (ETIC), (Boston: Museum of Afro American History, 1976), 8–10.

⁷⁶ MAAH, "Interpreting Black History," 12.

⁷⁷ Johnson, Oral History, 2012. These archaeological excavations took place at the African Meeting House, on Beacon Hill and the Dillaway-Thomas House in Roxbury, home of the Roxbury Historical Society.

⁷⁸ "Black History Month Programming," *Boston Globe*, February 3, 1977: A10.

⁷⁹ MAAH, "Interpreting Black History;" 9.

⁸⁰ Lee Mitgang, "A living 'museum without walls,'" *The Capital Times* (Madison, WI), June 22, 1979: 18; William Sonski, "A Museum Without Walls," *Boston Globe*, September 20, 1979: A8.

Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority’s elevated railway Dudley Square Station in the National Register of Historic Places, a status achieved in 1985.⁸¹

On Beacon Hill, the Museum utilized federal historic preservation programs to formally recognize the regional and national significance of the African Meeting House. This approach at once underscored the significance of the African Meeting House by a metric recognized in both the Black and white communities—the National Register and National Historic Landmarks programs—and served to guard the building from the potential negative impacts of development. Reflecting on this period during a 2006 oral history, Rushing underscored that by thinking about the African Meeting House as an “artifact,” people could more easily make the connection between historic preservation and Black history. Rushing explained that “we were able to have historic preservation of African American communities become central to the kinds of work that black people think about nowadays when they think about black history.”⁸²

Even before the Museum’s acquisition of the African Meeting House in July 1972, Rushing moved to have the building added to the National Register of Historic Places, a status attained on October 7, 1971.⁸³ Listing on the National Register ensured that the African Meeting House would be recognized by the federal government as historically significant, and ensured a measure of protection as this significance would need to be considered during federal projects that could affect historic resources. National Register status also made the Museum eligible for tax credits associated with the building and qualified it for certain federal historic preservation grants. Historic preservation documentation enabled the Museum to intensify its fundraising efforts in the early 1970s, as it demonstrated the African Meeting House’s significance beyond the sphere of the Boston Black community.

As noted above, in 1973 a fire damaged the African Meeting House roof during repairs.⁸⁴ The Museum received a matching grant-in-aid for \$12,500 from the Historic Preservation Fund (a grant program stemming from the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966) to help with repairs.⁸⁵ The Boston Athenaeum offered help with emergency curation and SPNEA stepped forward to offer advice on the restoration of the roof.⁸⁶ The Museum also gathered private donations to help

⁸¹Betsy Friedberg, Edward Gordon, and Museum of Afro-American History. *Dudley Station Historic District National Register Nomination*, Suffolk County, Massachusetts (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1985).

⁸² Byron Rushing, Oral History Interview, 2006.

⁸³ The African Meeting House was added to the National Register of Historic Places on October 7, 1971. The original nomination has not been located, the extant nomination is the National Historic Landmark Nomination; Post and Poh, *African Meeting House NHL Nomination*.

⁸⁴ “Afro Museum on Beacon Hill Destroyed by 3 Alarm Fire,” *Boston Globe*, February 15, 1973: 51.

⁸⁵ Poh and Post, *African Meeting House NHL Nomination*, 2.

⁸⁶ “Abolition Story,” *Boston Globe*, March 3, 1973: 27.

fund the building's restoration. Despite these incremental gains, the fact remained that the African Meeting House was uninhabitable. The Museum was in dire need of support for the restoration, which would cost a minimum of \$400,000.

Rushing and the Museum board quickly recognized that connecting with the wider network of preservation organizations and federal programs could be an important part of the long-term financial strategy of the Museum while also legitimizing the mission and message of the organization. Rushing cast a wide net in search of support within the preservation community. Two months after the fire, he sought out National Historic Landmark (NHL) status for the African Meeting House. In the Museum's application, Rushing argued that additional research had shown the building to be not only significant to the history of New England Black Americans, but also on a national scale.⁸⁷ Staff NPS historian Robert C. Post surveyed the building in late May 1973 to determine if it met NHL standards of significance and historic integrity.⁸⁸ Rushing provided Post with extensive documentation supporting the historical and material integrity of the building and on May 30, 1974, the African Meeting House earned National Historic Landmark status.⁸⁹ With this status, the Museum gained access to federal and state grant programs that could potentially ease the financial burden of the African Meeting House restoration.

Looking beyond the National Register of Historic Places and National Historic Landmark programs, Rushing recognized that a stronger guarantee of preservation support might come from a public-private partnership between the National Park Service and Museum. He found a model for this type of partnership in the nascent Boston National Historical Park.⁹⁰ As will be seen in the next chapter, the relationships Rushing initiated during the documentation and nomination process grew during with the founding of Boston National Historical Park and began to pave the way for the establishment of Boston African American National Historic Site in 1980.

⁸⁷ Byron Rushing, to A. R. Mortenson, Chief Historian of the National Park Service, letter, 27 April 1973. African Meeting House NHL Documentation, 1974, On file at the National Archives, Washington, DC and online.

⁸⁸ "Integrity" in the context of the National Register of Historic Places and the National Historic Landmarks programs refers to whether the physical features of a resource retain their ability to convey the significance of the resource. The seven aspects of integrity are: location, design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling and association.

⁸⁹ Byron Rushing to Robert C. Post, Historic Sites Survey, letter, 18 January 1973. In Poh and Post, *African Meeting House NHL Nomination*.

⁹⁰ Bruggeman, *Trails of Freedom*, 198.

CHAPTER 3. CREATING BOSTON AFRICAN AMERICAN NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE, 1974–1980

By the mid-1970s, the Museum of Afro American History began to establish a relationship with the National Park Service, with an eye toward establishing a partnership that could help to ensure the preservation of the Museum's key property, the African Meeting House. A Black history-centered national historic site in Boston was not a foregone conclusion, however, as both the Museum and the NPS had their misgivings about the benefits and long-term impacts of establishing such a site. The 1970s saw a whirlwind of negotiations, proposals, and lobbying by the Museum and politicians who sought to get Boston National Historical Park, and later Boston African American National Historic Site, on the books.

The Advisory Commission of Boston NHP became the springboard for the exploration of a potential Black history-centered national park or historic site in Boston. From 1974 through 1980, Byron Rushing, both executive director of the Museum and a member of the commission, established relationships with local politicians and businesspeople, galvanizing the local Park Service support for the African Meeting House restoration. Ultimately, establishing a separate national historic site appeared to be the most direct avenue toward getting the needed financial support.

In retrospect, the bill to establish Boston African American National Historic Site seems tailor-made to succeed in the social and political climate of the late 1970s. At that time, the National Park System expanded its portfolio of urban national parks and sought to correct the lack of parks that highlighted African American history. Legislators like Phillip Burton helped to create this political environment. In 1978, Burton “pushed through Congress the largest single legislative package in national park history” in the form of the National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978, known as the Omnibus Bill of 1978.⁹¹ This bill served as “an important milestone in making national parks relevant to an urban-based industrialized society” and resonated with the ideals professed by NPS leadership like Director George Hartzog in his advocacy of urban national parks during the 1960s and early 1970s.⁹² Beginning in the mid-1960s, Hartzog had worked to expand the Park Service, seeking to make parks accessible to a wider range of people, in part to expand support for the NPS in Congress. Urban parks were key to realizing his vision.⁹³

The growing receptiveness of the National Park Service to the establishment of Black history sites began with passage of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) in 1966. With the passage

⁹¹ Alfred Runte, *National Parks: The American Experience* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 190.

⁹² Runte, *National Parks*, 190.

⁹³ Rolf Diamant, “From Management to Stewardship,” 37.

of the NHPA, the NPS's mandate expanded to include a broader range of American history than had previously been conceived. The NPS had to that point been acutely focused on creating a united story of American history and preserving the materiality of that singular narrative.⁹⁴ In 1970, Director Hartzog called for a more inclusive and representative National Park Service, "balanced and complete in its representation of the Nation's historical heritage; and to identify 'gaps' that presently exist in this representation."⁹⁵ Following this shift, the NPS revised its official Thematic Framework in 1972. The notion that the National Park System should represent more than "outstanding geological wonders" underwrote changes to the framework.⁹⁶ The National Park Service began to make these changes in response to critiques of the park system levied at the NPS in the run up to the American Bicentennial. These changes accelerated, however, in response to a broader national reckoning with racial inequality, which took myriad forms such as protests to gain equal employment opportunities and school busing programs to gain equal education.

The template created by the Boston NHP in its establishment as a "partnership-park" also paved the way for Boston African American NHS. A partnership park is a unit of the NPS which relies largely on partnerships between the National Park Service and privately owned or municipally owned historic sites to accomplish NPS goals of preservation and interpretation. Under a partnership model, the NPS works "collaboratively with private groups, either individual landowners, non-profits, governments, or corporations, to create more extensive areas of land protection."⁹⁷ This framework distributes managerial, operational, and financial responsibility among multiple parties and reduces the amount of property the NPS itself must own in order to operate a park. At Boston NHP, partnerships became formalized through a series of cooperative agreements which dictated the responsibilities of the National Park Service and the partners in the preservation of the designated properties. This partnership model had been implemented not only at Boston NHP, but also at Independence National Historical Park in Philadelphia and, in Boston, at the Dorchester Heights National Historic Site.

Local politicians such as Massachusetts Senator Edward Kennedy were interested in bringing popular national parks to the area. This local support likely helped to pave the way for fast approval of a bill to establish the national historic site.

In the spring of 1980, the proposed legislation for the site gained support from Boston National Historical Park, the North Atlantic Regional Office, and local congressmen and senators seeking to address gaps in the National Park Service with respect to African American history. The

⁹⁴ Anne Whisnant, Marla Miller, Gary Nash, and David Thelen, *Imperiled Promise: The State of History in the National Park Service* (Bloomington: Organization of American Historians, 2011), 20–21.

⁹⁵ National Park Service, *Part One of the National Park Service System Plan: History* (Washington DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1972), vii.

⁹⁶ Runte, *National Parks*, 187.

⁹⁷ Elisabeth M. Hamin. "The US National Park Service's partnership parks: collaborative responses to middle landscapes," *Land Use Policy* 18 (2001): 125.

enabling legislation for the site was passed in October of 1980 [Public Law (P.L.) 96-430]. With the establishment of the site, bringing the vision of the Museum and the National Park Service to fruition became the responsibility of Boston National Historical Park, itself in its infancy in 1980. The limited scope that legislators had drafted for the site—essentially to provide seasonal park rangers and limited funding for restoration at the African Meeting House—had lasting impacts on the ability of the site to realize its potential as an institution which hoped to help elevate Black history within the NPS system.

Boston National Historical Park as an Unfinished Park

The seeds of Boston African American National Historic Site were first sown during the legislative drive for the establishment of Boston NHP in the early 1970s. The National Park Service had first considered a national park in Boston in the 1930s, though the NPS did not act on the recommendations of the National Parks Advisory Board at that time. In 1955, Congress established the Boston National Historic Site Commission and a campaign for a national park began again, with the privately funded Freedom Trail as its centerpiece. The newly minted Freedom Trail developed as a wayfinding tool connecting some of the city's American Revolution-era historic sites. The architects of the Freedom Trail hoped it would encourage tourism and support urban renewal efforts.⁹⁸ The proposed park nonetheless proved unpopular with Bostonians, in part due to the wariness of residents about how urban renewal would change their neighborhoods.⁹⁹

On the eve of the American Bicentennial in the early 1970s, the mythologized versions of Boston's Revolutionary past presented on the Freedom Trail resonated with the themes of the Bicentennial celebration. At the heart of early federal plans for the celebration of the Bicentennial rested the sanguine notion of a singular, uniting, national heritage—as represented by a glorification of the nation's founding fathers and the ideals of liberty and individual responsibility.¹⁰⁰ The Bicentennial fervor of the early 1970s would provide the needed push to establish the Boston NHP in 1974. The new park would celebrate the American Revolution and the Revolutionary values of freedom and independence. Amidst the preparations for the Bicentennial, however, Boston NHP's central conceit came under critique in the summer of 1972.

Byron Rushing became a vocal critic of the Bicentennial narrative and the legislation for Boston National Historical Park. At the time, Rushing served both as a liaison between state legislators and Massachusetts's Black communities and the executive director at the Museum of Afro

⁹⁸ Bruggeman, *Trails of Freedom*, 44–47.

⁹⁹ Bruggeman, *Trails to Freedom*, 114–122 and 148.

¹⁰⁰ Tammy Gordon, *The Spirit of 1976: Commerce, Community, and the Politics of Commemoration*. Public History in Historical Perspective (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013), 1–4.

American History.¹⁰¹ He brought the interests and outlook of the Museum and Boston's Black communities to bear on the Boston NHP concept, which proposed to preserve a number of sites associated with the American Revolution in or near downtown Boston.

Senator Edward Kennedy took an active role in the Bicentennial-era drive for the establishment of Boston National Historical Park. Senator Kennedy's advocacy for the legislation began in 1972, when he described the Bicentennial as "the most significant event [Boston] will have to cope with" as usage and visitation to historic sites was projected to skyrocket in 1975 and 1976.¹⁰² On July 17, 1972, Kennedy met with local Boston civic leaders at the Old State House to discuss the "drafting of legislation to prevent the further deterioration of some of our Revolutionary War Sites, the enhancement of others, and the costs of maintaining the sites, especially in light of the expected visitor influx for the bicentennial celebration."¹⁰³ As he conceived it, the Boston park would include Faneuil Hall, the Paul Revere House, the Old North Church area, Old South Meeting House, Bunker Hill, and the Old State House—the Charlestown Navy Yard at the time was set to be protected via separate NPS legislation.¹⁰⁴ Attendees to the July meeting included an array of local preservation interest groups and cultural societies, including the Museum of Afro American History, the only Black organization represented at the gathering.¹⁰⁵

Byron Rushing represented the Museum's interests at the meeting and Kennedy made multiple changes to the legislation based on his comments.¹⁰⁶ One of these changes was detailed in a letter the following month wherein Kennedy assured Rushing that the legislation would include text prohibiting the acquisition of property "unless the present owner wishes the Department of Interior to purchase the historic site."¹⁰⁷ By requesting this language, Rushing sought to explicitly protect the African Meeting House from being purchased out from under the Museum against its will. The

¹⁰¹ "Legislators organize office for liaison with blacks," *Boston Globe*, 24 Aug 1971: 14.

¹⁰² "Kennedy unveils bill on Hub antiquity," *Boston Globe*, 18 Jul 1972: 3.

¹⁰³ "Boston National Historical Park, Mass." United States Congressional Record, Proceedings and Debates of the 93rd Congress, First Session, Senate, Friday December 7, 1973. *Congressional Record* 199, part 32 (Dec. 7, 1973–Dec. 12, 1973), 40139–40140.

¹⁰⁴ Carter Lance, "Hub's historical monuments fading...", *Lowell Sun* (Lowell, MA), 14 September, 1972: 30.

¹⁰⁵ "7/17 Meeting Attendees," Museum of African American History, Byron Rushing Collection, Box 1, Folder 1 "Legislation." currently housed at BNHP Archives, Charlestown Navy Yard, Boston, MA. Other institutions represented at the meeting included: Massachusetts Department of Conservation; Beacon Hill Architectural Commission; Historic Boston Inc.; Massachusetts Historical Commission; American Jewish Historical Society; Bostonian Society – Old State House; Massachusetts Bicentennial Commission; Boston Mayor's Office; Boston Parks and Recreation; The Old North Church; and the Boston Public Facilities Department.

¹⁰⁶ "7/17 Meeting Attendees," Museum of African American History, Byron Rushing Collection, Box 1, Folder 1 "Legislation." currently housed at BNHP Archives, Charlestown Navy Yard, Boston, MA.

¹⁰⁷ Edward M. Kennedy, to Byron Rushing, letter, 1 August 1972, Folder 1 "Legislation," Box 1, Byron Rushing Collection, MAAH Archives, currently housed at BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

July 17, 1972, park service meeting occurred only five days after the Museum and Congregation Libovitz finalized the sale of the African Meeting House.

Rushing initially took exception to the Boston NHP bill, regardless of the potential inclusion of the African Meeting House. While he eventually offered support for the bill, he formalized his critique of the legislation during a Senate hearing before Senator Kennedy and Senator Alan Bible in September 1973. His central critique: the Boston park as designed would potentially perpetuate racial inequities with respect to heritage tourism and recognition of the contributions of Black and Brown people to the American Revolution.¹⁰⁸

Rushing recognized the need to preserve the sites outlined in the legislation, clustered along the Freedom Trail in downtown Boston; however, he opposed the exclusion of sites outside the old Boston, Charlestown, and South Boston core. The proposed park included no historic sites in Dorchester or Roxbury. Rushing proposed that three sites be studied for inclusion in Boston NHP for their associations with the American Revolution: the Shirley-Eustis House, the Roxbury High Fort, and the Dillaway-Thomas House.

Boston preservationists already recognized the Shirley-Eustis House in Roxbury for its association with Revolutionary War history. The historic building was home to the colonial governor of Massachusetts and a barracks for American soldiers during the war. In 1961 the Boston National Historic Sites Commission proposed that the federal government acquire the Shirley-Eustis House outright to ensure its preservation.¹⁰⁹ The final Boston NHP legislation excluded the historic home.

Dorchester and Roxbury were Black and Hispanic communities in the 1970s, and the choice to exclude sites in these neighborhoods deprived those communities of funds for improvements and the potential benefits that came with tourism. Beyond preserving the historic integrity of the sites themselves, Rushing argued that a National Park Service presence would provide a “boost to the development of these communities.”¹¹⁰ Using the language of urban renewal, Rushing underscored that Roxbury and Dorchester would stand to benefit from the financial support a national park could bring. These sites were ultimately excluded, resulting in an unequal

¹⁰⁸ Byron Rushing, to Edward M. Kennedy, letter, 18 October 1972. Folder “MAAH Director (Rushing) Files, 1973–1980.” Former MAAH Directors (Rushing) Files, Photocopies BOAF 1, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

¹⁰⁹ Bruggeman, *Trails to Freedom*, 102.

¹¹⁰ Byron Rushing, “Testimony before Senators Bible and Kennedy in support of the Boston National Historic Park, delivered at the Old State House, Boston September 10, 1973,” Folder “Est. of BNHP and BOAF,” Former MAAH Directors (Rushing) Files, Photocopies, BOAF 1, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA. [Hereafter: Rushing, “Testimony ... September 10, 1973”].

distribution of preservation resources and recognition between historic sites in white and non-white neighborhoods.

The second component of Rushing's critique of the Boston NHP legislation pointed to the lack of Black history sites as part of the proposed park. Vincent deForest and Robert DeForrest, brothers and early Black historic preservationists, brought similar critiques to the National Park System during this same period as they helped the NPS prepare for the Bicentennial. In 1972 congressional hearings on the founding of Tuskegee National Historical Park, Robert DeForrest testified about the paucity of national parks associated with Black Americans and the need for an "honest interpretation of the diversity of our society."¹¹¹ In Rushing's critique he called for park planners to "[reevaluate] what we mean by the period of the American Revolution" as the end of the Revolutionary War did not spell freedom for Black people who remained enslaved nor women who lacked many civil rights under the law. As such, Rushing argued that for the proposed Boston NHP to "reflect the reality of the Revolution" it would have to include important nineteenth- and twentieth-century sites associated with the civil rights struggles of these groups. Rushing argued that "the Boston National Historic Park, like the eighteenth-century Revolution, will be unfinished, incomplete until it commemorates the struggle of non-white, and non-English speaking, and non-male Americans for independence and freedom."¹¹²

In the early 1970s, city officials and preservationists began to recognize the significance of the African Meeting House and the historic Black community on Beacon Hill as part of the ongoing legacy of the American Revolution. "Boston 200," the city's Bicentennial celebration committee, included programs, events, and tours in Boston's Black and Brown neighborhoods scheduled for 1976. An early version of the Black Heritage Trail was incorporated into the Boston 200 programming, including a detailed account of the history associated with the various stops along the way as part of the Boston 200 guidebook (Figure 4).¹¹³ The Black Heritage Trail at that time stretched from Downtown Crossing to Beacon Hill to the North End. The Boston 200 programming also incorporated Black history by way of the publication of *Black Bostonia*, a historical summary of some of the major contributions of Black people to Boston history based on

¹¹¹ United States Congress, "Tuskegee Institute National Historical Park: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Parks and Recreation of the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs," United States Senate, 92nd Congress, Second Session, on S. 3663. September 27, 1972 (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972); Vincent and Robert were brothers but they spelled their last names differently. "Two Brothers Pushed the National Historic Landmark Program to Include Black History," *Washington Post*, February 11, 2023.

¹¹² Rushing, "Testimony ... September 10, 1973."

¹¹³ The Boston 200 Corporation, *Boston: The Official Bicentennial Guidebook*, (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1975), 200.

the research of scholars such as Robert Hayden, an educator and specialist in local African American history, and J. Marcus Mitchell, curator of the Museum of Afro American History.¹¹⁴



Figure 4. Black Heritage Trail Map, 1975. *Boston 200 Corporation, Boston: The Official Bicentennial Guidebook.*

¹¹⁴ The Boston 200 Commission undertook a number of initiatives related to Black history. They raised \$83,000 for the Dillaway-Thomas House; assisted in the restoration of John Eliot Square; made repairs to the John Farwell Mansion (a white abolitionist); erected historical markers; and undertook oral histories with members of the Black community; Peter Anderson, "Black History Lives at the Meeting House," *Boston Globe*, 26 May 1975: 25.

In response to Rushing's testimony, Senator Kennedy asked Rushing if the Museum would want the African Meeting House added to the proposed Boston NHP. At the time, Rushing temporarily decided against this as he "wasn't sure what the nature of the park was going to be" with the new partnership park model, but he left the door open for future collaborations between the Museum and the National Park Service.¹¹⁵ Years later, Rushing reflected that adding the African Meeting House to Boston NHP at that late stage would have amounted to tokenism, and the building and its history deserved more.¹¹⁶ A few months later, President Gerald Ford signed Boston National Historical Park into law on October 1, 1974, as Public Law 93-431 (see Boston NHP Structure Sidebar).¹¹⁷ Less than a year before Boston's Bicentennial celebrations, scheduled to begin in April 1975, Boston got its national park dedicated to the celebration of the American Revolution.

While the African Meeting House did not become part of Boston NHP, Rushing's advocacy for Black history helped shape the Boston NHP legislation. As described above, Rushing proposed that the legislation specifically restrict the NPS's ability to exercise eminent domain at the July 1972 stakeholder meeting. In addition to this, Rushing brought attention to historic sites in Roxbury and Dorchester which resulted in provision within the legislation for the study of the Dillaway-Thomas House for potential inclusion in Boston NHP in the future.¹¹⁸

Rushing's advocacy on behalf of Boston's Black history helped to build his relationship with Senator Kennedy, a relationship which resulted in an invitation to serve on the Boston NHP Advisory Commission.¹¹⁹ It is from this position that Rushing worked to foster relationships with park personnel and lawmakers like Senator Paul Tsongas and Representative Joseph Moakley, to connect with National Park Service programs, and ultimately to seek out the founding of Boston African American NHS. From his seat on the Boston NHP Advisory Commission, Rushing became the primary driver for the founding of Boston African American NHS and the restoration of the African Meeting House.

¹¹⁵ Byron Rushing, Oral History Interview conducted by Laura Muller, November 18, 2005, John Joseph Moakley Oral History Project OH-062, John Joseph Moakley Archive and Institute, Suffolk University, Boston, MA.

¹¹⁶ Boston African American National Historic Site, 10th Anniversary Celebration, October 10, 1990. Interpretation Files, Audio-Visual Materials, Box 23, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

¹¹⁷ Bruggeman, *Trails to Freedom*, 171–72.

¹¹⁸ Byron Rushing to Dexter Eure, letter, 12 December 1973. Folder 1 "Legislation," Box 1, Byron Rushing Collection, MAAH Archives, currently housed at BNHP, Charlestown, MA. Rushing points out to the *Boston Globe* that Roxbury's Dillaway-Thomas House will be studied for inclusion in the park, which he suggests is due to his advocacy.

¹¹⁹ Rushing, Oral History, 2005. Rushing noted that it was Kennedy that got him appointed to the Boston NHP Advisory Commission; Edward M. Kennedy [Senator] to Byron Rushing [Executive Director of MAAH], 13 September 1973. Folder 1 "Legislation," Box 1, Byron Rushing Collection, MAAH Archives, currently housed at BNHP, Charlestown, MA. Kennedy thanks Rushing and states that he wanted "to work closely with [Rushing] as we move forward on the legislation."

Sidebar: Boston National Historical Park Structure

Boston National Historical Park, authorized on October 1, 1974, (Public Law 93-431), preserves Boston's historic structures and properties "associated with the American Revolution and the founding and growth of the United States."¹²⁰ The park initially included: Faneuil Hall, the Paul Revere House, Old North Church, Old State House, Bunker Hill, Old South Meeting House, and Charlestown Navy Yard. Five additional sites listed as appropriate additions which would not require further congressional approval included: Boston Common, the Dillaway-Thomas House, the Thomas Crease House (Old Corner Book Store), the Dorchester Heights NHS, and three burying grounds (King's Chapel, Granary, and Copp's Hill). Dorchester Heights NHS was added to the park in 1978 via P.L. 95-625 by donation from City of Boston.

Boston NHP's legislation dictated that management of the new park would require cooperative agreements with property owners and limited park-owned property. Barring the donation or purchase of the properties listed in the legislation, the Secretary of the Interior was authorized to enter into cooperative agreements "assuring the preservation and historical integrity of such properties remains in force and effect." Cooperative agreements were intended to ensure access and protect the properties against changes and alterations. The benefits of cooperative agreements for property owners included the potential for technical support and financial assistance for preservation. The enabling legislation at once authorized the Secretary of the Interior to enter into cooperative agreements and left it at his or her discretion as to the extent of responsibility the NPS would bear in these agreements for marking, interpretation, restoration, and technical assistance.

The historical significance of the properties included in Boston NHP's enabling legislation were related to the central theme of the American Revolution to varying degrees. In the case of Dorchester Heights, these ties were strong as this location was critical to ending the Siege of Boston in 1776. In other cases, these ties were more tenuous, as in the case of Charlestown Navy Yard which is the docking location of the circa-1792 USS *Constitution* but was otherwise only associated with United States maritime history of the nineteenth century. Except for the Charlestown Navy Yard (which was transferred to the Department of the Interior from the United States Navy with the establishment of the park), Bunker Hill (which was transferred to the NPS from the State of Massachusetts), and Dorchester Heights, the National Park Service does not own any of the properties within the park.

¹²⁰ *Boston National Historical Park Act of 1974, U.S. Code, Title 16, Public Law 93-431, 93rd Congress, S. 210, October 1, 1974.*

Rushing's Service on the Advisory Commission for the Boston NHP

In the years after the establishment of Boston NHP, Rushing served on the park's Advisory Commission. Hugh Gurney remembered Rushing as a vocal advocate for Black history from his seat on the commission. Gurney described Rushing as "very much involved in the commission but always talking about ... the African sites and all, and how we could do that and so forth."¹²¹ Despite Rushing's keen interest in saving the African Meeting House, however, the Museum did not see a separate park as the only means of pursuing the interpretation and preservation of Black history sites. From his position on the Advisory Commission, he could initiate programming at Boston NHP, influence hiring, and potentially establish a more formal relationship between the Museum and the National Park Service.

Rushing arranged for Boston NHP to support the Museum in a number of projects. In writing to Wendell Simpson, head of the North Atlantic Region's Urban Affairs Office, Rushing listed several potential collaborative projects. These included: posting signage for the Black Heritage Trail; completing archaeological investigations at the African Meeting House; researching nineteenth-century Black Boston; drafting African American historical interpretations of the Freedom Trail sites; and translation of the Black Heritage Trail brochure into Spanish, French, and German.¹²²

Rushing sought ways for the Park Service in Boston to serve Black communities. He saw potential to create traditional American Revolution-themed programs in Black neighborhoods, thereby bringing tourism dollars as well as federal and local investment to those neighborhoods. One such proposal was for an interpretive program highlighting the connections between Boston and Roxbury during the American Revolution.¹²³ Potential projects included the creation of an urban trail which would recreate part of the "Knox Trail" by which cannon were transported from New York to Dorchester; recreating the path of William Dawes (who rode the same night as Paul Revere) through Roxbury; or exploring the connection between the Old State House and the Shirley-Eustis house, where the colonial governor had lived during the Revolution.

The African Meeting House restoration continued to be the most pressing need of the Museum, but folding this project into the goals of the Boston NHP would prove more challenging. In the late 1970s, the financial demands of the African Meeting House restoration began to mount. The Museum had raised and invested \$200,000 in preservation, but the needs of the building

¹²¹ Hugh Gurney, Oral History Interview conducted by Seth Bruggeman, September 1, 2017, Boston National Historical Park Administrative History Oral History Project; Rushing, Oral History, 2005.

¹²² Byron Rushing to Wendell Simpson, letter, August 21, 1980. Folder 4, Box 3, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

¹²³ Byron Rushing to Wendell Simpson, letter, August 21, 1980.

outstripped their fundraising efforts. By 1978, it became clear that the Museum of Afro American History would not be able to shoulder the restoration effort alone.

An Urban Initiative Brings Attention to Boston Again

In 1978, Director of the National Park Service William Whalen issued the “Urban Initiative,” to bring more National Park Service programs to cities. The Urban Initiative included \$1.4 million allocated in March 1979 for new “special projects” as well as continuing efforts already in place that brought interpretive and visitor’s services to urban communities.¹²⁴ Deputy Director Ira Hutchinson implemented the Urban Initiative. Hutchinson served as the first African American Deputy Director of the NPS between 1977 and 1983. He had an acute interest in expanding the recreational and leisure options of Black Americans and urban populations.¹²⁵ As part of the Urban Initiative, the NPS Office of Public Affairs circulated a list of National Park Service units with “Black Historical Associations.” Boston National Historical Park was one recipient, and the list landed on Byron Rushing’s desk.¹²⁶

On September 20, 1978, Byron Rushing gave a tour of the Black Heritage Trail to Judy Hart, legislative specialist for the North Atlantic Regional Office, and made the case for a new park on Beacon Hill. The following month, Hart forwarded information on the trail to Terry Savage, North Atlantic Chief of Planning and Design, for further study of a potential “new site” for the National Park Service.¹²⁷ In addition to the merits of a potential park, she emphasized the time-sensitive nature of the restoration project at the African Meeting House as “pressure for development on Beacon Hill [was] strong.”

¹²⁴ Grant Midgley, “Urban Projects Widen Park Service Horizons,” *Courier* 3, no. 8 (July 1980): 32.

¹²⁵ “Program: Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, October 11, 12, 13, 1978.” *Negro History Bulletin* 41, no. 4 (1978): 855. At the fall 1978 Annual Convention of the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History, held in Los Angeles, California, Hutchinson gave a paper entitled “The 1964 Civil Rights Act and Expanded Outdoor Recreation and Leisure Lifestyles for Black Americans.” Therein he discussed “the concept of ‘soul’ as it applies to American Blacks and their use of leisure time” and “the many myths about the leisure inclinations and preferences of Blacks.” Additionally, he was a contributing author to two books *Recreation and Special Populations* and *Recreation and Leisure for the Disadvantaged*.

¹²⁶ “Units of the National Park System with Black Historical Associations,” Folder “MAAH-NPS Relations,” Box 1, Byron Rushing Collection, MAAH Archives, currently housed at BNHP, Charlestown, MA; “The National Park Service Presence in Urban Areas,” 18 April 1979, Folder “MAAH-NPS Relations,” Box 1, Byron Rushing Collection, MAAH Archives, currently housed at BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

¹²⁷ Legislative Specialist, NAR [Judy Hart] to Chief, Planning and Design, NAR [Terry Savage], memorandum, re: “Preliminary Visit for a Possible New Site: Black Heritage Trail, Boston,” October 5, 1978, Folder 2, Box 14, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA. The memo did include summaries for several sites: Shaw/54th Regiment Monument, Phillips School, Abiel Smith School, African Meeting House, and Lewis Hayden House.

Interest in the potential site grew over the following year and in July 1979, Robert Nunn, Special Assistant to the Director of Urban Affairs, came to Boston to gather information.¹²⁸ Nunn became involved in implementing the Urban Initiative, affiliated with the Bureau of Equal Employment Opportunity, and served directly under Deputy Director Hutchinson.¹²⁹ Rushing and Museum board chairman Henry Hampton gave Nunn a tour of the African Meeting House and some of the sites on the Black Heritage Trail and expressed their eagerness to “reach a working relationship with the National Park Service.”¹³⁰

Following their meeting, Rushing wrote to Nunn, formally proposing the creation of a “National Afro-American Heritage Park” with the Black Heritage Trail uniting fifteen sites significant to Black history and the African Meeting House as its centerpiece.¹³¹ Rushing detailed the potential interpretive themes to be explored at the site, and proposed a “cooperative ownership” model similar to the system in use at Boston NHP, with the Museum retaining ownership of the African Meeting House. Notably, in defining the proposed site, Rushing also had to delineate a physical boundary around Beacon Hill. As a result, the proposed park included an abbreviated version of the Black Heritage Trail, cutting out many of the important sites that had been a part of the 1964 and 1976 conceptions of the trail.

As described above, Rushing recognized the limits of Boston NHP’s focus on a narrow view of the American Revolution. The addition of the Black Heritage Trail could broaden the Park Service’s understanding and interpretation of the ongoing salience of the themes of “freedom” and “revolution” in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Rushing proposed interpretive themes for the proposed park which ranged from everyday life in the free Black community to politics and abolitionism to architectural history on Beacon Hill. These themes, he argued, represented the tip of the iceberg and the interpretive potential of the proposed site promised to be “unique, multifaceted and perhaps unlimited.”¹³² Both Nunn and Hutchinson thereafter expressed support

¹²⁸ Byron Rushing to Robert Nunn, letter, October 22, 1979. Folder “Chronological Files: 1979,” Box A005.25, Byron Rushing Personal Research Files, Institutional Archive, MAAH Archives, Boston, MA.

¹²⁹ Naomi Hunt, ed., “People on the Move,” *Courier* 2, no.2 (1978): 32.

¹³⁰ Byron Rushing to Robert Nunn, letter, October 22, 1979. MAAH Archives, Boston.

¹³¹ Byron Rushing to Robert Nunn, letter, October 22, 1979. MAAH Archives, Boston. Rushing mentions “fifteen” sites, as Boston African American NHS’s sixteen sites had not been finalized.

¹³² Byron Rushing, “Testimony Concerning the Establishment of a Boston African American National Historic Site, Before the Subcommittee on Parks, Recreation, and Renewable Resources, U.S. Senate, Senator Dale Bumpers, Chairman, August 25, 1980.” Folder Legislation, Box 1, Byron Rushing Collection, MAAH Archives, currently housed at BNHP, Charlestown, MA. [Hereafter: Rushing, “Testimony ... August 25, 1980.”].

for the cooperation between the Park Service and the Museum with respect to interpretation on the Black Heritage Trail.¹³³

The NPS drafted the first version of Boston African American National Historic Site legislation in early 1980. Hugh Gurney recalled advising Rushing to use the Boston NHP legislation as a template.¹³⁴ Designed as a “partnership park,” Boston NHP was organized around cooperative agreements with historical associations and property owners managing the four non-federal contributing sites within the park: Old North Church, Old State House, Paul Revere House, and Old South Meeting House. These park partners operated largely independently from Boston NHP, but by signing on as partners, brought expectations of some federal funding, especially for rehabilitation projects. The Park Service, for its part, used the agreements as a means to maintain common operation and preservation standards across the sites and put less emphasis on promises for monetary support.¹³⁵

From his position on the Boston NHP Advisory Commission, Byron Rushing began to agitate for meaningful assistance for the restoration of the African Meeting House in early 1980. Rushing gathered a group of NPS personnel on Beacon Hill to take a tour of the Black Heritage Trail and discuss the options available to get the Park Service involved in the restoration and potentially transform the trail into a national historic site.¹³⁶ The attendees included NPS leaders Richard Stanton, North Atlantic Regional Director, and Hugh Gurney, Superintendent of Boston NHP; technical experts, such as Judy Hart; and people who might be involved in the logistics of a collaborative relationship, such as Carter Lowe of the North Atlantic Regional Office of Urban Affairs and Vince Lombardi, Site Manager for Dorchester Heights NHS.¹³⁷

¹³³ Byron Rushing to Thomas P. O’Neill, letter, March 14, 1980. Folder “Est. of BNHP and BOAF.” Former MAAH Directors (Rushing) Files, Photocopies, BOAF 1, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA; Byron Rushing to Joseph Moakley, letter, March 13, 1980. Folder “Lobbying,” Box 1, Byron Rushing Collection, MAAH Archives, currently housed at BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

¹³⁴ Gurney, *Oral History*, 2017.

¹³⁵ Bruggeman, *Trails to Freedom*, 212–13.

¹³⁶ Meeting Notes, “Tour 8am,” Circa Early 1980. Folder 2, Box 14, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.; Legislative Specialist [Judy Hart] to Chief, Planning and Design, memorandum, re: “Preliminary Visit for a Possible New Site: Black Heritage Trail, Boston,” October 5, 1978, Folder 2, Box 14, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

¹³⁷ Richard L. Stanton served as North Atlantic Regional Director for a period from January 1980 through February 1981, a crucial period in the planning for Boston African American National Historic Site. Carter Lowe served a detail as Site Manager of Boston African American National Historic Site from 1988–1990. Judy Hart went on to serve as the founding superintendent of the Women’s Rights National Historical Park, in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1984. Vince Lombardi served as the first “acting” site manager for Boston African American NHS from October 1980 through mid-1981.

Stanton and Gurney suggested the simplest solution: adding the African Meeting House to Boston NHP via a cooperative agreement between the Museum and the Boston NHP. Stanton expressed optimism that with an amendment to the Boston NHP legislation to add the African Meeting House, the whole process could be “wrapped up by the end of April.”¹³⁸ Such an agreement would not come with the needed funds, however, and Gurney cautioned that “for [a] rehab we need new authority.” Lowe suggested the restoration might be funded as a “token project” line item for fiscal year 1980. While the majority of those in attendance wanted to see the African Meeting House added to the Boston NHP by collaborative agreement, Rushing stated simply that he “want[ed] a park.”¹³⁹

Boston NHP and the Museum were already collaborating, jointly planning to design and install signage for the Black Heritage Trail and print brochures. Stanton indicated that he could help identify \$25,000 for publications and signs, but additional financial assistance would be difficult. The City of Boston was less helpful at first. Boston owned the Abiel Smith School and rented it to two veterans’ organizations but had been “up-tight about giving up white tenants for black purposes.”¹⁴⁰ Despite the undercurrent of racial discrimination on Beacon Hill, the NPS began to draft potential legislative language and the Museum began to reach out to property owners on Beacon Hill and consulting with the Beacon Hill Architectural Commission.

By March 16, 1980, legislative specialist Judy Hart reviewed a draft of the proposed legislation for Regional Director Stanton before sending it to the NPS Director on a tight deadline by close of business on March 17.¹⁴¹ Also in March 1980, Byron Rushing sent out proposals to two Massachusetts congressmen: Joseph Moakley, who represented the Massachusetts Ninth Congressional District, including Beacon Hill, and Thomas “Tip” O’Neill, who represented the Massachusetts Eleventh Congressional District and was at that time Speaker of the House. As part of his proposal to Moakley and O’Neill, Rushing pointed to the positive response he had already received from the Park Service and posited that the site could contain fifteen sites related to the

¹³⁸ Meeting Notes, “Tour 8am,” Circa Early 1980. Folder 2, Box 14, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

¹³⁹ Meeting Notes, “Tour 8am,” Circa Early 1980. Folder 2, Box 14, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

¹⁴⁰ Meeting Notes, “Tour 8am,” Circa Early 1980. Folder 2, Box 14, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

¹⁴¹ Legislative Specialist, NAR [Judy Hart] to Regional Director, NAR [Richard L. Stanton], memorandum, re: “Notes on the legislation for Boston African American National Historic Site,” March 16, 1980. Folder 3, Box 14, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA. The March 16th version of the legislation specifically named the African Meeting House, Abiel Smith School, (5) Smith Court Residences; George Middleton House; Lewis Hayden House; Charles Street Meeting House; George Grant House; John J. Smith House; Shaw/54th Regiment Monument; and the Boston Massacre Monument; Excluding completely the Phillips School; the John P. Coburn House, and the Coburn Gaming House.

nineteenth-century African American community on Beacon Hill, with the African Meeting House as the keystone.¹⁴²

On March 31, 1980, Richard Stanton submitted a full “Legislative Support Package” to the Director of the National Park Service, Russell Dickenson. Stanton indicated that the North Atlantic Region “strongly recommend[ed] this proposal” along with local support from the Boston NHP Advisory Committee, the City of Boston, and the Beacon Hill Civic Association. The submission represents the beginning of the bill’s legislative history, and after an April 15, 1980, revision, it got circulated to the House Subcommittee on National Parks, of which Phillip Burton was the Chair. As noted above, Burton served as a powerful advocate for the expansion of the Park Service, which had begun in the wake of the 1972 National Park System Plan and led to the establishment of more parks in urban areas and a focus on diverse populations.¹⁴³ These would come to include Boston African American NHS, in addition to Golden Gate National Recreation Area, Mary McLeod Bethune Council House National Historic Site, Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site, and Women’s Rights National Historic Park. Appointed by Congressman Maurice Udall in 1977 to the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, Burton had succeeded in passing the National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978 and brought his support to H.R. 7434.

Moakley ultimately became the central advocate in Congress behind the legislative push to found Boston African American National Historic Site. Immediately upon receiving Rushing’s proposal, and before the legislation had been fully vetted by the NPS, Moakley sought out the help of Congressman Burton. On May 15, Moakley wrote to Burton asking for him to “act favorably on this vital legislation” as “the black community in Boston, and all of us concerned with the preservation of this heritage, strongly support this legislation.”¹⁴⁴ Moakley proposed that the park’s establishment be considered as an amendment to other legislation before the Subcommittee on National Parks and Recreation that May, but he was unsuccessful.¹⁴⁵ As a result, the following week, on May 22, 1980, Moakley introduced H.R. 7434, a bill to establish Boston African

¹⁴² Byron Rushing to Thomas P. O’Neill, letter, March 14, 1980. Folder “Est. of BNHP and BOAF.” Former MAAH Directors (Rushing) Files, Photocopies, BOAF 1, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA; Byron Rushing to Joseph Moakley, letter, March 13, 1980. Folder “Lobbying,” Box 1, Byron Rushing Collection, MAAH Archives, currently housed at BNHP, Charlestown, MA. The sites that Rushing pointed to for inclusion were: the African Meeting House, Abiel Smith School, (5) Smith Court Residences; George Middleton House; Lewis Hayden House; Charles Street Meeting House; George Grant House; John J. Smith House; Phillips School; Coburn Gaming House; Home for Aged Colored Women.

¹⁴³ Barry Mackintosh, Janet A. McDonnell, and John H. Sprinkle, Jr. *The National Parks: Shaping the System*, 4th ed. (Hancock, MI: George Wright Society, 2018), 59.

¹⁴⁴ John Joseph Moakley to The Honorable Phillip Burton, letter, May 15, 1980. Folder “Lobbying,” Box 1, Byron Rushing Collection, MAAH Archives, currently housed at BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

¹⁴⁵ John Joseph Moakley to Byron Rushing, letter, May 20, 1980. Folder “Lobbying,” Box 1, Byron Rushing Collection, MAAH Archives, currently housed at BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

American National Historic Site, to the House of Representatives.¹⁴⁶ The bill got referred to the Subcommittee on National Parks and Recreation. Moakley then wrote letters to his colleagues soliciting cosponsors, requesting they join him in “preserving these moments of black history as a National Historic Site.”¹⁴⁷ The following month, on June 19, 1980, the Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks issued its Legislative Counsel Memo to the Subcommittee, detailing the legislation, its alternatives, its financial impact, and urging its “early approval” by Congress.¹⁴⁸

Writing the Bill

The bill that Moakley presented to Congress in May 1980 was much the same bill as the one that President Jimmy Carter would sign in October of that year, a few weeks before election day.

The final legislation (see Appendix B) outlined the purpose of Boston African American National Historic Site and set ground rules for its official establishment and management via cooperative agreements. Boston African American NHS’s core purpose:

“to preserve for the benefit and inspiration of the people of the United States as a national historic site certain historic structures and properties of outstanding national significance located in Boston, Massachusetts, and associated with the creation and development of a free African American community within Beacon Hill prior to the Civil War.”¹⁴⁹

While the only historic site named in the legislation was the African Meeting House, the legislation was tied to an annotated map with the site boundary and sixteen historic properties along the Black Heritage Trail proposed for inclusion within the national historic site (Figure 5). Cooperative agreements with private property owners were intended to ensure “the restoration, preservation, or maintenance” of historic properties identified on the map. Beyond the relatively circumscribed mandate of preservation, the site was also authorized to enter into cooperative agreements with organizations “to mark, interpret, restore, provide technical assistance, or any combination thereof,

¹⁴⁶ H.R. 7434 (96th Congress, 2nd Session), May 22, 1980. Folder 4, Box 14, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

¹⁴⁷ John Joseph Moakley to “Colleague” in the House of Representatives, letter, July 25, 1980. Re: H.R. 7434. Folder “Lobbying,” Box 1, Byron Rushing Collection, MAAH Archives, currently housed at BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

¹⁴⁸ “Legislative Counsel Memo,” June 19, 1980.

¹⁴⁹ *Boston African American Historic Site Act of 1980*, U.S. Code, Title 16, Public Law 96-430, 96th Congress, H.R. 7434, October 10, 1980.

and for such other activities as may be necessary for the preservation of any properties depicted on [the Boston African American National Historic Site] map.”¹⁵⁰

The enabling legislation also enumerated limitations on the site’s powers and requirements for its management. The site could not acquire property, except by gift, nor could it collect fees. Additionally, the legislation prohibited Congress from allocating funds for the launching and coordination of the new site within its first year. Finally, the proposed site would not be able to enter into contracts or incur obligations without Congress appropriating funding in advance.¹⁵¹

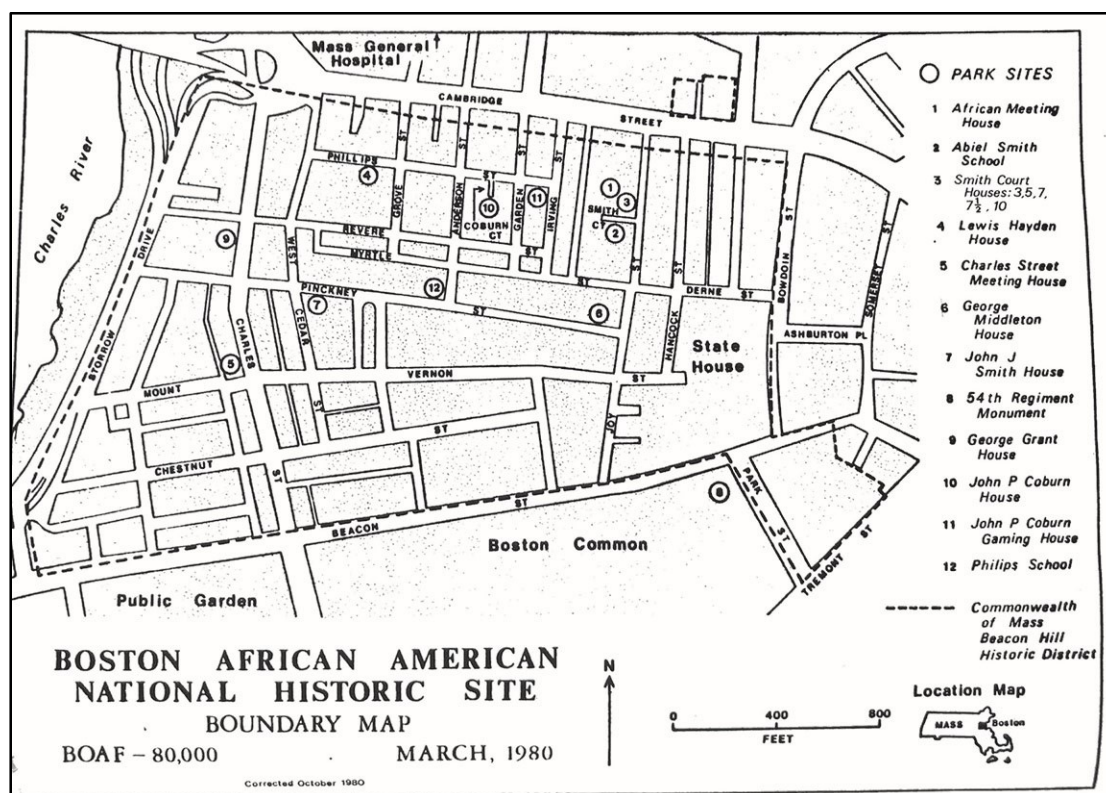


Figure 5. Boston African American National Historic Site Boundary Map, March 1980. *National Park Service, Boston African American National Historic Site, Resource Management Records.*

¹⁵⁰ The sixteen sites depicted on the 1980 Boston African American National Historic Site map are: African Meeting House; Abiel Smith School; Smith Court Houses 3, 5, 7, 7 1/2, and 10; Lewis Hayden House; Charles Street Meeting House; George Middleton House; John J. Smith House; Shaw/54th Regiment Monument; George Grant House; John P. Coburn House; John P. Coburn Gaming House; and the Philips School. Of these, the George Grant House and John P. Coburn House are no longer part of the Black Heritage Trail and are non-contributing resources within the Park. Research between 1980 and 1984 found that the George Grant House post-dated his occupation and Coburn House was demolished in 2005.

¹⁵¹ “H.R. 7434, Aug 21 Revision,” Folder 3, Box 1, Pre-Establishment Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

From its first drafting, the proposal materials for Boston African American National Historic Site focused on its small financial and administrative impact, weighed against the gains it would bring to the National Park Service. The proposed site was estimated to cost the NPS a modest \$50,000 annually and would consist of support for only six part-time staff during the “six months of peak visitation.” The proposal charted an expenditure of \$400,000 for “research and restoration of the African Meeting House.”¹⁵² Fundamental to the strategy of keeping costs down at Boston African American NHS would be its relationship with Boston National Historical Park. The proposed site would be inexpensive because “most administration could be absorbed by Boston National Historical Park.”¹⁵³

Weighed against the modest cost, the gains for the National Park Service looked great, as the new national historic site would help address deficiencies that had plagued the Park Service for years. Multiple studies, including one in the run-up to the Bicentennial, had surveyed and evaluated the National Park Service’s treatment of Black history at their existing parks and found deficiencies in representation within the system.¹⁵⁴ The legislative counsel memo emphasized that if the site proposal did *not* get approved, “it would perpetuate deficiencies in the National Park Service’s preservation and interpretation of major aspects of black American culture and history” and as a result, “the historic integrity and protection of this outstanding concentration of 16 structures could not be assured.”¹⁵⁵ Acquisition of the African Meeting House was rejected because buying the property would “probably require a full complement of administrative and maintenance staff.” In reality, the Museum never intended to sell the meeting house, but pointing out that the Park Service would not own the property further underscored the cost-efficient nature of the proposal.

Some people within the National Park Service expressed reservations about the proposed national historic site. In mid-June, the Assistant to the Secretary of the Interior and the Director of Congressional and Legislative Affairs responded to the proposal, indicating that the Department of the Interior was still considering whether a national historic site was needed to assist the Museum with restoration.¹⁵⁶ Gary Catron indicated that while the National Park Service found that

¹⁵² “Legislative Counsel Memo,” June 19, 1980.

¹⁵³ “Legislative Counsel Memo,” June 19, 1980.

¹⁵⁴ Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation (ABC), *Beyond the Fireworks of ‘76: A Summary Report of Thirty Sites Determined to be Significant in Illustrating and Commemorating the Role of Black American in United States History* (Washington: Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation, 1973); Joseph E. Harris, “Afro-American History Interpretation at Selected National Parks,” Department of History, Howard University (Washington, DC: National Park Service, September 1978); ABC was founded in 1970 by community activists Vincent deForest and Robert DeForrest and was focused on promoting the participation of Black Americans in the Bicentennial commemoration. Thereafter ABC had a thirty-year relationship with the NPS.

¹⁵⁵ “Legislative Counsel Memo,” June 19, 1980.

¹⁵⁶ Gary R Catron to Thomas P. O’Neill, letter, June 13, 1980. Folder “Est. of BNHP and BOAF,” Former MAAH Directors (Rushing) Files, Photocopies, BOAF 1, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

the “proposal merits consideration,” the work needed at the sites involved might more efficiently and effectively be accomplished under existing legislation, specifically the Historic Sites Act of 1935 or the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended. Both laws authorize federal assistance to historically significant properties on private land through grant programs and technical assistance. Catron’s hesitancy may also have been linked to the seemingly swift movement of the legislation from its initial formulation in 1978 to the House floor in 1980.

Movement through Congress

H.R. 7434 passed quickly among the myriad committees that reported to the House of Representatives, gaining twenty-five co-sponsors by July 31, 1980. Shortly thereafter, Senators Paul Tsongas and Edward Kennedy introduced S.3045, to establish Boston African American National Historic Site, to the Senate on August 20, 1980. The Senate bill mirrored the House bill. After Senate approval, the House formally took up the bill on August 25, 1980, and Representative Burton called for a suspension of the rules and swift passage of the legislation. Shirley Chisholm, the first Black woman elected to the United States Congress in 1968, signed on as a cosponsor and urged others to do the same. She described the site as a “microcosm of [Black Americans’] fight for equality and self-determination. This is American history at its best and certainly deserves the special recognition that declaring these buildings historic sites would bring.” Representative Joe Donnelly of Massachusetts spoke up to cosponsor the bill and characterized it as “a long time coming.”¹⁵⁷

After the addition of several cosponsors, the House did suspend the rules and voted in favor of the bill. Before concurring on the bill, the Senate deferred it to the Senate Energy and Natural Resource Subcommittee on Parks, Recreation, and Renewable Resources. Later that day, the Senate Subcommittee heard witness statements. Witnesses on the afternoon of August 25 included Byron Rushing, Joseph Moakley, Peter Gove (Chief of the Office of Legislation for the National Park Service), and Joy Austin (of the African American Museum Association).

Byron Rushing testified to the fact that Beacon Hill “contains the largest group of antebellum Afro-American historic sites of any urban area in the United States” and he expected that further research would identify additional sites. Joseph Moakley, as the congressman who introduced the bill, made a powerful statement of support for its passage. He argued that the historical significance of the new national historic site “lies in the fact that this area represents and exhibits the first stages of Black self-determination in Boston, as well as in our country.”¹⁵⁸ The legislation’s popularity

¹⁵⁷ “African American National Historic Site, Boston, Massachusetts,” United States Congressional Record, Proceedings and Debates of the 96th Congress, Second Session, House, Monday, August 25, 1980. *Congressional Record* 126 (Jan. 3, 1980–Dec. 30, 1980): 22920–22921.

¹⁵⁸ Rushing, “Testimony, Senate ... August 25, 1980.”; Joseph Moakley, “Testimony: Boston African American National Historic Site, (S3405) Senate Subcommittee on Parks, Recreation, & Renewable Resources, August 25,

among the House and Senate which followed can be credited in part to the positive and celebratory story the site represents. The Black Heritage Trail narrative focused on perseverance, independence, and freedom as seized by Black Americans in the lead-up to and during the Civil War.

While the Senate and House responded enthusiastically to the legislation, the spokesperson for the National Park Service at the August 25, 1980, Senate hearing appeared less keen. In statements drafted for his testimony, Peter Gove, the Chief of the Office of Legislation for the NPS and a witness for the Department of the Interior, offered only measured support for the bill. His estimate was that despite the modest restoration funds needed and the assistance from Boston NHP, site costs would amount to an additional \$100,000 a year, a figure that would grow as “more extensive historical and architectural surveys have been completed.” Gove cautioned that he could not “predict when the NPS might be in a position to make the necessary funds available, were the legislation to be enacted.”¹⁵⁹ As the impetus for the proposed site originated with the Boston NHP Advisory Council and its political supporters, it had not been studied internally by the Park Service itself. Passage of the legislation for a new site would foist a new burden on the NPS from Congress, and without funding allocated for the new site, it would represent an unfunded mandate. The disconnect between Congress’s desire to designate new NPS units and their reluctance to fund these new responsibilities has in recent years been flagged as highly problematic for the financial health and academic rigor of the Park Service.¹⁶⁰

Conversely, the Park Service did not want to actively oppose the legislation as its own surveys of Black representation and interpretation in the Park Service had called for more Black history-centered parks. While Gove’s draft testimony directly addressed the costs involved and the uncertainty of funding, during the hearing itself, he omitted mention of financial issues, leading to an awkward exchange with Senator Tsongas. Referring to the draft testimony, Senator Tsongas asked him “Maintenance cost, you say it may go higher?” At this point Gove indicated a “mistake in the testimony” and did not get questioned further on the issue. By the end of the August 25, 1980 hearing, the bill had acquired a legion of cosponsors and broad support in both the House and Senate.

1980.” Suffolk University, Moakley Archive and Institute, MS100, Series 08.01, Box 1, Folder 41; “African American National Historic Site, Boston, Massachusetts,” August 25, 1980. *Congressional Record*, 22920–22921.

¹⁵⁹ “Statement of Witness for Department of Interior, Before the Senate Sub-Committee on Parks, Recreation, and Renewable Resources, Committee on Energy and National Resources, on S.3045, Providing for the Establishment of Boston African American National Historic Site, August 25, 1980.” Folder 4, Box 14, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

¹⁶⁰ Mackintosh, et al. *The National Parks: Shaping the System*, 59; James Ridenour, *The National Parks Compromised: Pork Barrel Politics and America's Treasures* (Merrillville, IN: ICS Books, 1994), 77–79.

The Senate Subcommittee sent back the legislation without written report on September 12 and on September 30, the House amended the legislation at the behest of Congressman Clarence Brown of Ohio.¹⁶¹ The amendment (Title II) called for the formation of a commission to study the possibility of establishing a National Center for Afro-American History and Culture in Wilberforce, Ohio.¹⁶² The Senate passed the House version of the bill, with the amendment. The following day, the House agreed with the addition of Title II, and passed H.R. 7434, as amended, clearing the way for the President to sign the bill.

On October 10, 1980, President Jimmy Carter signed H.R. 7434, as amended, as Public Law 96-430.¹⁶³ At the same signing ceremony, Carter also signed into law H.R. 7218, establishing the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site in Atlanta, Georgia (Figure 6). Carter described the establishment of the two sites—one representing the nineteenth-century history of the civil rights movement and the other representing the twentieth-century movement—in addition to the establishment of the commission to study a National Center for Afro-American History and Culture as a “three-pronged effort to preserve a vital, but long neglected part of American heritage: the history and culture of Americans of African ancestry and their role in the history of our Nation.”¹⁶⁴ Byron Rushing also spoke at the signing, underscoring the monumental importance of the act in light of the historical significance of the free black community that once lived there, which was only made possible through the joint efforts of the NPS, congressmen, and the president.¹⁶⁵

As we will see in the chapters to follow, the commitment to Black history suggested by the passage of this legislation proved to be meager and materialized slowly in the case of Boston African American National Historic Site. With respect to the National Center for Afro-American History,

¹⁶¹ United States Congress. “Establishing Boston African American National Historic Site in Commonwealth of Massachusetts.” United States Congressional Record, Proceedings and Debates of the 96th Congress, Second Session, House — October 1, 1980. *Congressional Record* 126, part 22 (October 1, 1980), H10231-H10233.

¹⁶² While signed into law with Boston African American National Historic Site, Title I and this amendment as Title II did not relate to each other.

¹⁶³ *Boston African American Historic Site Act of 1980, U.S. Code*, Title 16, Public Law 96-430, 96th Congress, H.R. 7434, October 10, 1980.

¹⁶⁴ “Martin Luther King Jr. and Boston African American Historical Sites Bill Signing Ceremony.” Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, Collection, Office of the Staff Secretary, Series: Presidential Files, Folder 10/10/80, Container 180.

¹⁶⁵ United States, President. “Martin Luther King, Junior, and Boston African American National Historic Sites, Remarks on Signing H.R. 7218 and H.R. 7434 Into Law. October 10, 1980.” *Public Papers of Presidents of the United States: James E. Carter, Jr.* (1980, Book III), 2172–76. Office of the Federal Register, National Archives and Records Administration, 1974–2022. Washington, DC.



Figure 6. Signing ceremony for H.R. 7434 and H.R. 7218, October 10, 1980, establishing Boston African American and Martin Luther King Jr. Historic Sites. *Courtesy of the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.*

a federally funded national museum focused on African American history would not be achieved for thirty-six more years, with the 2016 opening of the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, DC.¹⁶⁶

Challenges to Come

The National Park Service faced a number of setbacks almost immediately despite the popularity of Boston African American NHS’s founding legislation. The swift approval of the bill had sidestepped the NPS’s internal system of proposing new NPS units, which included evaluating research needed, how operations would be organized, and how they would be funded. By focusing on the ready-made research of the Museum of Afro American History, the Park Service itself did not have an opportunity to hammer out the details of the site’s significance, research its history, or

¹⁶⁶ A museum in Wilberforce, OH had been in the works since 1968, so the 1980 passage of this law did seem like a step in the right direction. The National Center for Afro-American History and Culture Commission went unfunded until five years later, when enthusiasm had withered. The National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center in Wilberforce would eventually be funded privately and opened in 1987.

recommend additional sites to be a part of the unit. Any strength or deficiency in the site's interpretive framework was inherited directly from the Museum's research to date. As the years went on, this remained on the back burner as the Museum maintained control of most of the interpretive programming at the site.

The legislative limits on fundraising and appropriations would create problems for the site and the Museum in the years to come. For example, fees collected on the part of private organizations, such as the Museum of Afro American History, were to be put toward the maintenance and restoration of the site, but not its operation.¹⁶⁷ This oversight caused problems for the Museum, which relied on fundraising to pay its staff. Still in its infancy, the Museum needed a financial backer for the restoration of the African Meeting House, but this funding was frequently delayed and less than needed. The site similarly found itself perpetually out of step when it came to gaining funding for staff positions, research and documentation, and preservation efforts.

The legislation also failed to spell out the administrative relationship between Boston African American NHS and Boston NHP. Legislative memos written in the lead-up to the bill's passage identified the larger, sprawling Boston NHP as the "parent park," but the bill itself did not specifically mention Boston NHP. This ambiguity may have been part of the reason why the site managers saw the independence of the site as part of its original mandate and vitally important to its success. As we will see, the fact that Boston NHP and Boston African American NHS shared a superintendent created a potential conflict as the site's staff exercised varying degrees of operational autonomy. At times, the site manager and staff asserted control over the site's programming, goals, and finances in ways that did not always harmonize with the superintendent's vision for the site.

What the Boston African American NHS's legislation does make clear is that the site was expected to be a low-cost way of addressing some of the thematic and representational problems within the NPS. As such, the political popularity of the site overshadowed any uncertainties about its long-term financial or operational stability.

¹⁶⁷ Legislative Specialist, NAR [Judy Hart] to Regional Director, NAR [Richard L. Stanton], memorandum, re: "Notes on the legislation for Boston African American National Historic Site," March 16, 1980. Folder 3, Box 14, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

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CHAPTER 4. GETTING THINGS OFF THE GROUND, 1980–1988

When Congress authorized Boston African American National Historic Site on October 10, 1980, the mandate to build the site arrived on the desk of the North Atlantic Regional Office (Regional Office or NARO). The Regional Office quickly began to assemble key staff to “activate” the new site, which was heralded as a progressive step toward more inclusive representation within the National Park Service. Director Russell Dickenson issued a press release describing Boston African American NHS as the seventh unit of the National Park Service to be dedicated to “the history and accomplishments of black Americans.” Dickenson was optimistic that this site would “help us to recognize the role of black history as an intrinsic part of the mosaic of American history.”¹⁶⁸

The Museum of Afro American History’s executive director, Byron Rushing, and the site’s first manager, Dorothea “Dotty” Powell, shared Dickenson’s optimistic perspective on the potential of the site. Rushing and Powell shared a vision of the site as something bigger than the preservation-focused skeleton of the legislation. For them, the site represented an opportunity to advance Black history education, research, and outreach. At times, the broad view of the site’s mandate, held by the site manager and staff, would butt up against the more pragmatic approach of the site superintendent, who tended to focus on the preservation requirements outlined in the legislation. Site Manager Dotty Powell also spent much of the 1980s seeking out operational autonomy for the site. She hoped that with control of independent funding, the site would be able to make decisions about programming and navigate its relationships with partners without being beholden to Boston NHP.

Several roadblocks stood between the site and the ideal of operational autonomy in the early 1980s. First, after the passage of P.L. 96-430, the NPS classified Boston African American NHS as an affiliate area of the National Park Service. This limited the site’s ability to access funding. The site would not be recognized as a discrete unit of the National Park Service until 1988. Second, Congress designed the new site to be dependent on the Boston NHP, with both entities sharing a superintendent and organizational resources.¹⁶⁹ This stymied the park’s ability to advocate for itself to the Regional Office and risked the needs of the site being treated as secondary to Boston NHP. Third, Congress did not designate base funding for Boston African American NHS, forcing the Regional Office and Boston NHP to find money in their existing budgets to fund its activation. Money from the NPS main budget—known as “Operations of the National Park Service” or

¹⁶⁸ Department of the Interior News Release. “National Park Service Announces Addition of Black Historic Site.” NPS Press Release, October 24, 1980. Folder “National Park Service,” Box A008.22, ED Sylvia Watts-McKinney, Institutional Archive, MAAH Archives, Boston, MA.

¹⁶⁹ “Minutes of Meeting, Commemoration Efficiency Team,” March 9, 1984. Folder 6, Box 5, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA. Powell recounted that Boston African American NHS had been “instructed to draw upon park resources rather than regional personnel for most support services.”

ONPS— was not available for the site until fiscal year 1985, which greatly strained the relationship between Boston African American NHS and its “parent park,” Boston NHP.¹⁷⁰

The tension between the site and Boston NHP rose following a shift in management in 1984 when John Burchill replaced Hugh Gurney as superintendent. Whereas Gurney had encouraged operational autonomy on the part of the site as much as he could, Cultural Resource Manager Steve Carlson remembers Burchill as having a very “hands-on” management style that leaned into the hierarchical organization of the Park Service itself.¹⁷¹ While Burchill arduously worked to both increase the visibility of the site and obtain preservation funding, his staff recounted their struggles to connect with him and to participate in administrative activities such as the setting of institutional goals or controlling the site’s finances. Misunderstandings between Boston African American NHS and Boston NHP were further augmented by the racial differences, disparities in power, and conflicting activist goals of the site’s white superintendent and Black site managers.

The nascent partnership between the site and the Museum of Afro American History further complicated site management. At first, the Site-Museum relationship was spelled out clearly in a cooperative agreement; preservation was the responsibility of the NPS and interpretation was the responsibility of the Museum. Quickly, the two organizations began to realize the over starkness of these lines. The site did not have the funds to complete the restoration on its own and needed additional research and interpretive latitude. The Museum found running interpretive and research programs to be expensive endeavors often beyond its funding capacity.

With only the text of the new legislation to go on, more questions arose than answers about how this new site would be managed, where money would come from to run it, and how it could meet its mandate. Despite this, Boston African American NHS got on its feet quickly in late 1980. Over the next decade, its skeletal staff found success in programming and building community relationships while also overseeing the drafting of a General Management Plan and the completion of the first phase of the African Meeting House restoration. These accomplishments happened through the joint efforts of the Museum of Afro American History, the Regional Office, and local site leadership in the form of Site Manager Dotty Powell and the site’s superintendents, Hugh Gurney, and John Burchill.

¹⁷⁰ NPS, GMP: BOAF 1984.

¹⁷¹ Steve Carlson, Oral History Interview conducted by Teresa Bulger, April 20, 2021. Boston African American National Historic Site Administrative History Oral History Project.

Activation

On October 22, 1980, legislative specialist Judy Hart assembled key staff members from the North Atlantic Regional Office with leadership from Boston National Historical Park and the Museum of Afro American History for the activation of Boston African American National Historic Site.¹⁷² This meeting, held just twelve days after the 96th Congress authorized the site, outlined twenty-two major action items and doled out responsibility for each to the nineteen people assembled that day. As part of the activation process in October 1980, Byron Rushing gave a tour of the Black Heritage Trail to the staff of Boston NHP to familiarize them with the historic resources of the new site (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Museum Executive Director Byron Rushing leads a tour of the Black Heritage Trail shortly after Boston African American NHS's establishing legislation was signed into law in October of 1980. (Photographer: Victor Jorin). *National Park Service, Boston African American National Historic Site, Resource Management Records, Broadside Photos.*

¹⁷² Legislative Specialist, NAR [Judy Hart] to Regional Director, NAR [Richard L. Stanton], memorandum, re: "Activation Meeting on Boston African American NHS," October 27, 1980. Folder "Lobbying," Box 1, Byron Rushing Collection, MAAH Archives, currently housed at BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

The burden of activation fell upon Boston NHP and the Regional Office. The Regional Director officially established that the superintendent of Boston NHP would serve as superintendent of the new site with the assistance of a park ranger who would “[serve] as unit manager.” NPS expected Boston NHP to “advise and assist the Boston African American National Historic Site in their respective areas of expertise such as administration, protection, interpretation, safety, maintenance, historic preservation, curatorial management, planning and public affairs.”¹⁷³ Boston NHP and Dorchester Heights National Historic Site already realized this model, managed by Superintendent Gurney with Vince Lombardi as site manager. With his site manager skills in mind, Lombardi was assigned as the acting site manager for Boston African American NHS. Wendell Simpson represented the Northeast Region Urban Affairs Office and Byron Rushing represented the interests and priorities of the Museum. Superintendent Hugh Gurney positioned himself as responsible for developing cooperative agreements but otherwise left the rest of the team to work on the new site’s general management plan, cultural resource reports, a maintenance plan, and interpretive materials.¹⁷⁴ The team would soon find that running Boston African American NHS would be much more complicated than Dorchester Heights NHS.

As described above, the site’s legislation had promised to offer all the benefits of an inclusive National Park Service, without the hefty price tag of acquiring land or allocating base funds. As for administrative costs, without property, the legislative package had described the administrative impact of Boston African American NHP as minimal enough to be “absorbed” by Boston NHP.¹⁷⁵ The site followed a partnership model mirroring Boston NHP, and so any programming associated with the site was presumed to be facilitated and implemented by park partners, as generally proved to be the case with Boston NHP’s park partners such as the USS Constitution Museum and the Freedom Trail Foundation. In contrast to Boston NHP, the new site’s proposed partners were mostly private homeowners rather than cultural institutions, with the Museum of Afro American History not yet financially stable.

The Regional Office took on the big picture planning for the site, including the General Management Plan process. With the everyday needs of the site and its resources in the hands of Boston NHP, and with the onset of a Boston winter looming over the early meetings, a rush to stabilize and secure the African Meeting House became chief concerns. By early December, \$25,000 was allocated for the pressing safety needs of the site, a shadow of the \$160,000 budget estimate recommended by Boston NHP Chief of Maintenance David Rose for the activation of the

¹⁷³ Regional Director, NAR [Richard L. Stanton] to Superintendent, Boston NHP [Hugh Gurney], memorandum, re: “Boston African American National Historic Site,” January 19, 1981. Folder 4, Box 5, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP Archives, Charlestown, MA.

¹⁷⁴ Legislative Specialist, to Regional Director, re: “Activation Meeting . . .,” October 27, 1980.

¹⁷⁵ “Legislative Counsel Memo,” June 19, 1980.

site.¹⁷⁶ Lombardi and Rushing used the \$25,000 to clean up the African Meeting House, undertake an electrical inspection, and install a fire hydrant and fire alarm system.

Signed cooperative agreements between the site and park partners became necessary for the NPS to disburse funds to partners. As such, Byron Rushing of the Museum of Afro American History and Hugh Gurney of the National Park Service quickly began to draft an agreement. For the NPS, this agreement proved necessary to assure “the preservation and historical integrity of the property in question.”¹⁷⁷ Signed in August 1981, the cooperative agreement delegated preservation efforts at the African Meeting House to the National Park Service and interpretive responsibilities and control to the Museum. The two organizations pledged to “cooperate to the common purpose of protecting and preserving the historical fabric of the African Meeting House,” and “preserving Museum objects.”¹⁷⁸ Both parties also agreed to coordinate training, hours of operation, and special events, abide by federal guidelines of non-discrimination, and bar politicians from involvement in the agreement. The agreement did not include a joint statement of a common mission nor a binding funding commitment on the part of the NPS.

Though each team member had primary responsibilities pulling them in other directions, the team managed an impressive array of accomplishments in its first year of operations. In addition to negotiating a cooperative agreement with the Museum of Afro American History, the staff at Boston NHP began other community relations projects, such as drafting signs to mark the Black Heritage Trail and publishing a Black History Month calendar. Without space or a budget, the site managed its first programs: these included a historiography conference on Black New England and an exhibition, “Negro Cloth: Northern Industry and Southern Slavery,” to be brought to Boston on loan from the Merrimack Valley Textile Museum.¹⁷⁹ Lombardi and Rushing began to draft a historic structure report, building upon the 1975 architectural and historical analysis completed by

¹⁷⁶ Other urgent projects included trash pick-up, fence repair, snow removal, site clean-up, new electrical service, repair of street and sidewalk, installation of heating and air conditions, installation of restrooms, and installing water service. Chief of Maintenance [David Rose] to Site Manager, BOAF [Vince Lombardi], memorandum, re: “Activation Costs,” October 31, 1980. Folder 10, Box 14, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA; Superintendent’s Squad Meeting Minutes, “November 17, 1980,” Staff Meetings and Annual Reports, Superintendent Files, BOST Resource Management Records, BNHP, Charlestown MA; Superintendent’s Squad Meeting Minutes, “December 2, 1980,” BOST Resource Management Records, Superintendent Files, Staff Meetings and Annual Reports, BNHP, Charlestown MA. Hereafter: Superintendent’s Squad Meeting Minutes will be abbreviated: SMM.

¹⁷⁷ “Cooperative Agreement, National Park Service and The Museum of Afro American History,” August 4, 1981. Folder 3, Box 3, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP Archives, Charlestown, MA. Hereafter: “Cooperative Agreement,” NPS and MAAH, 1981.

¹⁷⁸ “Cooperative Agreement,” NPS and MAAH, 1981.

¹⁷⁹ The original name of this exhibition, “Plantation Spinners,” was changed upon its reuse at Boston African American NHS. SMM, “June 9, 1981,” BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown MA.; Hugh Gurney to NAACP, letter, January 7, 1981. Folder “Site Manager,” Box 1, Byron Rushing Collection, MAAH Archives, currently housed at BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities.¹⁸⁰ The pair also sought out space and furniture for potential offices and drew up contracts for basic maintenance needs. The Museum and Acting Site Manager Vince Lombardi implemented these initiatives under the oversight of the site's first superintendent, Hugh Gurney.¹⁸¹

Boston African American NHS's First Superintendent: Hugh Gurney

Superintendent Hugh Gurney served as the site's first superintendent and brought to the position experience with the “partnership park” model through his management of Boston NHP as well as a collaborative management style. With Boston African American NHS added to Superintendent Hugh Gurney's portfolio, he found that the new site had a host of preservation, funding, and interpretive needs. At the same time, however, he likely saw the site as having the potential to address some of the problems with race that Boston NHP faced. His collaborative management style and experience with partnerships during the early years of Boston NHP gave him some perspective on how to make the site a success. Some of the key accomplishments during Boston African American NHS's early years were due to his leadership between 1980 and 1984, and his frank recognition of racial inequality within the NPS.

In 1980, Superintendent Gurney navigated the development of Boston NHP, which was only six years old at the time. Gurney and his staff had begun to grapple with the challenge of retrofitting Charlestown Navy Yard to be a tourist destination and hammering out the details of cooperative agreements with park partners in and around downtown Boston.

Gurney's management style at Boston NHP to date focused on being team oriented and unimposing, recognizing the value of the work that each of the partnership sites, such as the Paul Revere House or Old North Church, had done to interpret Boston's Revolutionary War-era past long before his arrival. Minutes from superintendent's staff meetings convey a personable leader, interested in the well-being of his team, without micro-managing their responsibilities. Each “Squad” meeting began with a survey of the feelings and concerns of those gathered and proceeded with conversational information sharing. Squad meetings would also frequently include budget discussions, allowing for fiscal transparency between Boston NHP's various divisions, and discussions of how well the team fulfilled wider site goals.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Frederic C. Detwiller, “African Meeting House, Smith Court, Boston: An Architectural/Historical Analysis,” (Boston: Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, 1975), BOAF.001, CRCBIB 40035, Box 49 of 503, NER Cultural Resources Bibliography, RG0079 National Park Service, National Archives, Waltham, MA.

¹⁸¹ Legislative Specialist, to Regional Director, re: “Activation Meeting ...” October 27, 1980.

¹⁸² See Superintendent's Squad Meeting Minutes, 1980–1984. BOST Archives, Charlestown MA.; SMM, “October 19, 1982,” Folder 16, Box 16, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

Gurney approached his administration of Boston African American NHS with a willingness to accept the guidance and judgement of his staff and park partners. When asked during a 2017 oral history about his role in the founding of Boston African American NHS, Gurney indicated that it was “not a ... major part of [his] work but ... [he] was involved in it.” Instead, he pointed to the collaborative work of Byron Rushing and Site Manager Dotty Powell as key to the early successes of the site. Dotty Powell was credited with “work[ing] primarily with Byron and others on ... putting this thing together, getting a brochure together,” as well as getting space in the Abiel Smith School for offices, hiring interpreters, and starting on an historic structure report.¹⁸³

Even as Gurney delegated much of the work associated with the new site, he was no doubt aware of its potential role as a balm for Boston’s wounds of racial violence and conflict. With the enactment of the Massachusetts Racial Imbalance Act in 1965, school desegregation was implemented in Boston in the early 1970s. Violence, protests, and demonstrations opposing busing were especially violent between 1974 and 1976.¹⁸⁴

Racial tensions associated with busing manifested themselves in myriad ways at Boston NHP, including racial violence along the Freedom Trail. Asked about whether Black visitation to Charlestown sites was low due to the threat of racial violence in the late 1970s, NPS Park Ranger Frank Montford succinctly responded: “That’s probably a good surmise.”¹⁸⁵ In the late 1970s and early 1980s, hate incidents and racial tension within the Boston NHP were recounted matter-of-factly in the Superintendent’s Squad meeting minutes. On January 6, 1981, for example, Montford reported that “EO [Equal Opportunity] posters in [Building] 109 have been defaced,” and on January 27, 1981, meeting attendants speculated that if “too much emphasis is being placed on racial problems when writing the [Dorchester Heights] GMP—it may exacerbate the problem as it focuses on it.” The portion of Boston NHP in the city’s North End saw similar problems. In July 1981, a “racial incident” occurred involving a group of Black people being “heavily harassed by local youths.” Incorporating the group into the Freedom Trail walk being led through the Paul Revere Mall area by an NPS park ranger diffused the conflict.¹⁸⁶

In response to racially motivated harassment along the Freedom Trail, Gurney established a “Task Force on Racism” in September of 1980. As part of this initiative, he called for support from politicians such as Deputy Mayor Clarence Jones (and later, Mayor Kevin White), Councilman Ray Flynn, and community groups in Charlestown and Dorchester. In writing to Mayor White,

¹⁸³ Gurney, Oral History, 2017.

¹⁸⁴ Ronald Formisano, *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 5; Peters, *Reclaiming the Narrative*, 234.

¹⁸⁵ As quoted in J. Harvie Wilkinson, *From Brown to Bakke: The Supreme Court and School Integration: 1954–1978* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 205.

¹⁸⁶ SMM, “January 6, 1981,” “January 17, 1981,” “July 14, 1981.” BOST RMR, BNHP Archives, Charlestown, MA.

Gurney frankly asserted that “one of the major problems the National Park Service has faced in administering the various sites here in Boston is racism.” The problem had grown so intense that Gurney became “hesitant to suggest that black visitors go to the Bunker Hill Monument or Dorchester Heights.”¹⁸⁷ Years later, reflecting on his attempts to engage with the community, Gurney recalled that at community meetings he tried to address “racial things and what [the Park Service] could do.”¹⁸⁸

Plans for the task force included the development of educational curricula, a youth program, and an awareness campaign focused on the economic benefits of local historic sites.¹⁸⁹ What came of the Task Force on Racism after 1982 is not documented, and it apparently never fully materialized. A role for the National Park Service in the City’s discourse on racial problems did come to fruition, however, when Boston African American NHS hired its first site manager. This position became vital to enacting a vision for how Boston African American NHS could be a tool not only for historic preservation, but for community education, inspiration, and healing.

Boston African American NHS Assembles a Team

From the beginning, Superintendent Gurney and Byron Rushing recognized that Boston African American NHS’s site manager would be tasked with not only managing the everyday operation of the site but also the relationships between the site and the Museum of Afro American History, the Beacon Hill community, and Boston’s African American community. The vacancy announcement for the position requested applicants demonstrate their “ability to relate effectively to African-American Groups.”¹⁹⁰ In addition to having the skills necessary to develop relationships with the property owners within the site, the site manager would coordinate programs for preservation projects, interpretation, and maintenance. Byron Rushing led the hiring process, which involved the review of six applicants.¹⁹¹ After a three-month search, he officially chose Dotty Powell as the site’s first site manager in August 1981.

¹⁸⁷ Hugh Gurney, to Kevin H. White, letter, February 10, 1981. Folder 9, Box 16, Site Manager Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

¹⁸⁸ Gurney, Oral History, 2017. Context for Gurney’s comments includes a 1977 assault on Black students visiting Bunker Hill in Charlestown by local white residents.

¹⁸⁹ “Develop a Demonstration Project between the National Park Service and the Charlestown and South Boston Communities,” Draft Planning Document, no date. Folder 9, Box 16, Site Manager Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

¹⁹⁰ “Vacancy Announcement,” United States Department of the Interior, NARO: #81-63. Folder “Site Manager,” Box 1, Byron Rushing Collection, MAAH Archives, currently housed at BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

¹⁹¹ Rushing’s “Notes on Interviewees,” Folder “Site Manager,” Box 1, Byron Rushing Collection, MAAH Archives, currently housed at BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

Powell brought to the position a background in sociology and human resources, having worked at the North Atlantic Regional Office for seven years in various capacities in both personnel and administrative positions. Born and raised in Roxbury, Powell had personal and professional roots in the Boston area. Powell approached the position with both an official sense of responsibility for protecting the site's resources and a felt sense of personal responsibility to the legacy of the Black people who once lived on Beacon Hill and built the African Meeting House. In a 1988 interview she explained her single-mindedness by pointing to this history as her inspiration: "those people ... that created that meeting house went through a lot. And you're [the site manager] going through a lot. So you're on the same footholds so to speak."¹⁹²

Powell pulled together the site's purpose and its potential. She recognized the NPS's responsibility for the preservation of buildings and monuments within the site while also understanding the importance of the history that those buildings represented. Only two years earlier, in 1978, an internal study found that the National Park Service had pursued few opportunities to document, present, and celebrate Black history.¹⁹³ While the cooperative agreement between the Museum and the site had delegated interpretation at the African Meeting House to the Museum, Powell saw the NPS as having an educational and interpretive responsibility which could be executed in collaboration with the Museum. To fulfill the potential of the site, she would need help, and so she requested staff from Superintendent Gurney.

In late 1981, Ted Fowler transferred from his position as a temporary park ranger at Boston NHP to Boston African American NHS and became the site's first full-time park ranger.¹⁹⁴ Fowler proved key to executing the interpretive mission of Boston African American NHS in its early years, as he created much of the content to be included in exhibits, pamphlets, and talks, and he worked closely with the Museum in executing these projects. With a staff of two, the site's interpretive work was executed by Fowler, in collaboration with the Museum, while Powell took care of administrative tasks. Northeast Regional Office Architectural Historian Barbara Pearson completed a draft historic structure report for the African Meeting House in 1982.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹² Dorothea Powell, Oral History Interview conducted by Ken Heidelberg, March 15, 1988. Box 23, Audio-Visual Materials, Interpretation Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

¹⁹³ Harris, "Afro-American History Interpretation at Selected National Parks."

¹⁹⁴ Superintendent's Squad Meeting Minutes, November 10, 1981; R. Dixie Tourangeau, "Is this Hollywood or an NPS Career? Ted Fowler Ponders Opportunities as Researcher, Writer, Actor, Director," *Courier* 33, no. 2 (1988): 10–12.

¹⁹⁵ This HSR took at its starting point the analysis of Detwiller (1975), which was not found to be sufficient to serve as an historic structure report. While Pearson drafted the African Meeting House's HSR in 1982, the document was not finalized and published until 1994, under her married name Barbara Yocum. Barbara Pearson, *Draft Historic Structure Report: African Meeting House, Boston African American National Historic Site, Boston National Historical Park, Boston, Massachusetts* (Boston: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1982); Barbara Yocum, *Historic Structure Report: African Meeting House, Boston African American National Historic*

While the Museum conducted Black Heritage Trail tours, between 1981 and 1984, Fowler developed a living history program. He wrote an interpretive talk to accompany the site's "Negro Cloth" exhibit, produced slideshows and pamphlets, and created a living history character known as "Boston Black." He intended this character "to illustrate how white and black history entangled, starting with pre-Revolutionary events and running through the Underground Railway (sic) and Civil War."¹⁹⁶ Fowler put his interpretive skills to good use in the after-school program "People and Places," a site collaboration with Boston NHP's Old South Meeting House. In 1984, the site also collaborated with the Old South Meeting House to design the "Resisting for Justice" interpretive and educational program as part of the Boston Public Schools' "People and Places" program (Figure 8).¹⁹⁷

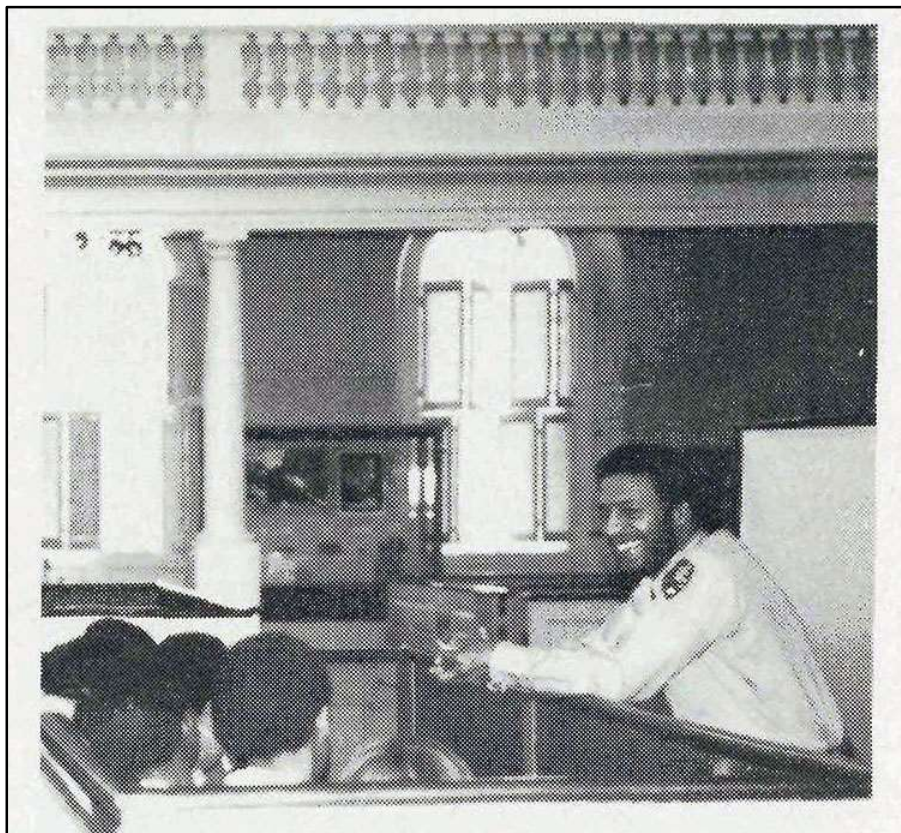


Figure 8. Park Ranger Ted Fowler with a group of school children during the program "Resisting for Justice: The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850" circa 1984. The site undertook the Resisting for Justice program in collaboration with Boston NHP's Old South Meeting House, as part of the Boston Public School System's "People and Places" program *National Park Service, NPS Denver Service Center Boston African American National Historic Site, 1990s Brochure*.

Site, Boston National Historical Park, Boston, Massachusetts (Boston: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1994).

¹⁹⁶ Tourangeau, "Is this Hollywood or an NPS Career?" 10–12.

¹⁹⁷ NPS, BOAF: GMP 1984: 41.

During the first half of the 1980s, the site sponsored an impressive number of projects, programs, and exhibits due to its close collaboration with the Museum of Afro American History. Drawing on the research and planning efforts of Byron Rushing at the Museum, the site staged three exhibits between 1981 and 1983. After the site first launched the “Negro Cloth” exhibit in 1981, the Museum added the “Lost and Found Painting of Allan Crite” in early 1982, and “I Was Born of Beacon Hill” in 1983.¹⁹⁸ Other programming shouldered by the Museum included the planning of the cosponsored Black History Month calendar and conducting Black Heritage Trail tours. In addition to programming, the Museum was instrumental in community relations as Rushing facilitated community meetings on both Beacon Hill and in Roxbury.

For his part, Superintendent Gurney put his full confidence in Powell’s management and backed her decisions on budget estimates, requests for staff, and requests for office space.¹⁹⁹ While Boston NHP could muster few financial resources available to the new site, it benefitted from congenial relationships between its staff, the personal drive of its site manager, the creativity of its first park ranger, and a strong and respectful partnership with the site’s primary partner, the Museum.

Financial Woes

While Powell and Fowler found support within the staff and leadership at Boston NHP, the site itself continued to struggle with financial issues. A network of African American leaders within the Park Service attempted to advocate for funding the site. Regional Urban Affairs Officer Wendell Simpson submitted a funding request for fiscal year 1981 to the North Atlantic Region in early November 1980. Simpson’s funding request called for \$638,800 for development, construction, maintenance, and operation of the site, with the restoration of the African Meeting House itself as a separate project altogether.²⁰⁰ The request fell on deaf ears, however, and Boston African American NHS did not receive a line item in the National Park Service budget for fiscal year 1981. In spring 1982, another prominent African American leader at the National Park Service, Deputy Director Ira Hutchinson, facilitated the temporary funding of the site by allocating \$100,000 for operations. Hutchinson cautioned that the Washington offices could not allocate base funds for the site for the following year, however, and as such the site would need to “keep costs at a minimum level” and “look for external opportunities to assist with funding future exhibits,

¹⁹⁸ SMM, “February 16, 1982” BOST RMR, BNHP Archives, Charlestown, MA; *North Star: The Planning Bulletin for Boston African American National Historic Site* (Summer 1983), Folder “L-7617 BOAF General Management Plan, 1984–2008”. Box 8 of 43, BOAF, NARO Environmental Compliance Program Records 1967–2010, RG0079 National Park Service, National Archives, Waltham, MA.

¹⁹⁹ SMM, “November 10, 1981” and “December 14, 1981,” BOST RMR, BNHP Archives, Charlestown, MA.

²⁰⁰ Urban Affairs Officer, NAR [Wendell Simpson] to Regional Director, NAR [Richard L. Stanton], memorandum, re: “estimated Budget for Boston African American NHS,” November 3, 1980. Folder 10, Box 14, Site Managers Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

programs and the like.”²⁰¹ The site saw no base funding until fiscal year 1985, when it received only \$100,000. This lack of financial autonomy led to the inability of the site to provide funding for the needs of the Museum, which created some tension in this relationship.²⁰²

Project funds proved to be even more difficult to come by. After hearing that the restoration project at the African Meeting House had been assigned a Service-wide priority of 251 and put on a ten-year waiting list, Byron Rushing had three words for Congressman Joe Moakley: “What is this?”²⁰³ Moakley had been instrumental in getting the bill passed and soon got to work trying to find a way to get the site and the Museum the needed funds. In the meantime, Rushing wrote a one-page project proposal to act as a “case for support” for the project and reached out to a number of people in Washington, including Frederick Mohrman, congressional aide to Sidney Yates, member of the House Appropriations Subcommittee. In 1982, Mohrman visited Boston African American NHS during a trip along the East Coast “looking for NPS projects to fund.”²⁰⁴ This visit became a pivotal moment for the project’s funding. Superintendent Gurney recalled that Rushing was busy on this particular January day and gave Gurney the keys to the African Meeting House so the aide could be shown around.²⁰⁵ Site Manager Powell also remembered the day as a turning point, noting that her most “satisfying accomplishment” as site manager had been making a convincing case to Mohrman in 1982 for the restoration of the African Meeting House. In the summer of 1983, a “surprise” appropriation of \$1 million materialized for the African Meeting House restoration project. The visit from a congressional aide, which had been, in part, motivated by the lobbying efforts of Rushing, contributed to this accomplishment.

The appropriation of funding for the African Meeting House restoration was facilitated in Washington by the efforts of Massachusetts Senator Tsongas and Congressman Joe Moakley. In July 1983, Tsongas argued that if the restoration had to wait until 1990, it would be too late for the

²⁰¹ Deputy Director, NPS [Ira Hutchinson] to Regional Direction, NAR [Herb Cables], memorandum, re: Information: Funding Support for Boston African American National Historic Site,” April 9, 1982. Folder 3, Box 16, Site Manager Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

²⁰² Powell, Oral History, 1988.

²⁰³ Rushing, Oral History 2005, 8; Chief, Programs and Budget, North Atlantic Region [Abigail B. Homer], to Superintendent, Boston NHP [Hugh Gurney], memorandum, re: “Form 10232 for African Meeting House,” July 2, 1982. Folder 3, Box 6, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

²⁰⁴ R.D. Tourangeau, “Retirements: Mrs. Dorothea Powell” *Courier* 33, no. 2 (1988): 40.

²⁰⁵ Gurney, Oral History, 2017. Notably, Gurney stated in 2017 that the aide worked for Illinois Congressman Dan Rostenkowski. Contemporary documentation suggests the aide actually worked for Illinois Congressman Sidney Yates, chair of the House Appropriations Committee. In meeting notes from March 9, 1984, Site Manager Powell points to the efforts of “congressional aide Mohr” (sic) as fundamental to getting the African Meeting House restoration project “seen” by the appropriations committee. Further, Rushing’s files note that Mohrman and Yates became key people to lobby for support; “Minutes of Meeting - Commemoration Efficiency Team, March 9, 1984;” Folder 6, Box 5, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA; “African Meeting House.” Case for Support, Circa 1981. Folder “Lobbying,” Box 1, Byron Rushing Collection, MAAH Archives, currently housed at BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

commemoration of the 350th anniversary of Black people arriving in Massachusetts to be marked in 1988. While Tsongas could not get funding for the project attached to the Senate appropriations for the National Park Service, Congressman Joe Moakley had “succeeded in urging Appropriation Committee members to restore funds” as part of the Fiscal Year Supplemental Appropriation Bill.²⁰⁶ On July 30, 1983, President Ronald Reagan signed Public Law 98-63, including a National Park Service allocation of \$1 million for “Construction.”²⁰⁷ Two days later, the accomplishment garnered a single sentence at the Superintendent’s Squad Meeting: “\$1,000,000 has been appropriated for the African Meeting House.”²⁰⁸

For the NPS, the allocation proved bittersweet. According to Gurney, while the NPS was happy to have the money for this important project, the Washington office was nonetheless displeased that its ability to control its budget had been circumvented. The practice of funding Park Service projects by congressional authority, outside the formal appropriations process, became a pattern beginning in the late 1970s, and would be credited with slowly weakening the NPS’s ability to control how it executed its mandate by the 1990s.²⁰⁹ Discussing the Meeting House project getting “bumped up” to the front of the line, Rushing similarly remembered that the National Park Service “was not happy about that.”²¹⁰ As the young Boston African American NHS was an “affiliated area” not yet considered a “park unit” and was not afforded a base operating budget, the funding of the African Meeting House project surely came as a surprise.²¹¹

A Partnership Park with Few Partners

Boston African American NHS’s enabling legislation identified cooperative agreements as the site’s most important tool in the management of the historic resources that comprised the site. Designed as a partnership park in the image of Boston NHP, an expectation existed that the superintendent and site manager would establish agreements with all the property owners identified in the enabling legislation within the first few years of the site’s operation. The site’s inability to ever do this became a thorn in its side and a repeated goal articulated in management plans and annual reports. One major reason that these agreements became a challenge to establish lay in the fact that the site comprised largely private homes. This stood in contrast to Boston NHP,

²⁰⁶ “Oldest black church gets restoration funds,” *Bay State Banner* (Boston, MA), July 28, 1983: 7.

²⁰⁷ “An act making supplemental appropriations for the fiscal year ending September 30, 1983, and for other purposes.” P.L. 98063 (98th Congress), July 30, 1983, accessed October 1, 2021.

²⁰⁸ SMM, “August 2, 1983.” BOST RMR, BNHP Archives, Charlestown, MA.

²⁰⁹ Mackintosh et al., *The National Parks: Shaping the System*, 59; Ridenour, *The National Parks Compromised*, 77–79; Jonathan B. Jarvis and T. Destry Jarvis, *National Parks Forever: Fifty Years of Fighting and a Case for Independence* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2022).

²¹⁰ Rushing, Oral History, 2005.

²¹¹ Gurney, Oral History, 2017; Rushing, Oral History, 2005.

where non-profits, cultural groups, or the City of Boston owned all the properties with whom that site intended to partner. In the case of the Museum of Afro American History, the site quickly secured its first cooperative agreement in the summer of 1981. Cooperative agreements with the City of Boston followed in 1986 for the Robert Gould Shaw/54th Massachusetts Regiment Memorial and the Abiel Smith School. Establishing and maintaining agreements with private homeowners proved significantly more difficult.

The Beacon Hill community proved reluctant to accept the new site with most of the homeowners of the site's resources uninterested in cooperative agreements. Affluent, white residents had mostly moved to the area during the decades after the Black residents moved to the Roxbury area of Boston in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While not subject to formal redlining, Black people found it difficult to buy homes in Beacon Hill in the mid-twentieth century. In the early 1960s, the founders of the Museum of Afro American History, Howard and Sue Bailey Thurman, had to use a straw buyer to purchase their home on Beacon Street in order to conceal their racial identities.²¹² In the 1980s, the neighborhood continued to be largely white. In response to Boston African American NHS, Beacon Hill neighborhood residents “expressed fears of people looking in windows and entering [their] home.” Residents also harbored anxiety about an influx of tourists to the neighborhood, street cleaning, and snow removal, or fretted over Smith Court being too dark at night.²¹³

The Museum and the site worked to assuage these fears, but anxiety continued, leading to difficulty for the Museum and site in establishing cooperative agreements with private homeowners. Reasons for hesitancy among homeowners appeared multiple and varied— ranging from parking issues to misconceptions about the obligations of homeowners, to anxieties about privacy and security.²¹⁴

The owners of the Hayden House, John and Mary Gier, represent the only private property owners who entered into a cooperative agreement with Boston African American NHS and the Museum.²¹⁵

²¹² Sylvia Watts-McKinney, Oral History Interview conducted by Teresa Bulger and Nedra Lee, October 7, 2021. Boston African American National Historic Site Administrative History Oral History Project.

²¹³ SMM, “October 24, 1982,” Folder 16, Box 16, Site Manager Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA. Powell and Gurney met with residents about street cleaning, snow removal, and fear of people looking in windows; SMM, “November 17, 1981,” Folder 16, Box 16, Site Manager Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA. Beacon Hill residents concerned about tourists coming and don’t want plaques; SMM, “December 1, 1981,” Folder 16, Box 16, Site Manager Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA. Notes indicate that residents “are nervous about that part of the street being dark.

²¹⁴ “Identification of potential misconceptions of signing cooperative agreement,” Folder 6, Box 5, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

²¹⁵ Ted Fowler, “A cooperative agreement signed for care of Hayden’s home, Boston African American NHS ” *Courier* 28, no. 8 (August 1983): 6; Cooperative Agreement Among the National Park Service and John R. Gier, III and Mary E. Way and the Museum of Afro American History, September 13, 1984, Suffolk County Registry of Deeds, Deed Book 11155: 227–236. On file at Suffolk County Registry of Deeds, Boston, MA.

That agreement asserted the common preservation goals of the three parties, with the benefits for the homeowner being financial assistance for the restoration and other technical support related to maintenance of the house. The Park Service not only funded the work but its historic architect, Victor A. Jorin, produced the plans and assisted in supervising the construction.²¹⁶ Despite the Park Service's significant investment in the improvement of a private residence, other property owners expressed little interest in similar cooperative agreements. Site Manager Powell even looked to Mary Gier for assistance in "developing [a] support group" to gain more interest in cooperative agreements among property owners.

These efforts were failed, however, as no other private homeowners entered into a cooperative agreement with the site.²¹⁷ In a 2005 interview, Byron Rushing attributed the loss of interest in cooperative agreements with private owners to "a shift both in the administration and in the country, and then a shift in the administration of the Park Service. And they never did another one with a private owner."²¹⁸ As a Black history-focused national park, the staff of Boston African American NHS found themselves having to manage the racial anxieties of their Beacon Hill neighbors in addition to working to interpret and preserve Black history. With little support from the Beacon Hill community, Site Manager Powell turned toward the wider Boston preservation network and Black newspapers to publicize the existence of the site and gain support for its mission and relevance for Black and white Bostonians alike.

Creating Community Relationships

Powell prioritized community outreach and publicizing the site in an effort to make it a "nationally known site for Blacks and whites."²¹⁹ To achieve this, she turned to those instruments that

²¹⁶ Construction Drawing, "Replacement Lintels/Sills, Lewis Hayden House, Boston African American NHS," Sept. 1983 NPS drawing BOAF_490_6111, BOAF Drawing Files, Resource Preservation and Planning Directorate, National Parks of Boston, Charlestown, MA.

²¹⁷ In 1984 Dotty Powell drafted a cooperative agreement between the National Park Service, the Museum, and the owners of Coburn's Gaming House. The agreement went unsigned, though the effort revived briefly in 1991. Also in the early 1990s, the park maintained an informal partnership with Jim Skelton and Stephen Judge, owners of the Middleton House on Pinckney Street, though no cooperative agreement with Skelton and Judge materialized. Notably, Skelton served as the NPS Regional Architectural Historian at the time. Vince Lombardi to Site Manager, Boston African American National Historic Site [Dorothea Powell], memorandum, re: "Proposed Cooperative Agreement, Coburn's Gaming House," November 13, 1984. Folder 6, Box 4, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP Archives, Charlestown, MA.; "Cooperative Agreement Between National Park Service and 2 Phillip Street Condo Association," September 24, 1991. Folder 6, Box 4, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP Archives, Charlestown, MA.; "Boston African American National Historic Site, List of Partners, Groups and Cooperative Agreements." A22. Circa 1990. Folder 4, Box 1, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP Archives, Charlestown, MA.

²¹⁸ Rushing, Oral History, 2005. Byron Rushing pointed to the ascendance of James Ridenour as director of the National Park Service in 1989 as a turning point for the plausibility of gaining preservation funds for privately owned homes, and thus the park could no longer make promises to property owners as to the type of assistance the NPS would be prepared to offer.

²¹⁹ Powell, Oral History, 1988.

extended the site's reach beyond Beacon Hill: the GMP planning newsletter *The North Star* and the annual Black History Month calendar. She worked to grow the site's mailing list, beginning in fall 1981 by sending out 2,000 queries to potentially interested individuals and organizations.²²⁰ Responses to the newsletter “demonstrat[ed] considerable interest in the site and a rather passionate concern about its future,” motivating Park Planner Rolf Diamant and Dotty Powell to distribute a document summarizing the comments to the mailing list as well.²²¹

To raise the visibility of the site locally, Powell partnered with the Friends of the Public Garden (FPG), a preservation-minded volunteer organization founded in 1971 with the mission of improving the city's deteriorating park spaces, especially the Public Garden and Boston Common. In early 1981, the FPG began planning for the restoration of the Robert Gould Shaw and 54th Regiment Memorial (Shaw/54th Regiment Memorial) on the 85th anniversary of its 1897 dedication. The Shaw/54th Regiment Memorial is one of the sites which comprise Boston African American NHS. Twenty-one private citizens financed it to honor Robert Gould Shaw and the Massachusetts 54th Regiment, the first all-Black regiment raised in the North as part of the Union Army. Famed sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens designed the memorial that prominently depicts Colonel Shaw on horseback, behind which rows of realistically depicted African American infantrymen march.²²²

The FPG hoped to curb damage from years of neglect and to underscore the “symbolic value” of the monument's message of racial cooperation by restoring the structure and inscribing the names of the men who served in the 54th Regiment. At the funding campaign's launch, John D. O'Bryant, chair of the Boston School Committee, spoke, declaring that “the monument now—as it did then—portrays something all of us should be fighting for. Blacks and whites are working together to repair and restore this monument, in the same way that blacks and whites should be working together in every aspect of our city life—employment, education, and housing.”²²³ At a time when Boston was wracked by heated protests and violence associated with mandatory school busing, O'Bryant's words demonstrate that preservation of the Shaw/54th Regiment Memorial had taken on a political dimension.

²²⁰ SMM, October 6, 1981, BOST RMR, BNHP Archives, Charlestown, MA.

²²¹ “Boston African American National Historic Site, Public Views on the Future: A Summary of Responses to the North Star Planning Alternatives, 1984.” On File, NARA-Boston, RG 0079, National Park Service, Northeast Region, Environmental Compliance Program Records, 1967–2010, Box 8 or 43, Folder L-7617 BOAF General Management Plan, 1984–2008.

²²² Ryan McNabb. National Historic Landmark Nomination, *Robert Gould Shaw/54th Regiment Memorial National Landmark Nomination*, Suffolk County, MA [Draft], 2020.

²²³ Thomas P. Winn, “Fund drive under way for Shaw Memorial,” *Boston Globe*, January 30, 1980, 25; Editorial, “A Common monument,” *Boston Globe*, January 31, 1980, 14.

By the early 1980s, the physical memorial lay in desperate need of restoration, and the popular understanding of its meaning had drifted toward a focus on its central character, Robert G. Shaw.²²⁴ While the bas-relief sculpture is lauded by art historians as one of the first accurate portrayals of African American facial features, suggesting Saint-Gaudens's respect for his subjects, this aspect of the memorial's story had, by the early 1980s, been largely lost on the general public. The original meaning of the monument had by then been overshadowed by its important location, across the street from the Massachusetts State House, which had made it a convenient location for numerous protests associated with anti-war, anti-communist, and anti-abortion causes and as a locus for graffiti in the 1960s and 1970s.²²⁵ While the FPG was hoping to revitalize the interpretation of the memorial as a symbol of racial harmony, the prominence of Shaw at the center of the memorial remained an imbalance not lost on observers. Art historian Albert Boime describes Saint-Gaudens's composition as "establishing a visual 'color-line' that guarded white supremacy."²²⁶ Echoing this sentiment, graffiti scrawled across the front of the memorial in 1982 read, "Who was the first black captain from Mass?" (Figure 9).

The National Park Service became a cosponsor of the project in late 1981. At first the NPS only committed to installing wayside interpretive markers to tell the story of the 54th Regiment and contextualize the creation of the monument in the late nineteenth century. This partnership soon ballooned, however, as Site Manager Powell spearheaded a campaign to track down descendants of the men who served in the 54th Regiment. Regional Director Herbert Cables and Director of Urban Affairs Wendell Simpson helped to distribute a press release on behalf of Powell to advertise the project, submitting the release to a host of newspapers nationwide.²²⁷ Powell soon found out that she had a personal connection with the regiment, as her grandfather Charles Potter had enlisted and served with Shaw. Powell used the rededication project as an opportunity to meld the historical and the personal, and she would later reflect that "that link made me push as much as I did for things."²²⁸ Powell ran advertisements in Black newspapers such as the *Bay State Banner*, wrote to dozens of potential descendants, and answered innumerable queries from

²²⁴ "Unfinished Memorials," *Boston Globe*, July 1, 1982.

²²⁵ McNabb, *Robert Gould Shaw/54th Regiment Memorial NHL Nomination*; Otto Friedrich, "In Boston: Aid and Comfort for the Shaw," *Time Magazine*, April 6, 1981.

²²⁶ Albert Boime, *The Art of Exclusion: Representing Blacks in the Nineteenth Century* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990), 211.

²²⁷ "National Park Service Seeks Descendants of Union Army's First Black Regiment." March 1, 1982, Herbert S. Cables. Press Release, Folder 1, Box 16, Site Manager Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA; SMM, "December 14, 1981," Folder 16, Box 16, Site Manager Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA. Dottie had Wendell Simpson arrange for a meeting with the publisher of the Black newspaper *The Banner* to get help advertising her search for descendants of the 54th Regiment soldiers. The SMM notes indicate: "Dottie plans to organize a reunion of these descendants in 1982."

²²⁸ Tourangeau, "Retirements: Mrs. Dorothea Powell," 40.

interested parties for additional information on enlisted men.²²⁹ Gathering the descendants of the 54th Regiment became at once a personal mission and an exercise in community engagement which served to spread the word about the existence and the activities of the site.



Figure 9. Site Manager Dotty Powell shows NPS Regional Director Herbert S. Cables Jr. the Robert Gould Shaw and 54th Massachusetts Regiment Memorial on Boston Common in 1982. Graffiti on the front of the monument reads: “Who was the first black captain from Mass?” *National Park Service, Boston African American National Historic Site, Resource Management Records, Broadside Photos.*

By mid-1982, interest had grown in the restoration project and the FPG had raised more than \$40,000. Boston African American NHS took the lead in organizing the clean-up and restoration at the memorial and had the names inscribed beginning in the summer of 1982.²³⁰ The official rededication took place on June 21, 1983, during a ceremony which included a speech from African American scholar Lerone Bennet, Jr., a spiritual sung by world-renowned vocalist Ruth

²²⁹ “Fifty-Fourth Regiment/Shaw Rededication,” Folder 8, Box 15, Site Manager Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.; “Fifty-Fourth Regiment/Shaw Rededication,” Folder 1, Box 16, Site Manager Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

²³⁰ “Unfinished Memorials,” *Boston Globe*, July 1, 1982; “Honor Civil War Black Soldier” *The Boston Herald*, July 1, 1982.

Hamilton, and a dramatic reading of Frederick Douglass’s piece on the meaning of July Fourth.²³¹ The commitment of the Park Service to the rededication project laid the groundwork for a cooperative agreement between the City of Boston and the site for the preservation of the Shaw/54th Regiment Memorial, signed in 1986.²³² Powell’s approach to management of the site’s relationships with its partners, the community, and the historical record itself underscored her view of the site as a political project. The site’s General Management Plan laid this perspective out plainly.

General Management Plan

The NPS drafted Boston African American NHS’s first General Management Plan (GMP) in 1984. It reflected the community-oriented approach, progressive historical perspective, and growth mentality that made the site distinctive in the early 1980s. Importantly, the GMP expanded upon the skeletal role for the site laid out in its enabling legislation, and thus codified the disjuncture between what the site was required to be and what the site could potentially be. While the restoration of the African Meeting House was at the core of the GMP, the plan’s architects—including Regional Planning Coordinator Rolf Diamant, Regional Historian Dwight Pitcaithley, Byron Rushing, Dotty Powell, and many others—sketched out the potential of the site and made a case for the aggressive financial support of its development. Dwight Pitcaithley would later become the Chief Historian for the National Park Service in 1995. In that role, he advocated for the Park Service to actively embrace its educational responsibilities and recognized that “a useful history must include both painful as well as prideful aspects of the past.”²³³ This perspective is also reflected in the importance put on historical research within the GMP.

Rather than focus strictly on preservation, as the enabling legislation lays out, the GMP describes the mission of the site as commemoration: to “commemorate a community of free Afro-Americans which—in the face of tremendous opposition—mounted a resistance to the forces of slavery and segregation in the years leading up to and including the Civil War.”²³⁴ In defining the need for the GMP, the authors note that the requirement of the site to “preserve and protect” the historic resources within the site, as described in the legislation, to be only one part of its mandate. Additional needs not codified in the legislation are also enumerated, including the need to “develop

²³¹ SMM (n.d. Spring 1982), Folder 16. Box 16, Site Manager Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

²³² Cooperative agreement, National Park Service and City of Boston, June 28, 1985. Folder 7, Box 2, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

²³³ Dwight T. Pitcaithley, “‘A Cosmic Threat’: The National Park Service Addresses the Causes of the American Civil War,” in *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*, eds. James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton (New York: The New Press, 2006), 172.

²³⁴ National Park Service, *General Management Plan & Environmental Assessment: Boston African American National Historic Site*, (Boston: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, November 1984), 1. Hereafter: NPS, GMP: BOAF 1984.

the information necessary to preserve important cultural resources, and to achieve greater public understanding and appreciation for the historic role of the Free Afro-American community on Beacon Hill.”²³⁵ The GMP estimated that \$234,500 would be needed to complete baseline documentation of site resources in addition to the suggested base funding for operations, to the tune of \$287,000 a year. Baseline studies included historic structure reports, an interpretive prospectus, a scope of collection statement, and an historic resource study.

With respect to preservation of the architecture within the site, the GMP echoed the enabling legislation in proposing that NPS “enter into cooperative agreements with the owners of all the historic properties comprising Boston African American National Historic Site as defined in Public Law 96-430.”²³⁶ The GMP proposed that the site restore the African Meeting House to its 1855 appearance, in keeping with the cooperative agreement between the site and the Museum established in 1981.

The restoration plans outlined in the GMP propelled forward even before the document’s completion. As noted above, Congress appropriated \$1 million for the African Meeting House restoration in 1983, much to the surprise of the site and the NPS more widely. This generous sum exceeded the 1980 estimates for the needed preservation work; however, by the time the GMP had been completed in 1986, the estimate had already risen to \$1.4 million, with repairs to the Smith School and Hayden House estimated to cost an additional \$384,000.²³⁷

Boston African American NHS’s GMP set lofty goals for the site’s development and operations, on par with the authors’ optimism and broad view of the site’s mission. The goals in the GMP would prove too ambitious, and the sprawling scope of the document outstripped the fiscal resources so much that it did not serve as a useful planning document in the years to come. Implementing the GMP did not prove feasible in the fiscal climate of the late 1980s. After an internal review, the Regional Office drafted a Record of Decision in 1986 asking for revisions. Ultimately, however, the draft version of the GMP became accepted without revision sometime in 1986.²³⁸ While many of the goals of the GMP fell by the wayside, the importance of park

²³⁵ NPS, GMP: BOAF 1984, 23.

²³⁶ NPS, GMP: BOAF 1984, 25.

²³⁷ NPS, GMP: BOAF 1984, 36–37; NAR Programming [Abigail B. Homer], to WASO Budget [Forest McCain], fax, re: “African American Meeting House-Package 102,” May 20, 1983. Folder 3, Box 6, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

²³⁸ The National Archives do not have a final Record of Decision (ROD) document on file for the 1984 GMP, however the copy on file with the NPS Denver Service Center, has “Draft” crossed out; Additionally, a draft ROD is extant, dated January 1986; “Regional Director, NARO [Herb Cables], to Superintendent, BNHP [John Burchill], draft memorandum, January 1986, re: Record of Decision, Finding of No Significant Impact, General Management Plan and Environmental Assessment, Boston African American National Historic Site, Massachusetts.” On file, NARA-Boston Archives, RG 0079, National Park Service, Northeast Region, Environmental Compliance Program Records, 1967–2010, Box 8 or 43, Folder L-7617.

partnerships and the restoration of the African Meeting House embodied the primary goals of the site.

Collaboration with the Museum and the Restoration of the African Meeting House

Although Congressman Moakley and Senator Tsongas had secured funding for the African Meeting House restoration in the summer of 1983, the Park Service lacked readiness to begin implementing the restoration process until the following summer. Powell recalled that “when the million dollars was appropriated it was like a miracle ... even though we had no restoration plan at the time”.²³⁹ The surprise allocation had caught the Regional Office off-guard, with major foundational documents still incomplete. The African Meeting House Historic Structure Report had not been finalized, an interpretive prospectus remained outstanding, and the cultural resources management plan, undertaken by Boston NHP Park Planner Debbie Szarka, remained still underway.²⁴⁰ The site to that point had been surviving on the goodwill of Boston NHP and the Regional Office, with some funding from the Washington Office.²⁴¹

Nonetheless, the surprise funding signaled the beginning of the site’s first major collaboration with the Museum of Afro American History. The relationship between the site and the Museum had been laid out in the August 1981 Cooperative Agreement. According to that agreement, the Park Service held “primary responsibility for preservation, and restoration of the African Meeting House” while the Museum would take the lead on interpretation and facilitate access to the building.²⁴² Little attention was given in the agreement to the details of how the restoration would proceed with respect to decision making, scheduling, or the pace of the project. The two parties soon found that the Park Service’s complex contracting process and hierarchical management structure clashed with the Museum’s Board of Directors (Museum Board) cooperative governing structure.

For example, the NPS included the Museum in conversations in early fall 1983 regarding the schedule of the restoration project over the following two years, but the march toward each milestone ultimately proceeded without input from the Museum Board. The schedule proved to be aggressive and expedited; the scoping of the Architectural and Engineering (A&E) specifications

²³⁹ Tourangeau, “Retirements: Mrs. Dorothea Powell,” 40.

²⁴⁰ “Minutes of Meeting, Commemoration Efficiency Team,” March 9, 1984. Folder 6, Box 5, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

²⁴¹ “Fiscal 1984 Budget Briefing Statement,” Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Boston African American National Historic Site. Former MAAH Directors (Rushing) Files, Photocopies, BOAF 1, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

²⁴² Cooperative Agreement, National Park Service and the Museum of Afro American History. 1981.

and the selection of a contractor set to be completed by the end of 1983.²⁴³ In November, Superintendent Gurney proposed a meeting with the NPS team and the Museum Board to discuss both the GMP and the restoration to ensure the Museum to be “fully aware of all plans” and to be “on record as supporting them.”²⁴⁴ Gurney sent a similar letter in January of 1984, noting the urgent need for a meeting with “further development of the Meeting House by the National Park Service” potentially in jeopardy.²⁴⁵ Apparently unable to schedule a meeting with the Museum Board, the NPS team moved forward with the selection of a contractor to undertake the A&E specifications in early 1984.

The Museum Board responded with “extreme displeasure” at having been bypassed in the processes of drawing up the scope of work and the selection of a contractor.²⁴⁶ Having not even received copies of communications regarding the scope of work, review, and contracting of the project before the A&E contractor was selected, the Museum Board became concerned that they would not be included in any substantial way in the future of the project. To make matters worse, this was not the first time the Museum’s participation had been an afterthought to the progress of Park Service planning efforts. After providing comments on *The North Star* Planning Bulletin for the General Management Plan in the spring of 1982, Executive Director Rushing became informed that his comments could not be addressed as doing so would “throw the whole planning effort back by several months.”²⁴⁷ Hoping to break the cycle of being overlooked, the Museum reminded Gurney in March of 1984 that “as owners of the building, the Museum has a veto over decisions that are unacceptable to its Board.” In both cases, the Park Service attempted to reconcile the relationship, but nonetheless, the seed of a pattern had been planted.

On a basic level, the bureaucracy of the National Park Service lacked the ability to be nimble or flexible enough to exercise an effective collaboration with the Museum. Collaboration requires the ceding of some amount of control. The Museum Board felt they had ceded all control over the African Meeting House restoration despite being the owners of the building itself. In the spring of 1984, Byron Rushing asked the Museum’s preferred architectural firm, Stull and Lee, to review the A&E contract for the restoration work. After the review, the project architects informed

²⁴³ Chief, Historic Preservation [E. Blaine Cliver], to Associate Regional Director, Planning & Resource Preservation [Charlie Clapper], memorandum, re; Schedule of Work; BOAF. September 26, 1983. Folder Unlabeled, Box 1, Byron Rushing Collection, MAAH Archives, currently housed at the BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

²⁴⁴ Hugh Gurney, to Byron Rushing, letter, November 28, 1983. Folder “MAAH-NPS Relations,” Box 1, Byron Rushing Collection, MAAH Archives, currently housed at the BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

²⁴⁵ Hugh Gurney, to Byron Rushing, letter, January 13, 1984. Folder “MAAH-NPS Relations,” Box 1, Byron Rushing Collection, MAAH Archives, currently housed at the BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

²⁴⁶ Henry Hampton, to Hugh Gurney, letter, March 9, 1984. Folder Unlabeled, Box 1, Byron Rushing Collection, MAAH Archives, currently housed at the BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

²⁴⁷ Hugh Gurney, to Byron Rushing, letter, April 30, 1982. Folder Unlabeled, Box 1, Byron Rushing Collection, MAAH Archives, currently housed at the BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

Rushing that “there is no formal provision of role, authority nor responsibility on the part of the owner” [of the African Meeting House].²⁴⁸ Despite the Museum having no formal role, the Park Service asserted that “the Museum’s involvement is critical, in fact a must, in the planning process and all facets of the restoration.” To ameliorate the imbalance of power and the lack of transparency, NPS arranged a joint meeting wherein the Museum expressed their concerns and both parties agreed to a better communication structure with reasonable notice of meetings and deadlines.²⁴⁹

Following the April 1984 joint meeting, the Museum Board routinely received copies of correspondence, information on planning and draft specifications, and notice of meeting times.²⁵⁰ The relationship between the Park Service and the Museum appears to have improved somewhat, specifically with regard to communication about the restoration project. The dynamics of this relationship would be further shaped by changes at both organizations which occurred in the mid-1980s.

Shifts in Leadership

A major factor that guided the fate of Boston African American NHS in the second half of the 1980s was the ascendance of new management at both the site and the Museum of Afro American History. John Burchill became superintendent of Boston African American NHS and Boston NHP simultaneously beginning in September of 1984, after Hugh Gurney was transferred to another post. Less than a year later, the Museum’s Board hired a new Executive Director, Ruth Batson.

The direction of the National Park Service had shifted away from the expansionist approach of the 1970s and increasingly sought ways to implement public-private partnerships to achieve Park Service goals. President Reagan had appointed a new Secretary of the Interior, James C. Watt, who opposed land acquisition and the addition of new parks, while also undoing a recent reorganization of the grant system at the NPS.²⁵¹ The chilling of the new administration toward the National Park

²⁴⁸ Stull and Lee, to Byron Rushing, letter, March 13, 1984, Folder Unlabeled, Box 1, Byron Rushing Collection, MAAH Archives, currently housed at the BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

²⁴⁹ Wendell Simpson for Hugh Gurney, to Henry Hampton, letter, March 20, 1984, Folder “MAAH-NPS Relations,” Box 1, Byron Rushing Collection, MAAH Archives, currently housed at the BNHP, Charlestown, MA; Associate Regional Director, Planning and Resource Preservation [C. Clapper] to Files, memorandum, re: “April 26 Discussion on African Meeting House, BOAF NHS,” April 26, 1984. Folder 4, Box 16, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

²⁵⁰ Miscellaneous correspondence, 1984. Folder Unlabeled, Box 1, Byron Rushing Collection, MAAH Archives, currently housed at the BNHP, Charlestown, MA. Additionally, references in the Superintendent’s Minutes for 1985, 1986, 1987 reference frequent meetings with Museum staff and Board members.

²⁵¹ Donald Hellman, “The National Park Service at 100,” *Akron Law Review* 50, nos. 1 & 2 (2017), 48; Mackintosh et al., *Shaping the System*, 59.

Service can be felt in the general mood at the Boston NHP staff meetings during 1983 and 1984. During this period, the implementation of the Office of Management and Budget's Circular A-76 was a source of anxiety. The guidance presented in A-76 sought to curb excessive spending by evaluating government agencies to see where certain tasks could be done by private entities at a lower cost.²⁵² At Boston NHP and Boston African American NHS, this meant the creation of "management efficiency teams" which would evaluate each department, such as maintenance or security, to see where costs could be brought down. In November 1983, the superintendent's staff meeting minutes noted that "morale is a problem especially in light of A-76. Some bad rumors are going around. Problem is that the accurate information is not better than the rumors."²⁵³ In the case of Boston African American NHS, a management efficiency team got created with oversight from the Boston NHP's Professional Service Staff. Powell found herself under a microscope and wrote up the results of her own site's evaluation, pointing out that rather than a place where money could be cut, "the results were overwhelming. The Site needs more staff or the present staff will become less involved in outreach programming with other agencies."²⁵⁴

Despite Gurney's attempts to stay in touch with the goals of his staff and to prioritize accordingly, he was met with the persistent sense that meetings had become rote, people felt insecure in their positions, with little appetite to go above and beyond to design new projects.²⁵⁵ Boston NHP became further demoralized in the summer of 1984 when that site was the subject of a scathing editorial on the state of the National Park Service in Boston, with specific reference to the difficulty of getting to Charlestown Navy Yard, its industrial and unwelcoming appearance, and the lack of amenities.²⁵⁶ At the following Superintendent's Squad meeting, the staff found themselves discussing the critique which proved a significant blow for morale at the site and Boston NHP.²⁵⁷ Gurney was transferred a few weeks later.

²⁵² Director General Accounting Office [J. Dexter Peach] to Chairman, House Subcommittee on Environment, Energy, and Natural Resources [Mike Synar], memorandum re: Implementation Status of the Office of Management and Budget Circular A-76 ..., March 15 1985, accessed via Government Accountability Office website: <https://www.gao.gov/products/rced-85-56>.

²⁵³ SMM, "November 17, 1983." BOST RMR, BNHP Archives, Charlestown, MA.

²⁵⁴ Site Manager, BOAF [Dorothea Powell], to Deputy Superintendent, Boston NHP, draft memorandum, re: Management Efficiency Team Results. n.d. (circa 1984), Folder 6, Box 5, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

²⁵⁵ For example, on April 24, 1984, the Superintendent's Squad Meetings got assessed as unproductive and the team considered stopping them because the meetings appeared not goal oriented, there was little information sharing, and in general resulted in "very little interest generated." SMM "April 24, 1984," BOST RMR, BNHP Archives, Charlestown, MA.

²⁵⁶ "USS Constitution Disgraced," *Boston Globe*, August 13, 1984.

²⁵⁷ SMM, "August 14, 1984," BOST RMR, BNHP Archives, Charlestown, MA.

A new superintendent, John Burchill, arrived at Boston NHP and Boston African American NHS in October 1984, ready to change course.²⁵⁸ Met with a bleak financial picture, Burchill brought a business-minded perspective that was primarily focused on preservation, maintenance, and efficiency. Upon his arrival, he outlined his goals for the management team, stressing the importance of cooperative agreements, clear project priorities, and streamlined park functions to save money.²⁵⁹ He focused on the NPS's responsibilities and encouraged park partners to operate as self-sufficiently as possible. While this provided autonomy for park partners, it also resulted in the park becoming somewhat disengaged from partner needs. Burchill focused his attention on performance assessment, accountability, and human resources. He ran the parks much like a business, including hiring assistants to help him manage relationships with stakeholder organizations.²⁶⁰ These changes reflect not only trends toward austerity within the Park Service, but also Burchill's history and management style.

Burchill had spent his youth in and around Boston, went to school at the University of Massachusetts Amherst where he earned a bachelor's degree in business administration in 1961, and obtained a law degree from Suffolk University in downtown Boston in 1967. His career at the National Park Service began as a liaison between the NPS and the U.S. Attorney on issues of land damage, acquisition, and management issues.²⁶¹ Following this, he worked as chief of concessions management at three major natural national parks before 1981. By 1981, he had taken the position of superintendent of Lowell National Historical Park in Lowell, Massachusetts. At Lowell, Burchill made the Park Service an active partner in the downtown revitalization of the city by leveraging the prestige and reputation of the Park Service to enhance businesses, residential development, and public spaces.²⁶² During his short tenure as superintendent there, Burchill brought in \$12.5 million in restoration funds for the Boott Cotton Mills through his relationship with Senator Paul Tsongas.²⁶³ Burchill's success in revitalizing the Lowell National Historical Park in particular had made him a likely candidate for superintendent of a major urban park like Boston NHP, and Boston African American NHS came with the territory.

Upon arriving in Boston, Burchill began positioning the Boston NHP as a player in the wider economic development of the city. He arrived well-positioned to run an urban partnership park,

²⁵⁸ SMM, "October 2, 1984," BOST RMR, BNHP Archives, Charlestown, MA.

²⁵⁹ SMM, "October 2, 1984," BOST RMR, BNHP Archives, Charlestown, MA.

²⁶⁰ Bruggemen, *Trails to Freedom*, 334–335.

²⁶¹ "John Burchill Shifts to Yellowstone," *Courier* 2, no. 8 (1979), 12. Burchill worked at Cape Cod National Seashore, and later held the same position at Yosemite National Park (1975–1979) and Yellowstone National Park (1979–1981).

²⁶² Paul Marion, *Mill Power: The Origin and Impact of Lower National Historical Park* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2014), 59–60.

²⁶³ Bruggeman, *Trails to Freedom*, 334.

while drawing on his business background to help bolster the Park Service's partnerships with business and civic leaders in addition to the private historic sites within its boundary. The shift from Gurney to Burchill signaled an increased emphasis on managing the Boston parks as a business under which park partners operated largely independent of the Park Service.²⁶⁴

Superintendent Burchill managed Boston African American NHS using the framework of the site's enabling legislation, the site's cooperative agreement with the Museum, and the site's draft General Management Plan (GMP). Notably, the planning process for the GMP stalled between 1984 and 1986, despite the need for revision. Burchill took the draft GMP as "final" in 1986.²⁶⁵ This move may have been influenced by the fact that the site and the Museum were in effect already moving forward with the restoration of the African Meeting House, the keystone of the preferred alternative outlined in the GMP. The other interpretive, educational, and planning goals of the GMP were quietly set aside.

Burchill deferred to the Museum when it came to outreach and research. The cooperative agreement stated that the Museum should lead and control interpretive programming and research as much as possible. Intellectual control was a core priority for the Museum which would continue in the decades to come. What became clear, however, is that the Museum lacked the financial resources to fulfil this part of its mission on its own. Burchill's detachment from the interpretive and outreach missions of the Museum had the unintended consequence of weakening the shared interpretive programming of the site and the Museum.

Burchill's deference to the Museum is reflected in a mid-1990s interview on the state of Black history at Boston NHP. Burchill acknowledged that "there is ample material that could be used to connect [Boston NHP] to African Americans" but due to budget constraints that require funds be directed at general maintenance, these Black cultural resources did not get developed. Instead, he pointed to the work of the Museum of Afro American History and Byron Rushing as addressing some of these deficiencies.²⁶⁶ Burchill described the former executive director of the Museum as

²⁶⁴ Bruggeman, *Trails to Freedom*, 339. Burchill wanted to secure an important position for BNHP within the city and the NPS. BNHP was originally founded to *serve* its partners, but the Park Advisory Commission, a group of the Site Managers that would meet with BNHP, was disbanded in 1986 and not replaced by a new means of communication between the partner sites and BNHP.

²⁶⁵ Historian, BNHP [Paul Weinbaum] to Planner, NAR [Rolf Diamant], memorandum, re: "BOAF - GMP," June 13, 1984. Folder 2, Box 6, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA. Weinbaum pointed out a range of factual errors and deficiencies which were not corrected. Other reviewers also pointed out the need for a more thorough review of the budget estimates presented in the Draft GMP; Superintendent, BNHP [John Burchill] to Regional Director, NAR, memorandum, re: Draft Finding of No Significant Impact, January 1986. Folder 2, Box 6, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

²⁶⁶ Helán Page, "African Americans and National Parks in the New England Cluster," unpublished Technical Report, prepared for Rebecca Joseph, Director of Regional Ethnography, New England System Support Office, National Park Service (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1998): 139–140.

the “resident Black historian,” even though Rushing had long since moved on to serve in the Massachusetts House of Representatives. Boston NHP’s full-time historian was apparently not tasked with developing this history further. As will be seen in the chapters that follow, this passive approach to investing in the history of the site, contrasted sharply with the desires of the Black site managers and staff at Boston African American NHS.

Burchill saw great success when he focused on high-profile, big ticket preservation projects that could elevate the reputation of the Park Service in Boston and enhance tourism. The Park Service’s relationship with the Museum of Afro American History and the African Meeting House restoration project became a testing ground for his new management approach. As a large preservation project lay already in motion upon his arrival, Burchill stood in a position to execute the project speedily and demonstrate to the Museum that the African Meeting House was a high priority, even as it became difficult for the NPS to fund the wider Museum and Black history-oriented programs. In line with this separation, his vision for park partners to have more independence led him to dissolve the internal NPS team planning the rededication celebrations for the African Meeting House and delegate this to the Museum.²⁶⁷

The Park Service’s relationship with the Museum of Afro American History eased after 1984 due to a shift in leadership at the Museum in spring 1985. Byron Rushing had been the Executive Director of the Museum since the early 1970s, had brought about the founding of Boston African American NHS, and had helped to secure funding for the restoration of the African Meeting House in 1983. Beginning in 1983, he also served as a state representative, and in 1985 he stepped down from the position as executive director of the Museum. In his resignation letter, he cited the fact that “the completion of the restoration of the African Meeting House [is] assured” as one reason for his departure; another being the Museum’s need to build a “vigorous, caring, interested and supportive board of directors” which he saw as the main task of the next executive director.²⁶⁸

Seeking to achieve these goals, Ruth Batson took the helm at the Museum in April 1985. As discussed above, Batson had a long history with the Museum as one of its early and long-standing Board members, a seasoned activist in Boston’s equal education struggle, and a professional educator. She set out to revitalize the Museum at a time when the institution had meager financial means. The Museum had thus far been solely focused on the restoration and would need to be built up with new members, space, and wider name recognition. Under Batson’s leadership, the Museum collaborated with the site to complete the restoration of the African Meeting House, but

²⁶⁷ The last meeting of the 350th Anniversary Commemoration Efficiency Team was in September 1984. See Folder 6, Box 5, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

²⁶⁸ Byron Rushing, to Henry Hampton, letter, April 5, 1985. Folder “Correspondence Rushing,” Box A004, Board of Directors Files, Institutional Archive, MAAH Archives, Boston, MA.

also made progress growing its portfolio by starting negotiations to purchase the Nantucket African Meeting House in 1988, though the Museum did not purchase it until 1989.²⁶⁹

To get the Museum on its feet, Batson leaned into the Museum's relationship with the National Park Service. Powell reflected that when Batson began her tenure as executive director "she had no office space and so that is why we moved over together and started working together."²⁷⁰ While the two worked together on the Black History Month calendar and the site provided money for the Museum to do events when it could, ultimately the Museum was faced with the need to do its own fundraising for anything beyond the scope of the preservation and physical maintenance of the African Meeting House building itself, a stipulation of the cooperative agreement. As Park Service employees could not legally lobby or do fundraising, Powell's ability to help in this regard was somewhat limited, leading to some tension with the Museum. She recalled this also proved being a source of tension with Superintendent Burchill, who wanted her to work better with the Museum and "felt [she] should be out getting donations."²⁷¹ While these activities did not form a part of her job description, the Park Service's inability to fundraise for the Museum became nonetheless a source of stress for both Boston African American NHS and the Museum.

Despite not being empowered to fundraise, Powell recognized as early as 1982 that the financial stability of Boston African American NHS would be a determining factor in the site's success, so she suggested the site pursue private funding.²⁷² In July 1983, she established a "BOAF Friends Committee" in the hopes of forming an official fundraising body with which the National Park Service could have a cooperative relationship and seek financial stability.²⁷³ This organization, dubbed the "Friends of BOAF" was conceived as a private non-profit, which would help to fund those aspects of the African Meeting House restoration plans that lay outside the scope of the original \$1 million allocation, specifically landscaping and interpretive planning.²⁷⁴

While well-intentioned, Powell never saw the realization of the Friends group. In 1987, recognizing that the fundraising list of the Museum and the Friends group proved to be one and the same, Powell suggested the Friends group "should allow the Museum to do their fundraising

²⁶⁹ Museum of Afro American History, "Nantucket Church to be Restored," *The Museum-Smith Court News* 2, no. 1 (June 1989): 1. Folder 17, Box 11, Sue Bailey Thurman Collection, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center at Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts.

²⁷⁰ Powell, Interview 1988.

²⁷¹ Powell, Interview, 1988.

²⁷² SMM, "November 16, 1982." BOST RMR, BNHP Archives, Charlestown, MA. The minutes for this meeting state that Powell was "interested in private funding for the Afro Meeting House for future years."

²⁷³ "BOAF Friends Committee Planning Meeting Notes," July 13, 1983. Folder 6, Box 1, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

²⁷⁴ Miscellaneous letters between Dotty Powell and 54th MA Regiment descendants. Folder 15, Box 7, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

for the African Meeting House since they own the building.”²⁷⁵ While unable to establish a fund for the ongoing financial needs of the site and the Museum, she continued to advocate for community fundraising so that the site wouldn’t “have to [ask] the government for money ... Because you’re not always going to get it. You’re going to have to have some sort of mechanism there that you can fall back on.”²⁷⁶ When Powell made her exit from the position of site manager in October 1987, the Friends of BOAF lay still unrealized and the site’s financial stability remained uncertain.

Rededication of the African Meeting House

Bolstered by the clear vision of Ruth Batson and John Burchill, the African Meeting House restoration plans began to move quickly. D. Baugh & Associates Architects finalized the plans and specifications by the spring of 1985, after which archaeological excavations in the African Meeting House backlot in the summer of 1985 proceeded to mitigate project effects on subsurface cultural resources.²⁷⁷ In July 1986, a construction contract got awarded to TLT Construction of Peabody, Massachusetts, at a cost of \$849,000. As time went on, many change orders took place, and the site and Museum had to scale back what would be included in the “Phase I” restoration. Most notably, the project lacked funds for the installation of an elevator, a feature essential to meeting the accessibility requirements of the building under federal and state law.

By mid-1987, the Museum of Afro American History became eager to have the restoration project complete so the space could once again be used for exhibits, celebrations, educational programs, and fundraising. While interior painting and some minor projects lagged behind schedule, the building saw substantial completion by October.

Rededication of the African Meeting House took place during the second week of October 1987. The Museum used the week-long celebration to kick off a year of commemorative activities to mark the 350th anniversary of Black people arriving in Massachusetts. The rededication celebration proved to be one of the largest projects yet staged by the Museum. Harnessing the power of more than sixty volunteers, the Museum’s “Working Committee” hosted a parade, walking tours, speakers, public school events, fundraisers, exhibits, and other activities for adults and children to mark the moment. In some ways, the rededication celebration represented a

²⁷⁵ Site Manager, BOAF [Dorothea Powell], to Regional Director, NARO [NAME], memorandum, re: Identification of Fundraising Efforts Occurring This Fiscal Year, April 28, 1987, Folder 15, Box 7, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

²⁷⁶ Powell, Oral History, 1988.

²⁷⁷ “Summary of NPS-MASS. SHPO Consultation on the African Meeting House, Boston African American National Historic Site, Boston, Mass.” Folder BOAF Restoration of African Meeting House Chronology of Compliance, Box 16 of 90, BOAF, NARO CRM Division Records 1931–1995, RG0079 National Park Service, National Archives, Waltham, MA.

“coming out” party for the Museum, allowing it to mobilize more donors, reach more audiences, host more events, and raise money for the still-incomplete restoration and ongoing operating expenses.

Meanwhile, in the midst of the celebration, Dotty Powell stepped down from her position as site manager of Boston African American NHS. Able to feel assured that the African Meeting House restoration would be completed, Powell retired abruptly during the week of the rededication festivities. By her own account, she retired on October 13, 1987, as a birthday present to herself.²⁷⁸ In an interview taken the spring after her retirement, she explained that the stress of trying to meet both the steep expectations of Superintendent Burchill and the Museum had made the job all but impossible.²⁷⁹

The loss of Powell represented the loss of a powerful advocate for Boston African American NHS, but at the same time, the site was entering an exciting new phase. With the opening of the African Meeting House, several funding avenues within the NPS began to open up. Over the course of the following decade, the site began to grow and establish a larger program, build new partnerships, and grow its staff. While the broad research, documentation, and programming goals laid out in the 1984 GMP went unfunded and operational autonomy remained out of reach, the site made important strides toward achieving its educational and preservation missions.

²⁷⁸ Tourangeau, “Retirements: Mrs. Dorothea Powell,” 40.

²⁷⁹ Heidelberg, personal communication, October 4, 2020.

CHAPTER 5. GROWTH AND SHINE, 1988–2000

In January 1988, Boston African American NHS and the Museum of Afro American History opened the African Meeting House to the public. With this move, the Museum and the site entered a new period in their histories. The site's leaders had, up to that point, been acutely focused on the logistics of launching a new site and completing the first phase in the African Meeting House's restoration. With the keystone resource of the site open, the site's staff had an opportunity to reconsider how best to fulfill its legislative mandate. On the most basic level, the site's enabling legislation empowered the Park Service to "mark, interpret, restore, and provide technical assistance" in the service of the preservation of any of the sixteen properties within the site.²⁸⁰ The 1984 General Management Plan (GMP) built on this goal and laid out ambitious documentation, community outreach, and interpretation and education goals that would involve active collaboration with a number of institutions throughout the Boston area. The question remained outstanding in 1988: Would the site grow and fulfill its full potential as laid out in the General Management Plan? Or would it maintain a focus only on preservation, with limited research and programming?

Over the next decade, the degree to which Boston African American NHS would be able to fulfill its potential would depend on the vision of its superintendent, the financial support that he would be able to muster, and the drive of its site managers and staff to build the site's programs and community relationships. Throughout the 1990s, Superintendent John Burchill's vision for the site was as a preservation-minded unit with a circumscribed interpretive mission: to fulfill the staffing needs of the Museum of Afro American History along the Black Heritage Trail. This narrow view led him to advocate for funding for the site in association with preservation and some base operating funding, but he took little interest in the growth of programming and interpretation. Site managers and interpretive staff managed the basic tour and community programs, but did not have the money to undertake research, planning, or new programming.

Burchill's acceptance of the site's "basic" interpretive program as final was due in part to his deference to the Museum of Afro American History for interpretive matters. The Museum, however, did not have the financial resources to undertake research and planning needed to improve the site. During the late 1980s and 1990s, Burchill's advocacy for the site resulted in preservation funding for the second phase of the African Meeting House restoration and the rehabilitation of the Abiel Smith School (Table 1, Funding Packages 2 and 4). The money acquired under these funding packages, however, proved vastly inadequate for the work needed. When compared to the preservation projects at sites such as Faneuil Hall, the Old State House, and Dorchester Heights, which received far greater funding packages for restoration, the African

²⁸⁰ *Boston African American Historic Site Act of 1980, U.S. Code, Title 16, Public Law 96-430, 96th Congress, H.R. 7434, October 10, 1980.*

Meeting House restoration dragged out longer, beset with more financial difficulties than those associated with Boston’s Revolutionary War history and its commemoration. Whether this inequality proved intentional is beside the point; the effect of Burchill’s choices became unequal treatment of the Black history sites administered by the Park Service in Boston.

Table 1. Boston African American National Historic Site Major Funding Packages.²⁸¹

Funding Package	Amount	Description	Year Allocated	Year or Years Dispensed
1	\$1,000,000	Restoration of the African Meeting House	1983	1983–1987
2	\$1,525,000	Base Funds (\$300,000); Project Funds (\$1,225,000) Minor Rehabilitation of the Smith School and Phase II of African Meeting House Restoration	1989	Base Funds, FY 1991; Project Funds Circa 1995–1998
3	\$258,000	Base Funds, part of 1.6 mil package for BNHP	1990	FY 1992
4	\$1,398,000	Phase II of African Meeting House Restoration	1998	FY 1999
5	\$5,193,000	Complete Rehab of African Meeting House	2010	UNFUNDED
6	\$4,138,000	Rehabilitate African Meeting House Boston	2010	FY 2011

Where Boston African American NHS thrived in the 1990s lay in places where Burchill’s preservation focus resonated with the goals of his site staff. During the 1990s, the site made some significant strides toward growth and met some preservation goals. These achievements embodied

²⁸¹ “An act making supplemental appropriations for the fiscal year ending September 30, 1983, and for other purposes.” P.L. 98063 (98th Congress), July 30, 1983, accessed October 1, 2021; “Package #102, Rehabilitate African Meeting House.” Folder 8 “Accommodations of Physically Handicapped,” Box 1, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA; Department of the Interior News Release. “Congressional Subcommittee Approves Funds for Three Boston National Historical Park Sites.” NPS Press Release, August 6, 1990. Folder “National Park Service,” Box A008.22, ED Sylvia Watts-McKinney, Institutional Archive, MAAH Archives, Boston, MA; “Form 10-238,” US DOI, NPS, Development/Study Package Proposal, June 6, 1996, Folder 4, Box 27, Design and Construction Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.; 105th Congress, June 26, 1998, Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 1999; U.S. Department of the Interior Office of Budget, *Budget Justifications and Performance Information FY2011, National Park Service*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, FY 2011), CONST-51; “Recovery Act, Rehabilitate African Meeting House Boston, BOAF 151732, TAS::14 1041, NAICS: 712110,” Federal Grant Reporting, August 13, 2010. <https://www.federalgrants.com>.

the establishment of the site as an official unit of the National Park System, the tripling of base funding for site operations, and the restoration of the Abiel Smith School. Despite Burchill's secondary interest in the interpretative goals of the site, the 1990s also saw progress in the implementation of several additional programs beyond tours of the Black Heritage Trail and Black History Month programming through partnerships and collaborations with other parks. These additional programs embodied a renewed attention to the importance of Black history throughout the National Park Service in the 1990s and the drive of individuals within the Service to find ways to promote and explore this history.

At the same time, Boston African American NHS also encountered many roadblocks to its growth. While Superintendent Burchill insulated Boston African American NHS somewhat from the fiscal climate of the 1990s, hostile to park spending, the site did not receive funds to grow. Born in 1980 without base operating funds, the site had, in a sense, started its life underwater. The financial gains of the 1990s barely brought the site's head above water, and it remained vulnerable to any shifting financial tides.

Boston African American NHS never got to implement its GMP nor the interpretive prospectus which followed in 1989. The lack of support for research and planning documents such as a historic resource study, historic structure reports, and an interpretive plan led to the withering of its ability to execute its own mission. Other site goals, such as increasing the accessibility of the site, similarly fell by the wayside. As a result, for much of the 1990s, the site could only execute basic visitor services based on skeletal foundational research that had been developed in the late 1970s. Additional programs only became possible through partnerships with other parks and the drive of individuals to undertake outreach efforts. Within the site, Ken Heidelberg and park rangers pursued pockets of funding for educational programs. At Boston NHP, Marty Blatt, Chief of Cultural Resources and Historian, prioritized outreach and education in the late 1990s via the Centennial Celebration of the Shaw/54th Regiment Memorial. Throughout his career at Boston NHP, Blatt also spearheaded the drive to improve the foundational research supporting interpretation at Boston African American NHS by pursuing a historic resource study and programming that encouraged academic research on the history of Black Boston.

Boston African American NHS's primary partner, the Museum of Afro American History, also underwent major changes in the 1990s. After completing the first phase of restoration at the African Meeting House, that institution hoped to grow its programming, raise money for further preservation needs, and establish an independent institutional identity. The Site-Museum relationship continued to be fostered by the consistent focus on preservation offered by Superintendent Burchill and the collaborative spirit with which Site Manager Ken Heidelberg approached everyday site operations which supported the Museum's Black Heritage Trail program and other offerings. At the same time, the relationship also saw some strain. In 1989, for example,

the Museum faced the reprinting of its brochure and reflected that it needed to “retake greater control of the Black Heritage Trail.”²⁸²

Attempting to establish an independent Museum identity involved requesting revisions to the Site-Museum cooperative agreement, seeking out a multitude of financial supporters through an ambitious capital campaign, spreading the word about its mission independent of the NPS, and growing to include more historic properties outside Park Service control. The growth of the Museum moved forward in fits and starts initially, as three executive directors over the course of the 1990s brought different visions of how to achieve its goals.

By the end of the decade, both the Museum and the site were at a new turning point, with the departure of John Burchill in 2000, just months after the arrival of Beverly Morgan-Welch to the position of Executive Director of the Museum in early 1999. Burchill’s departure marked the end of an era at Boston’s national parks as well. For more than fifteen years he had used his single-minded focus on an “aggressive and targeted capital restoration program” and his community and political connections to create an environment where both Boston NHP and Boston African American NHS gained project funds in a changing funding climate.²⁸³ Boston African American NHS’s new Superintendent, Terry Savage, would have a wholly different approach to managing Boston NHP, Boston African American NHS, and their park partners in the new millennium.²⁸⁴

Achieving Base Funding and NPS Unit Status

Raising Boston African American National Historic Site above water fiscally took on critical importance after the opening of the African Meeting House. With only a site manager, one park ranger, and an administrative officer/typist, an increase in base operating funds would help determine whether the site would offer a minimal program of intermittent Black Heritage Trail tours or if it would evolve into something more.²⁸⁵ In the late 1980s, Boston African American NHS hoped to increase its base operating funds in order to provide just the baseline of visitor services (regular tours and interpretive programs) and provide more financial support for the

²⁸² “Minutes for Board Meeting March 15, 1989,” Folder “Board Minutes 1989,” Box A001.1, Board of Directors Files, Institutional Archives, MAAH Archives, Boston, MA.

²⁸³ John Burchill, “Superintendent John Burchill Announces Departure,” *Broadside*, no. 4 (1999), 1.

²⁸⁴ John Burchill, “Superintendent John Burchill Announces Departure,” *Broadside*, no. 4 (1999), 1.

²⁸⁵ Base operating funds encompass those funds allocated to units of the National Park Service for staff, maintenance, and basic programming. These come out of the “Operations of the National Park Service” (ONPS) budget. Project funds, for capital restoration, land acquisition, and other one-time expenses, formed a separate part of the budget. Acquiring and maintaining base operating funds is key to the success of any park, allowing for staff and program planning from year to year.

Museum of Afro American History. Funding the more ambitious program goals outlined in the GMP would require exponentially more funds, and so those goals got deferred.

Boston African American NHS had first gained base operating funds in fiscal year 1985, when the site received a line item for \$112,000 in the National Park Service ONPS budget, with approximately \$20,000 set aside for the Museum. Superintendent Burchill began advocating for an increase in base funding beginning in 1987, as the completion of the restoration to the African Meeting House neared.²⁸⁶ Burchill argued that the responsibility of the NPS to have significant “involvement and operational presence” represented a mandate for an increase in funding. The site’s anemic funding had only allowed for three employees and a “skeleton program” to date, but with the opening of the African Meeting House it would become “fully operational for the first time.” Without a significant increase in funding, the site would risk the deterioration of the improvements made thus far, cooperative agreements would be terminated, and NPS would lose “credibility with respect to its commitment to BOAF.”²⁸⁷

The site’s request landed on the desk of Regional Director Herb Cables. By 1987, Cables had distinguished himself as one of the National Park Service’s leading African American park managers. With a master’s degree in business administration, he came to the Park Service in 1974 and became an advocate for urban parks, serving as superintendent of Gateway National Recreation Area around New York Harbor before becoming North Atlantic Regional Director in 1982.²⁸⁸ Cables also had a history of advocating for Boston African American NHS specifically and became a member of the Museum of Afro American History.²⁸⁹

On the matter of Boston African American NHS’s base funding needs, Burchill and Cables saw eye to eye. In response to the site’s request, Cables listed a base funding increase to \$316,000 for the site as the region’s second priority after the restoration of base funding to Ellis Island for FY

²⁸⁶ The needs detailed for FY 1989 proved to be the same as FY 1988, but Burchill acknowledges that these would need to be met through “interim funding.”; Superintendent, BOAF [John Burchill] to Regional Director, NAR [Herb Cables], memorandum, re: “FY-89 Operating Budget Increase Request,” May 6, 1987. Folder1, Box 17, Site Manager Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA; “BOAF, FY 1988 Operating Increase Needs,” May 11, 1987. Folder “1988–1989 Financial Records,” Box A004, Meg Flanigan Papers, Board of Directors, Institutional Archive, MAAH Archive, Boston, MA.

²⁸⁷ Burchill to Cables, memorandum, May 6, 1987. BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

²⁸⁸ “Retirements: Cables Now Based at City University of New York,” *Courier* 38, no. 6 (1993): 33.

²⁸⁹ Cables had provided much needed support for the outreach initiatives of Park Site Manager Dotty Powell in the mid-1980s as she advertised her search for descendants of the 54th Regiment. Additionally, Cables sent letters in support of the restoration of the African Meeting House. Cables indicates his dual capacity as Regional Director and Museum member in a letter to the Statue of Liberty Centennial Commission asking for support of the restoration project; Herbert S. Cables Jr. to William Fugasy, Chairman of NY Statue of Liberty Centennial Commission, letter, April 15, 1987. Folder 16, Box 7, Site Manager Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

1989.²⁹⁰ Writing to Director William Penn Mott Jr., Cables warned that the strain put on the region’s urban parks by a backlog of conservation needs, increasing visitation, and recruitment difficulties would “gather steam” in the years to come. Urban cooperative parks like Boston African American NHS were one of the solutions to these problems, as “alternative management techniques” in the form of cooperative agreements promised to lessen the burden on the park system, even as some financial commitments remained necessary.

Cables also recognized that the site had entered a new phase in its development in 1988 which called into question its status as an “affiliated area.” The NPS is usually less involved in the funding and managing of affiliated areas than in units of the NPS, as the former represent areas administered but not owned by the NPS.²⁹¹ In the summer of 1988, Cables requested National Park Service Director Mott review the classification of the site. He argued that the opening of the African Meeting House came with changes to the site’s stewardship responsibilities, programming, and visitorship. On August 22, 1988, the Director authorized the reclassification of Boston African American NHS as a unit of the National Park Service.²⁹² In his memo authorizing the reclassification, he noted that “Public Law 96-430 clearly gives us responsibility for administering BOAF even though the site encompasses properties covered by cooperative agreements rather than land directly owned and managed by the National Park Service.” The fact that the site received ONPS funds and got allocated a number of full-time NPS employees further reinforced the fact that the site met the definition of a unit of the National Park System. The site thereafter became listed as a unit of the National Park System, “for statistical, funding and other purposes” moving forward.

Classification as a unit of the National Park System did not come with a boost in base operating funds but did put the site in a better position to argue for these funds. In December 1988, the site’s Acting Site Manager Carter Lowe argued the existing funding level to be “fundamentally, in its effect an abandonment of fiscal sanity” in light of the “reality of the operation.”²⁹³ Cables, Burchill, and Lowe’s calls for increased base funding continued to go unheard for two more years.

Complicating this call for more funding were the development and construction needs of Boston African American NHS. The 1983 \$1 million allocation (See Table 1, Funding Package 1) had allowed a lot of progress on the restoration of the African Meeting House; however, much was

²⁹⁰ Regional Director, NAR [Herb Cables], to Director [William Penn Mott, Jr.], memorandum, re: “’89 Budget Call,” May 7, 1987. Folder 10, Box 7, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

²⁹¹ Mark K. DeSantis, “National Park Service Affiliated Areas: An Overview,” *Congressional Research Service*. August 5, 2019, accessed May 20, 2022, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11281/2>.

²⁹² Director, NPS [William Mott], to Regional Director [Herb Cables], memorandum, re: “Boston African American National Historic Site,” August 22, 1988. Folder 2, Box 6, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

²⁹³ Carter Lowe, “Annual Operating Increase Call for Fiscal Year ’91.” December 5th, 1988. Folder 10, Box 7, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

still incomplete, and the preservation needs of the Abiel Smith School put increasing pressure on both the Museum and Boston African American NHS.

It was in this context that Superintendent Burchill leaned on the site's relationship with Massachusetts Representative Joe Moakley, a relationship which had first been established through Hugh Gurney and Byron Rushing in the early 1980s. In 1989, Moakley secured \$1.525 million in federal funds for the second phase of the African Meeting House restoration, temporary relief for site operations, and minor rehabilitation efforts at the Abiel Smith School (See Table 1, Funding Package 2). Accessibility signaled the chief problem the funds were meant to address as the African Meeting House lacked an elevator to the building's main sanctuary. In 1989, the Museum had been cited by the Boston's Accessibility Board for the absence of wheelchair access within the building.²⁹⁴ While awarded temporary waivers for these violations, both the site and the Museum recognized the need to make the site accessible via an elevator and ramps. In 1990, Burchill assured the board of the forthcoming changes to the building based on the new funding package.²⁹⁵

Boston African American NHS finally received an increase in base operating funds in the summer of 1990, when the House Appropriations Subcommittee on the Interior approved federal funds totaling \$1.6 million for three Boston sites, of which \$258,000 was allocated for Boston African American NHS operating funds (Table 1, see Funding Package 3). In an August 1990 press release, Burchill commented that Moakley's "effort [sic] in securing these funds are truly commendable" and in keeping with his commitment to historic preservation in Boston."²⁹⁶ The advocacy of politicians such as Moakley enabled the site to circumvent the NPS's internal funding structure and remained crucial to Boston African American NHS's ability to obtain funding for the operating needs and construction projects.

Beginning in 1991, Boston African American NHS received base operating funds in the ONPS budget of \$373,500, a 300 percent increase over the previous budget amount.²⁹⁷ This allocation was intended to fund a site manager, administrative technician, two permanent rangers, a full-time

²⁹⁴ Gerald LaBlanc, Chairman of Architectural Access Board, to Afro-American History Meeting House (sic), letter, January 12, 1989. Folder 1, Box 7, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

²⁹⁵ "Amended Decision," re: Afro-American Meeting House, Boston. Chairman, Massachusetts Architectural Access Board (Gerald LaBlanc), March 30, 1990. Folder 8, Box 1, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA

²⁹⁶ "Funding for Park Projects Advance," *Broadside* (Autumn 1990): 4; Department of the Interior News Release. "Congressional Subcommittee Approves Funds for Three Boston National Historical Park Sites." NPS Press Release, August 6, 1990. Folder "National Park Service," Box A008.22, ED Sylvia Watts-McKinney, Institutional Archive, MAAH Archives, Boston, MA.

²⁹⁷ Superintendent, BNHP [John Burchill], to Acting Site Manager, BOAF [Ken Heidelberg], memorandum, re: "Final Fiscal 1991 Budget Formulation," January 3, 1991. Folder 10, Box 7, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

maintenance worker, and four seasonal rangers. Additionally, the bump in base funding increased support for the Museum, as that funding continued to comprise approximately 20 percent of the overall budget for the site. Museum support rose from \$20,000 to \$82,000. The site's funding level and distribution remained generally stable throughout the 1990s, with small increases to help fund small pay increases and compensate for inflation. Although a great financial relief, it soon became clear that demand for site services would continue to spread staff thin into the late 1990s.²⁹⁸

Site Managers Work Toward Site Autonomy

Gaining adequate base funds for Boston African American NHS represented a hard-fought win for Black site managers and allies within the NPS. This accomplishment was in keeping with Superintendent Burchill's goals for the site—to allow it to execute its basic programming, obtain preservation funding, and support the Museum of Afro American History's programming where possible. Boston African American NHS's site managers wanted more. Site managers Carter Lowe and Ken Heidelberg saw the autonomy and growth of the site as vitally important to its future, although the two had different strategies for pursuing their goals. Any movement toward developing new interpretive material or programs at the site was achieved through the “collateral duty” efforts of site personnel, such as Boston NHP Historian and Chief of Cultural Resources Marty Blatt and site staff undertaking independent research. The site made strides toward promoting outreach programs in Boston throughout the 1990s, as will be discussed below. It had less success in gaining financial support that would fulfill the goals of the 1984 GMP or the new management goals which came as the site evolved.

Site Manager Carter Lowe

After Dotty Powell retired in 1987, Carter Lowe began his tenure as Boston African American NHS's site manager. A native of Roxbury, Lowe was a community activist before coming to the Park Service, serving in the Urban League of Albany and later in Boston in the 1960s.²⁹⁹ He worked as deputy superintendent at Lowell National Historical Park in the early 1980s and became the urban affairs officer at the North Atlantic Regional Office in 1984 after Wendell Simpson moved on from that position to become the first African American deputy superintendent of Boston NHP.³⁰⁰ Based in the downtown Boston Regional Office, Lowe worked with Boston NHP

²⁹⁸ Superintendent John Burchill, “Boston National Park Service, Northeast Field Area, Annual Report” FY 1997. A2621, Superintendent's Annual Narrative Report, Box Retain A-22 to A-98 1995–2000. BOST RMR, BNHP Archives, Charlestown, MA; Superintendent John Burchill, “Boston National Park Service, Northeast Field Area, Annual Report” FY 1998. A2621, Superintendent's Annual Narrative Report, Box Retain A-22 to A-98 1995–2000. BOST RMR, BNHP Archives, Charlestown, MA; Appended to the end of the FY 1997 and FY 1998 Superintendent's Annual Report for Boston NHP, Ken Heidelberg provided an Annual Report for Boston African American NHS.

²⁹⁹ “Negro Urges New Zoo,” *Boston Globe*, May 9, 1968, 19.

³⁰⁰ Juliet Brudney, “Coalition seeks help for the chronically jobless,” *Boston Globe*, December 18, 1983, A22.

in a limited capacity and served as president of the Minority Government Employees Association in the mid-1980s.³⁰¹

Lowe served as site manager at Boston African American NHS on a detail running between March 1988 and March 1990. As noted above, he became one of the most vociferous supporters of the increase in base operating funds for Boston African American NHS. Lowe's ambitions for the site did not end there, however, and he worked toward establishing managerial and fiscal independence for the site and to bolster the interpretive program. He saw the site's autonomy as essential to its success. During his tenure as site manager, he focused on promotion of the site to "make known the role of the Site," including its interpretive mission and its potential for service to Boston's Black community.³⁰²

Lowe made a proactive push for the site to establish partnerships beyond the Museum and the City of Boston. Ken Heidelberg, who served as supervisory park ranger under Lowe and became site manager following Lowe's detail, remembered him as "always on the road" trying to "drum up business" for the site.³⁰³ This outward-looking approach to management amounted to something of an enigma to site staff. Heidelberg became the site manager functionally for much of the everyday needs of the site, and Lowe attempted to occupy a role similar to a deputy superintendent. Heidelberg remembered that while Lowe was technically in charge, "everybody came to me because I was the only one that was around day to day, as far as interpretation, budget, and everything else."³⁰⁴

To work toward Boston African American NHS's autonomy, Lowe strengthened ties with academics, promoted academic research on the historic Beacon Hill community, and supported the establishment of a private Friends group to act as a funding source. The weaknesses of the site's interpretive and outreach programs could be systematically strengthened through a consortium for the study of African American issues with local academic institutions, through high school writing competitions to foster arts at the site, and through a "Black Issues lecture series." He also saw academic institutions as a means of acquiring new talent at the site via internships.³⁰⁵ For this he reached out to Robert Fox, the Director of Suffolk University's Collection of Afro-

³⁰¹ SMM, "November 26, 1984," BOST RMR, BNHP Archives, Charlestown, MA. Lowe is present in the Boston NHP management team minutes on November 26, 1984, arranging meetings for Acting Superintendent Wendell Simpson; Juliet F. Brudney, "Living With Work," *Boston Globe*, November 21, 1984, 27.

³⁰² SMM, "March 6, 1990," BOST RMR, BNHP Archives, Charlestown, MA; SMM, "November 26, 1984," BOST RMR, BNHP Archives, Charlestown, MA; SMM, "March 1, 1988," BOST RMR, BNHP Archives, Charlestown, MA.

³⁰³ Heidelberg, personal communication, October 7, 2020.

³⁰⁴ Heidelberg, personal communication, October 7, 2020.

³⁰⁵ Acting Manager, BOAF [Carter Lowe] to Superintendent, Boston [John Burchill], memorandum, re: "Program Initiatives for 1988–89," July 5, 1988. Folder 3, Box 5, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

American Literature, and Professor Emeritus Ed Clark who had previously run the program. He pursued another partnership with the Crite House, the homesite and Museum dedicated to the artwork of acclaimed African American painter Allan Ronan Crite. Lowe and Clark proposed that the Crite House donate its property and collection for curation by the NPS, in part to alleviate problems with the “viability of the Museum.”³⁰⁶ Ultimately the proposal did not come to fruition, but the effort represents one way Lowe sought to build the site both in its collections and through the only means available to it for the acquisition of property according to the site’s legislation: by donation.

Lowe recognized that financial independence could not be achieved by relying on base funding. Just as Dotty Powell had suggested the site would require an “endowment” to succeed, Lowe saw a “Friends” group as the solution to the gap between the funds the Park Service could supply and what would be needed for achieving the site’s programming and restoration goals. A non-profit, private “Friends” group could raise money for site projects, circumventing the NPS’s policies against soliciting donations. While originally conceived during Powell’s leadership to help fund the African Meeting House restoration, the late 1980s version of the organization focused on “programmatic organizational support” to supplement the site’s meager base funding.³⁰⁷ Robert Fox at Suffolk University led the charge to establish Friends of BOAF, which was incorporated in April 1989 with Fox as its president.³⁰⁸ A draft Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the “Friends” and the National Park Service firmly gave the site manager, not the superintendent, the authority over funding decisions and the granting of permits.³⁰⁹

In Lowe’s view, for Boston African American NHS to operate with some autonomy, the site manager would have to have a seat at the table with the superintendent regarding management decisions. Apparently, Burchill did not agree. To clarify the position responsibilities of the site manager, Burchill drew up a position description in November of 1988. The site manager would have “a consultative and close working relationship” with Boston NHP, the Museum of Afro American History, the North Atlantic Regional Office, the Denver Service Center, and Harpers Ferry Center, as well as regulatory and planning agencies, including the City of Boston.³¹⁰ This

³⁰⁶ Allan R Crite, to Carter Lowe, letter, July 6, 1988. Folder 5, Box 10, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

³⁰⁷ Acting Manager, BOAF [Carter Lowe] to Superintendent, BOST [John Burchill], memorandum, re: “Program Initiatives for 1988–89,” July 5, 1988. Folder 3, Box 5, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

³⁰⁸ “Friends of BOAF Inc., Nonprofit Corporation,” Registered April 21, 1989. Register Agent: Carter Lowe, President: Robert Fox, Treasurer: Dottrice Mcpherson. Massachusetts Secretary of the Commonwealth, Corporations Division, accessed December 13, 2021, <http://corp.sec.state.ma.us/CorpWeb/C...>

³⁰⁹ “Draft Memorandum of Agreement between the National Park Service and The Friends of BOAF, Inc.” Folder 4, Box 1, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

³¹⁰ “Role and Function Statement, Boston National Historical Park, Boston African American National Historic Site, Site Manager, 1988 and 1993,” Folder 2, Box 5, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

position description deferred any decision making to the superintendent. Lowe's correspondence reflects being routinely left out of critical site decisions, including those related to Section 106 compliance, funding, and even Black History Month programming.³¹¹ He could do little to change the situation, except to write memoranda to file, documenting his exclusion from the management of the site.

Ultimately, Carter Lowe's attempts to exercise managerial and financial control over the site were thwarted by the organizational structures already in place and the competing interests of Boston NHP and the Museum. The Museum staunchly opposed a Friends group, and voted in October 1989 for the group to be dissolved, as it conflicted with the fundraising interests of the Museum.³¹² Reflecting on the failure of the group to materialize in the face of opposition from the Museum, Robert Fox wrote with regret that by allowing the Museum to dictate the future of a Friends group, "the Site [BOAF] will not be permitted to develop to its full potential but will be a conduit for funds to the Museum of Afro American History. Therefore, the goals of the site will either be the goals of the Museum or will be subservient to the Museum."³¹³ This view of the power relationship between the two institutions gestures toward the fact that the site felt it had even fewer avenues toward growth than the Museum.

While the site was not "subservient" to the Museum, the Museum did have the right to control interpretation of the Black Heritage Trail and the African Meeting House according to the original cooperative agreement. In theory, delegating interpretive issues took pressure off the site to manage operations while the Museum maintained intellectual control. The continued delegation of interpretation had its own problems, however, as the Museum focused its interpretive efforts on education and exhibits at the African Meeting House. Updating the core of the site's interpretive program—the Black Heritage Trail—was not a high priority for the Museum. The NPS did not fund broader research and planning documents for the site until the late 1990s; these documents typically form the foundation of NPS interpretive programs. As a result the Black Heritage Trail remained only partially developed and the site continued to lack key baseline documentation of site resources and "vision" documents such as a long-term interpretive plan.

³¹¹ Acting Manager, BOAF [Carter Lowe] to File, memorandum, re: "Lack of 106 (Triple X) for Work Affecting the Fabric of the African Meeting House," August 11, 1988. Folder 4, Box 11, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA; Acting Manager, BOAF [Carter Lowe] to File, memorandum, re: "Amendments to CA1720-70002," March 9, 1989. Folder 8; Box 3, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA; Acting Manager, BOAF [Carter Lowe] to File, memorandum, re: "Grants to Museum of Afro American History," August 17, 1988. Folder 8; Box 3, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

³¹² "Museum of Afro American History, Board of Directors Meeting, October 4, 1989," Folder "Board Minutes, 1988–89 Financial Records," Box A004, Meg Flanigan Records, Institutional Archive, MAAH Archives, Boston, MA.

³¹³ Robert Fox, to Friend of BOAF, letter, June 17, 1991, File 128, Box 13, Collection SUA-12, Suffolk University Moakley Archives, Boston, MA.

Site Manager Ken Heidelberg

At the conclusion of Lowe's detail in March 1990, Superintendent Burchill sought a replacement who would share his view of the role of the site, with the superintendent in control of decision making and preservation goals and the site manager in charge of day-to-day operations of regular programming, in collaboration with the Museum. Burchill's attention to preservation over programming reflected his wider management style at Boston NHP. Historical programming—whether it be the changing meanings of “freedom” and “revolution” at the core of Boston NHP's interpretive program or the political and social complexity of Boston's nineteenth-century Black community—was not his forte.³¹⁴

The site manager position lay vacant for over a year. During that period, Ken Heidelberg, chief park ranger at Boston African American NHS, served as acting site manager. Heidelberg had worked at the site since 1985 and had shared Dotty Powell's vision for the site as a community-focused institution which would grow and someday establish itself as financially independent from Boston NHP. Heidelberg's hopes for an autonomous site may have been one reason he did not take the helm earlier. Superintendent Burchill initially opposed his appointment, but ultimately, Heidelberg succeeded Lowe permanently as site manager of Boston African American NHS in the summer of 1991.³¹⁵ While Heidelberg did not share Burchill's view of the role and future of the site, he already effectively managed its interpretive program and relationship with the Museum and appeared as the obvious choice for the position.

Ken Heidelberg came to the National Park Service in the early 1980s, after his service in the military. His career began as a seasonal park ranger at Adams National Historic Site, in Quincy, Massachusetts in the late 1970s where he was a visitor favorite for his storytelling capabilities.³¹⁶ Invited to apply for a position at Boston NHP in 1984, he soon began working as a park ranger under Site Manager Dotty Powell, helping with Boston African American NHS. Heidelberg became most interested in the visitor-facing aspects of park management, although he consistently expressed his frustration with the administrative dependence of the site on Boston NHP.

Ken Heidelberg represented a departure in management style from Carter Lowe. Rather than broadening the site's reach by cementing relationships with area colleges and cultural institutions, he took a close look at what the site needed in repairing its foundation: its primary relationship with the Museum of Afro American History. This relationship had frayed under Lowe's

³¹⁴ Bruggeman, *Trails of Freedom*, 375; Bruggeman describes here Burchill's preference to “blockbuster preservation projects” rather than events such as the Centennial Celebration the presented “complicated patriotic narrative of American progress.”

³¹⁵ Ken Heidelberg, personal communication, October 4, 2020; SMM, “July 23, 1991,” BOST RMR, BNHP Archives, Charlestown, MA.

³¹⁶ Heidelberg, personal communication, October 4, 2020. Adams National Historic Site became Adams National Historical Park in 1998.

management as he sought to distance the site from the Museum, both through a bid for the establishment of Friends of BOAF and by teaming more closely with other organizations. Heidelberg focused on mending the relationship by opening up communication and prioritizing the needs of the Museum. When he was officially installed as site manager in 1991, he made this explicit, stating that his first priority was to “continue to improve the relationship between the Site and the Museum of Afro American History.”³¹⁷ Heidelberg’s collaborative spirit resulted in a number of cosponsored programs. These efforts were most successful in the early years of his tenure as site manager between 1991 and 1995 and can be seen in his insistence on frequent joint Site-Museum meetings, joint sponsorship of programming such as the 10th Anniversary celebration, and cooperation for recurrent events such as the 54th Massachusetts Regiment Parade, which ran annually from 1992 through 1995.

Heidelberg’s vision for the position of site manager sought to preserve and promote Black history at the site by fostering the site’s partnership with the Museum, providing visitors with access to tours and interpretive programs already in place, and to promote the site through participation in programming with affiliated parks and other institutions. He held out hope that money would become available through the Park Service system to better fund the site. He continuously advocated to Superintendent Burchill for additional base funding and for control over the site’s budget. Unlike Lowe, however, he did not look outside the Park Service system for means of establishing site autonomy.

Heidelberg and other site staff consistently expressed their frustration in the site’s secondary priority for Boston NHP throughout the 1990s. In 1995, Heidelberg complained that he was beholden to a General Management Plan which lacked “a clear vision,” a collaborative agreement with the Museum which was being ignored, and a subordinate relationship to Boston NHP, which resulted in the site’s needs being overlooked.³¹⁸ Heidelberg’s annual reports, appended to the end of Burchill’s annual report for Boston NHP, consistently underscored that the minimal level of funding available to the site threatened to “severely impact the Site’s operation” and “[prevent] the Site from expanding programming and staffing.”³¹⁹

Boston African American NHS’s financial needs became consistently secondary to those of Boston NHP. During this period, Boston African American NHS’s site manager kept a site budget and planned for upcoming events and staffing needs. With differing sets of priorities between the

³¹⁷ Kenneth Heidelberg, “Boston African American National Historic Site’s 1991 Goals,” November 2, 1990. Folder “NPS BOAF Collaborations,” Box A008.6, Executive Director Sylvia Watts-McKinney, Institutional Archive, MAAH Archives, Boston, MA.

³¹⁸ Ken Heidelberg, “Draft Proposal for Boston African American National Historic Site,” Circa Spring 1995. Folder 9, Box 5, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

³¹⁹ Superintendent Burchill, “BOST Annual Report” FY 1997; Superintendent Burchill, “BOST Annual Report” FY 1998.

superintendent and the site manager, this distribution of labor led to problems. In a 2020 interview, Heidelberg recalled that site funds sometimes got used to fill gaps in the budget of programs conducted at Boston NHP sites. Remembering the difficulty of making plans for use of the site budget, Heidelberg found that Burchill would run programs at Bunker Hill, Dorchester Heights, or the Charlestown Navy Yard and “if they ran short on their money they would take our [Boston African American NHS] money.”³²⁰ This resulted in Boston African American NHS sitting below deck while Boston NHP charted its course. As noted above, this arrangement had been programmed into the site’s legislation, as no independent superintendent ever planned for the site. The situation was nonetheless frustrating, as the staff below the superintendent saw themselves as operating entirely separately from Boston NHP but still not in control of decision making.



Figure 10. Former Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm (D-NY) is presented an award during a joint Museum-Park event held on February 15, 1991, to celebrate the 10th Anniversary of the founding of Boston African American National Historic Site. Pictured are: Deputy Director of the NPS, Herbert S. Cables, Former Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm, Museum Executive Director Monica Fairbairn, and park Site Manager Ken Heidelberg. *National Park Service, Boston African American National Historic Site, Resource Management Records.*

Despite these limitations, the site orchestrated several landmark events in the early 1990s. One such occasion was the visit of former Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm to the site in February

³²⁰ Heidelberg, personal communication, October 7, 2020.

1991. Heidelberg arranged for Chisholm to be the Black History Month speaker in collaboration with the Museum of Afro American History, as part of the tenth anniversary celebration of the site's founding (Figure 10). That summer, the site orchestrated a "Glory Parade" to celebrate the 54th Massachusetts Regiment.³²¹

Heidelberg continued to advocate for site autonomy in the 1990s, even as an emphasis on organizational efficiency within the NPS after the 1995 restructuring of the agency made independence increasingly unlikely. In the mid-1990s, Superintendent Burchill reported that the Regional Office was "streamlining" as much as possible, leading to more administrative burdens being delegated to the parks.³²² Whereas Boston NHP had steady operating budget increases, Burchill anticipated hardship as "costs, particularly utility and payroll, [were] increasing faster" than budgets.³²³ The trend on the horizon became clear—Boston NHP and Boston African American NHS trended toward more administrative, fiscal, and interpretive consolidation, not less.

The Relationship between the Museum and the Site in the 1990s

During the 1990s, the site manager continued to manage daily operation of the site and its day-to-day relationship with the Museum of Afro American History. During Carter Lowe's time as site manager, this relationship was somewhat strained. Lowe pursued partnerships with other institutions, felt NPS support of the Museum to be underappreciated, and had difficulty managing complex operations issues. In 1989, Burchill delegated to Lowe the task of obtaining a "historic exemption" for the African Meeting House after the Boston City Fire Department cited the Museum for its lack of wheelchair accessibility.³²⁴ Lowe could not resolve the issue and Burchill had to step in and obtained a two-year time variance on the condition that the Park Service appropriate funds for the construction of an elevator at the African Meeting House.³²⁵ When Lowe left in 1990, the site's relationship with the Museum lay somewhat bruised.

Site Manager Ken Heidelberg sought to recenter the role of the Museum as the site's primary partner after his predecessor's management style had put the Museum on the back burner.

³²¹ SMM, "November 13, 1990," BOST RMR, BNHP Archives, Charlestown, MA; SMM, "February 26, 1991," BOST RMR, BNHP Archives, Charlestown, MA; SMM, "May 30, 1991," BOST RMR, BNHP Archives, Charlestown, MA.

³²² SMM, "April 19, 1994," BOST RMR, BNHP Archives, Charlestown, MA. Burchill mentions the Regional Office is in the process of streamlining in spring 1994.

³²³ SMM, "January 18, 1994," BOST RMR, BNHP Archives, Charlestown, MA.

³²⁴ "History," Folder "National Park Service," Box A008.22, Executive Director Sylvia Watts-McKinney, Institutional Archive, MAAH Archives, Boston, MA.

³²⁵ "Amended Decision," re: Afro-American Meeting House, Boston. Chairman, Massachusetts Architectural Access Board (Gerald LaBlanc), March 30, 1990. Folder 8, Box 1, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

Heidelberg, having worked with the Museum for years on a day-to-day basis as chief park ranger, had familiarity with past communication and consultation missteps, sympathy for the Museum's desire to be involved in all decision making, and saw the benefits of the Museum maintaining an independent identity from the site.³²⁶ The Museum's executive director at the time, Monica Fairbairn, embraced frequent cooperation and communication with the site and demonstrated an openness to sharing credit for programming at the African Meeting House and Abiel Smith School.

Serving from 1989 through 1992, Monica Fairbairn brought an outlook to the Museum that prioritized interpretive services and education as the Museum sought a new direction after the opening of the African Meeting House. Her willingness to allow the Park Service a seat at the Museum's table became less popular with the Board. This was in part because a tight association with the National Park Service made it difficult for the Museum to establish an autonomous identity and created logistical problems with collecting fees.³²⁷ As the site's enabling legislation did not allow it to collect fees, the Museum reluctantly found itself without this stream of income for Black Heritage Trail tours. As a result, the Museum considered advertising special events apart from the site to retain the ability to collect fees.³²⁸

The Board also remained interested in keeping some distance between the NPS and the Museum to retain as much control as possible of the historic resources themselves. The Museum planned to be the stewards of not only the African Meeting House, which they owned, but also the Abiel Smith School, which they negotiated with the City of Boston to lease, and the Nantucket African Meeting House (Nantucket AMH), which they purchased in 1989.³²⁹ The Museum speculated that the Park Service lacked the will or ability to fulfill its promises with respect to the African Meeting House and therefore could not be trusted as the stewards of the Black history resources that they sought to protect.³³⁰ Heidelberg remembered Fairbairn's favorability waning by 1993 within the Museum Board because "whatever she did she always wanted the park [Boston African American

³²⁶ Heidelberg explicitly puts the need of the Museum first in his outlining of goals for 1990; Kenneth Heidelberg, "Boston African American National Historic Site's 1991 Goals," November 2, 1990. Folder "NPS BOAF Collaborations," Box A008.6, Executive Director Sylvia Watts-McKinney, Institutional Archive, MAAH Archives, Boston, MA.; Heidelberg also reported in 1990 that the relationship with MAAH "continues to improve..." with the Park and Museum "collaborating on programming and other functions." SMM, "June 12, 1990," BOST RMR, BNHP Archives, Charlestown, MA.

³²⁷ "BOAF/MAHH Joint Staff Meeting Minutes: March 4, 1991," Folder "NPS BOAF Collaborations," Box A008.6, Executive Director Sylvia Watts-McKinney, Institutional Archive, MAAH Archives, Boston, MA.

³²⁸ "BOAF/MAAH Joint Staff Meeting Minutes," May 11, 1991. Folder "NPS BOAF Collaborations," Box A008.6, Executive Director Sylvia Watts-McKinney, Institutional Archive, MAAH Archives, Boston, MA.

³²⁹ Ellen P. Berkland, "The Centering of an African-American Community: An Archaeological Study of the African Baptist Society Meeting House, Nantucket, Massachusetts" (master's thesis, Boston University, 1999), 15.

³³⁰ "Museum of African American History Board of Directors Meeting, November 13th, 1996," Folder "1996–1997," Box A001.2, Board of Directors Files, Institutional Archive, MAAH Archives, Boston, MA. During joint meetings between the site and the Museum, Sylvia Watts-McKinney voiced that the Museum felt they are being treated unfairly and given disproportionately less support compared with other major Boston historic sites.

NHS] to be involved [be]cause she thought that ... the park had more resources” but at the same time “the people in the Museum [Board] wanted the Museum to be full front and center.”³³¹

Under Fairbairn’s direction, the Museum launched a fundraising campaign for the restoration of the Nantucket AMH in 1991. The Nantucket AMH, constructed as a school and church in the 1820s by the thriving Black community on Nantucket, by the early 1990s, lay in severe disrepair. As this resource is not part of Boston African American NHS, the Park Service was not involved in managing the property. Superintendent Burchill did show his support for the project, however, by providing a letter of recommendation as part of the Museum’s application for a National Trust for Historic Preservation grant.³³² On August 8, 1992, the Museum rededicated the Nantucket AMH and launched a \$1.5 million restoration drive to rehabilitate the building, acquire artifacts, and establish an endowment.³³³ The Friends of the African Meeting House on Nantucket and corporate and private donors provided crucial fundraising support, which made the restoration possible by 1999. Fundraising for the project became difficult, however, as the needs of the Museum’s Boston properties also pressed for finances.

Further complicating the Site-Museum relationship in the early 1990s was confusion surrounding NPS fundraising policies and the service’s funding cycle, the latter of which could lead to delays in the Museum acquiring program funds until long after programs had been staged.³³⁴ For an organization with a thin budget, fronting money for programs that the Park Service would reimburse them for created enormous financial strain and anxiety for the Museum Board and executive director. By the end of 1992, Fairbairn had handed in her resignation and the Museum began operating “on an interim basis” as staff turned over and a weak financial picture made full operations difficult.³³⁵ It wouldn’t be until the spring of 1994 that the Museum hired a new executive director.

During the 1990s, the Museum increasingly recognized its need to assert institutional autonomy and to better formalize control of the future of the African Meeting House and the Abiel Smith

³³¹ Heidelberg, personal communication, October 9, 2020.

³³² John Burchill to Nicholas Rabe, letter, February 1, 1991. Folder “Burchill,” Box A008.6, Executive Director Sylvia Watts-McKinney, Institutional Archive, MAAH Archives, Boston, MA.

³³³ Bruce McCabe, “For listeners of all tastes: Folk, jazz and gospel.” *Boston Globe*, August 8, 1992, 53, 55.

³³⁴ For example, the Museum’s FY 1992 budget got initially rejected as funding was requested for administrative time which would be spent on fund-raising activities, resulting in months of delay in the acquisition of much-needed funds; Acting Regional Director, NAR [Marie Rust] to Superintendent, BNHP [John Burchill], memorandum, re: “CA 1720-700002 Amendment #11, Museum of Afro American History,” February 18, 1992. Box 3, Folder 9 MAAH General 1991–1995, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA, Central Files; Watts-McKinney, Oral History, 2021. Former Museum Executive Director Sylvia Watts-McKinney noted the delay in delivering funds created tension between the Museum and NPS.

³³⁵ Luiz Overbea, “Director of Meeting House resigns post, but leaves legacy,” *Boston Globe*, December 27, 1992, 168; SMM, “March 30, 1993,” BOST RMR, BNHP Archives, Charlestown, MA.

School. In 1991, the Museum Board considered revising the Site-Museum cooperative agreement in order to address its changing needs. At an April 1991 meeting, the Board agreed that “the Museum’s relationship with the National Park Service should continue but the current cooperative agreement must be formally amended to reflect an equal partnership relationship” with the condition that the Museum be the “sole owner of the Abiel Smith School in order to take a leadership role in defining the future use of the space.”³³⁶ Later that year, the Site and the Museum renewed the agreement with the understanding that “within 90 days the existing Cooperative Agreement will be jointly reviewed and revised.”³³⁷ Ed Blackman drafted changes to the agreement, clarifying the Museum’s ability to collect fees, articulating the Museum’s primary control of the historical narrative presented at the site, and asserting the Museum’s leadership role and the Park Service’s role as a consulting party.³³⁸ The edits were never incorporated and a thorough joint review and revision did not take place for another decade.

While the cooperative agreement did not get revised, the Museum did take other steps to seize control of the Abiel Smith School. Conveniently located adjacent to the African Meeting House, the site and the Museum had shared offices there since the mid-1980s, despite the building being owned by the City of Boston. Superintendent Burchill initially reached out to the City of Boston to establish a direct Memorandum of Understanding between the Park Service and the City for NPS occupation of the Smith School, with the City taking responsibility for preservation costs.³³⁹ This effort went nowhere, however, and the Museum and site agreed that the Museum would seek out their own direct relationship with the City. In a 1991 petition to the City, the Museum requested to be designated the developer and owner of the Abiel Smith School.³⁴⁰ With support from Mayor Thomas Menino, in 1994 the Museum signed a 99-year lease with the City of Boston for their occupancy of the property.³⁴¹ The NPS supported these decisions and continued to promise to take

³³⁶ “Long Range Planning Session,” Saturday April 27, 1991. Folder “1996–1997,” Box A001.2, Board of Directors Files, Institutional Archive, MAAH Archives, Boston, MA.

³³⁷ Monica Fairbairn, to John Burchill, letter, January 27, 1992. Folder “Cooperative Agreement,” Box A008.2, Executive Director Sylvia Watts-McKinney, Institutional Archive, MAAH Archives, Boston, MA.

³³⁸ Ed Blackman, to Executive Director, Monica Fairbairn, memorandum, re: “Cooperative Agreement,” February 5, 1992. Folder “Cooperative Agreement,” Box A008.2, Executive Director Sylvia Watts-McKinney, Institutional Archive, MAAH Archives, Boston, MA.

³³⁹ “Unsigned Memorandum of Understanding between the National Park Service and the City of Boston, Agreement No. #1720-9-8001,” circa August 1989. Folder 3, Box 3, Central Files, Box 3, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

³⁴⁰ Erlene Belton, to Members of the Board, memorandum, re: “All-Day Meeting - April 27, 1991,” June 6, 1991. Folder “April 27, 1991,” Box A001.2, Board of Directors Files, Institutional Archive, MAAH Archives, Boston, MA.

Ruth Batson and Ed Blackman (Chairs of the Museum Board), to Frank Jones, (Commissioner of Real Property Department), City of Boston, letter, March 4, 1991. Folder “April 27, 1991,” Box A001.2, Board of Directors Files, Institutional Archive, MAAH Archives, Boston, MA.

³⁴¹ SMM, “June 21 1994,” BOST RMR, BNHP Archives, Charlestown, MA; “Rededication of the African Meeting House, December 6, 2011” Program, (Boston: Museum of African American History, 2011), 20. Folder “African

responsibility for the restoration of both the African Meeting House and the Abiel Smith School. This responsibility became formalized in 1997, when the Abiel Smith School was added to the Site-Museum cooperative agreement.³⁴²

The revised cooperative agreement and other gains became possible by the renewed relationship between the site and the Museum with the arrival of the Museum's new executive director, Sylvia Watts-McKinney, in the spring of 1994. Watts-McKinney immediately recognized the need to balance an independent institutional identity and a mutually beneficial relationship with the NPS, the Museum's largest donor. Watts-McKinney noted that while the Museum remained in dire straits financially, the "National Park Service couldn't go out of business" so it remained important to foster the ties.³⁴³ At the time, the Park Service provided the Museum with an annual support package amounting to approximately \$90,000 from the site's base operating funds. In addition to this, project funds of \$1.2 million for the second phase of the restoration of the African Meeting House had been allocated by 1994 but had not yet been spent (See Table 1, Funding Package 2). Seeing the financial need of the Museum and the limits of the site's ability to help, Watts-McKinney launched a capital campaign in 1997 to raise \$3.2 million for restoration projects and to create an endowment for the financial sustenance of the Museum. The seed of the campaign lay in the \$1.2 million already allocated by the Park Service.³⁴⁴

The capital campaign became necessarily separate from the operations of the site, due to fundraising rules within the National Park Service. Primarily known as a local museum supported financially by key community members, the health of the Museum required broadening its base. The programs and events sponsored as part of the capital campaign served to reach new audiences and donors and to further distinguish the Museum's institutional identity from that of the National Park Service. Watts-McKinney found that donors wanted to see their money go toward tangible interpretive and educational projects, rather than into the buildings themselves.³⁴⁵ To this end, she arranged for the Museum to produce three documentaries focused on Black history, host a series of public forums on social issues at the African Meeting House, and launch special exhibitions based on new acquisitions. At the close of the three-year campaign, private and corporate

American History," Box 1, Division of Cultural Resources, Chief's/Historian's Files (Blatt), BOST RMR, BNHP Archives, Charlestown, MA; Virgil Overbea, "African Meeting House gets new lease on life," *Bay State Banner*, July 7, 1994.

³⁴² Sylvia Watts-McKinney, to Executive Director, MAAH [Beverly Morgan-Welch], memorandum, re: "Briefing Memo I: National Park Service," October 14, 1999. Folder "SWM Transition Memos, 1999–2000," Box A009, ED Beverly Morgan-Welch, Institutional Archive, MAAH Archives, Boston, MA; "Cooperative Agreement, National Park Service and The Museum of Afro American History," 1997. On file BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

³⁴³ Watts-McKinney, Oral History, 2021.

³⁴⁴ "\$3.2 Million for Priceless History," *1806: the Newsletter of the Museum of Afro American History* (Winter/Spring 1998), published by the Museum of Afro American History.

³⁴⁵ Watts-McKinney, Oral History, 2021.

supporters had pledged only \$877,027 of the planned \$2 million, while the NPS had offered an additional \$1.4 million in support of the construction projects at the site (see Table 1, Funding Package 4).³⁴⁶ The capital campaign was extended in the years after Watts-McKinney's tenure, continuing to garner support under the direction of Beverly Morgan-Welch in 1999. While the Museum was able to raise a significant amount, it was unable to establish an endowment nor provided enough funds to supplement the NPS support package to complete the African Meeting House. As a result, the Museum put more pressure on the NPS to support the restoration efforts in the years to come.

During this period, the everyday Site-Museum relationship revolved around daily operations, technical support, and preservation funding. Heidelberg's team of rangers continued to manage daily operation of the Black Heritage Trail and African Meeting House tours. At the higher level, Burchill facilitated the preservation projects at the African Meeting House and Abiel Smith School. The preservation of the Abiel Smith School occupied much of Watts-McKinney and Burchill's attention throughout the decade. As a result, this project overshadowed the larger and more complicated African Meeting House restoration. The problem of wheelchair accessibility remained outstanding and was not revisited until 2001.³⁴⁷

Restoration of the Abiel Smith School

Historic preservation at the Abiel Smith School became the unintended focus of site resource stewardship in the 1990s. This preservation project brought the goals of the Museum and the site into alignment; however, completing the project involved navigating a host of problems. As noted above, Representative Moakley had been key in acquiring \$1.525 million in funding for the completion of the Phase II restoration at the African Meeting House (see Table 1, Funding Package 2). A portion of this funding package focused on restoration of the Abiel Smith School as an "administrative support space and a visitor's contact station."³⁴⁸ Since the building remained in better condition than the meeting house, and therefore represented a seemingly simpler project, the site and Museum decided to pursue the completion of the Smith School project first. In the mid-1980s, the NPS expected the restoration to cost less than \$300,000 and result in permanent administrative offices, a "visitor center" for the site, and exhibit space.³⁴⁹ Within a few years,

³⁴⁶ "Capital Campaign Donation Records," Box A039.4, Permanent Financial Records, Institutional Archive, MAAH Archives, Boston, MA.

³⁴⁷ "Accessibility Committee," Email Ruth Raphael, at NP-BOST, March 28, 2001. Folder 1, Box 7, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA, Central Files.

³⁴⁸ NPS, GMP: BOAF 1984, 26 and 35; "National Park Service Fiscal 1988 Construction Program: Boston African American National Historic Site," Folder "BOAF2," Box A004, Meg Flanigan Papers, Board of Directors, Institutional Archive, MAAH Archive, Boston, MA.

³⁴⁹ Original estimates for the work, including an HSR, exhibits, and mechanical, electrical, and structural improvements totaled \$284,000 in 1986, with no elevator noted. In the FY1988 request for funds, the estimate is

however, the Park Service and the Museum recognized that the Smith School rehabilitation project to be much more complicated and expensive than originally understood.

By 1990, the increasing office space needs of both institutions and the limitations of space in the African Meeting House convinced the NPS that the school building stood as better suited for interpretive and visitor services.³⁵⁰ Transforming the building into public space required the Park Service to bring the building up to code, which meant providing access to the building for people with disabilities to meet the standards of the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board. In 1991, the Regional Office began exploring the costs and logistics of installing wheelchair access and conducted preliminary archaeological investigations in advance of finalizing plans for a wheelchair lift or ramp to the backlot at the Smith School.³⁵¹ As project plans developed in the following years, however, avoidance of expensive archaeological mitigation became impossible, and the funds for the investigation came out of the overall budget for the project, leaving less money for the Meeting House restoration. Additionally, high architectural and engineering design costs, the need for extensive improvements to the heating and cooling system in the building, and the installation of an elevator took a toll on the finances of the project.³⁵² By the mid-1990s, the funds associated with Funding Package 2 became entirely devoted to the rehabilitation of the Smith School. Seeing the costs of the Abiel Smith School work escalate, Superintendent Burchill began requesting additional funding for the stalled African Meeting House restoration in 1996. In 1998, the government appropriated an additional for the restoration of the African Meeting House and the completion of the exhibits at the Smith School (see Table 1, Funding Package 4).

Coordination of the planning for the Abiel Smith School restoration remained a complicated public-private endeavor between the Museum, architects, NPS Regional Office, Boston NHP, and the site itself. While the regional Cultural Resources Center managed the project's progress in

noted as based on “combination of completed construction plans [for the African Meeting House], advance and project planning documents”; “National Park Service Fiscal 1988 Construction Program: Boston African American National Historic Site,” and “Boston African American National Historic Site: Funding Requirements, July 21, 1986,” Folder “Special Budgets,” Box A004, Meg Flanigan Papers, Board of Directors, Institutional Archive, MAAH Archive, Boston, MA.

³⁵⁰ Superintendent, BOST [John Burchill], to Regional Director, NARO [Gerald D. Patten], memorandum, Re: “Smith School and African Meeting House Projects,” April 30, 1990. Folder “Abiel Smith School Renovations,” Box A004, Meg Flanigan Papers, Board of Directors, Institutional Archive, MAAH Archive, Boston, MA; John Burchill, “Statement for Management: Boston African American National Historic Site, October 1990.” Folder 2, Box 5, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA. Note: The Statement for Management indicates one management objective as: “Relocate offices now in the Smith School so that the space there may be used for program purposes identified in the GMP and the Interpretive Prospectus.”

³⁵¹ Marie Rust [Regional Director, NARO], to Brona Simon [Deputy SHPO], letter, September 5, 1991. Box 2 of 12, NARA National Historic Preservation Act, Section 106 Records 1980–1995, RG0079 National Park Service, National Archives, Waltham, MA.

³⁵² Stull and Lee Architects “Meeting Minutes,” Folder 9, Box 17, Site Manager Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

coordination with Steve Carlson at Boston NHP, managing the expectations and needs of the Beacon Hill community was delegated to Site Manager Ken Heidelberg. Heidelberg regularly held public meetings, sent notices to homeowners, and fielded the concerns of residents with regard to the project schedule, traffic disruptions, and parking issues.³⁵³ Originally, Boston NHP, in concert with the Museum of Afro American History, the architects Stull and Lee, and the site, prepared the construction plans to go out to bid in 1993.³⁵⁴ In their review of the project, however, the State Historic Preservation Office found that the project had not met the requirements of Section 106 of the NHPA.³⁵⁵ To mitigate the impact of the project, Phase III archaeological data recovery took place in 1995 and 1997.³⁵⁶

In the spring of 1998, the NPS awarded the contract for the “Exterior Restoration and Interior Adaptive Re-Use of Abiel Smith School” to the Lumus Hahs Construction Company of Wakefield, Massachusetts, for the sum of \$739,000.³⁵⁷ The site and Museum held a ground-breaking for the Abiel Smith School restoration on May 18, 1998, attended by a host of political leaders and activists who had long been supporters of preservation efforts at the site (Figure 11).

The project, originally slated for completion by the end of 1998, experienced several construction-related delays as the contractors requested change orders for out-of-scope repair needs. Twelve modifications to the contract were processed, resulting in a revised contract amount of over \$911,000 by autumn of 1999, when the restoration finished.³⁵⁸ The additional costs strained the Museum and site’s budgets for the restoration work. With every modification, less money was available for the exhibits planned at the Smith School. Nonetheless, the restoration and exhibits were completed, and the school was reopened to the public on February 21, 2000.³⁵⁹

³⁵³ “Minutes of the Meeting for Smith Court Residents and Neighbors on the Restoration of the Smith School Project,” May 12, 1998, Folder 4, Box 6, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

³⁵⁴ SMM, “November 16, 1993,” BOST RMR, BNHP Archives, Charlestown, MA.

³⁵⁵ Judith B. McDonough [State Historic Preservation Officer], to John Burchill [Superintendent, BOST], letter, “Re: Abiel Smith School and African Meeting House, Boston African American National Historic Site, Boston, Mass (MHC#7967).” Folder 4, Box 27, Design and Construction Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

³⁵⁶ Steven R. Pendery and Leslie A. Mead, “Archaeological Investigations at Boston African American National Historic Site, Boston Massachusetts,” Archeology Branch, Northeast Cultural Resource Center, Boston System Support Office, Lowell: National Park Service, 1999.

³⁵⁷ SMM, “February 17, 1998,” BOST RMR, BNHP Archives, Charlestown, MA; Richard Armenia (NPS Contracting Officer), to Sumul Shah (President, Lumus Hahs Corporation), Notice to Proceed, May 1, 1998. Folder 4, Box 7, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

³⁵⁸ Peter Steele, “Building on our First Quarter Century,” *Broadside*, no. 4 (1999): 3; Nancy Tansino (NPS Contracting), to Sumul Shah (President Lumus Hahs Corporation), Letter of Partial Acceptance, January 13, 2000. “RE: Contract Number 1443-CX1720-98-002, ‘Exterior Restoration and Interior Adaptive Re-Use of Abiel Smith School,’ Boston African American NHS.” Folder 3, Box 6, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

³⁵⁹ “Abiel Smith schoolhouse reopens as Museum site,” *Boston Globe*, February 22, 2000, B3.

In an effort to fulfill this new commitment, Superintendent Burchill began asking for additional base funding for fiscal year 1999 in light of the expansion of the site into the Smith School. With site capacities already stretched past their limit, he asked for an increase of \$250,000 to fund maintenance of the new building, add staff, and funds for the Museum to expand education and outreach.³⁶⁰ With the completion of the Smith School rehabilitation, the site had reached an important turning point. The 2000s would bring the next phase in the preservation efforts of the site: progress toward the full restoration of the African Meeting House. At the same time, the site's interpretive program, still materially the same as it had been since the early 1980s, had a lot of work to do to catch up with the progress the site had made in the realm of preservation.



Figure 11. Museum of African American History, National Park Service, and political supporters of Boston African American National Historic Site pose with shovels at the ground-breaking for the restoration of the Abiel Smith School on May 18, 1998. (*From left to right*): Former Museum Chairman Henry Hampton, Museum Board Chair Michele Courton-Brown, Congressman John Joseph Moakley, Ira Jackson of BankBoston, and Boston African American National Historic Site Superintendent John Burchill. *National Park Service, Boston African American National Historic Site, Resource Management Records.*

³⁶⁰ "Support information for ONPS Funding Request," Folder 3, Box 6, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

Boston African American NHS Interpretive Program

The 1990 increase in base operating funds allowed for the staffing of more tours and interpretive talks at the African Meeting House just as demand for NPS services rose. African American history enjoyed increased attention within the National Park Service, academia, and in popular culture. The 1989 release of the movie *Glory*, depicting experiences of the 54th Massachusetts Regiment, followed the 1987 debut of Henry Hampton's *Eyes on the Prize* series on the civil rights movement. The site and the Museum sought to capitalize on this increased interest and visitation by creating programs that would draw new audiences.

Between 1983 and 1997, visitation to the site rose over 2,000 percent.³⁶¹ During the 1990s, annual visitation consistently exceeded 350,000 people, although approximately 90 percent (~300,000) of these visitors interacted with the site at the Shaw/54th Regiment Memorial, with the balance visiting the African Meeting House or taking the Black Heritage Trail tour.³⁶² Still, the site provided Black Heritage Trail tours to 9,715 visitors in 1993, and visitation rose steadily throughout the decade before peaking at 14,708 visitor taking tours in 1999. African Meeting House visitors in 1993 numbered 13,390, a figure which rose to 25,783 persons in 1999. Clearly, demand for interpretive services at the site had increased over time, even as restoration of the African Meeting House remained incomplete throughout the decade and the Abiel Smith School remained not yet opened to the public.

To meet the demand for Boston African American NHS interpretive services, the NPS hired new site staff in 1992, including park rangers Bernadette Williams and Frank Middleton, administrative assistant Lauren Macchia, and seasonal park rangers. The staff make-up proved a diverse group, consisting of seasoned Black park rangers, veterans, and disabled individuals.³⁶³ By their own accounts, site staff became personally invested in the stories of the site and to its success. The long careers of the staff hired during this period speak to their personal dedication to the site—Williams served as supervisory park ranger for sixteen years and Middleton worked at the site for eighteen years. Both routinely took on responsibilities beyond work hours to attend Black history events at

³⁶¹ Planner, BNHP [Ruth Raphael], to Superintendent BNHP [John Burchill] and others, memorandum, re: "General Management Proposal for Boston African American National Historic Site," May 1, 1997. Folder 2, Box 6, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

³⁶² Boston African American National Historic Site Visitation Data, "Year to Date Reports," accessed December 21, 2021, <https://irma.nps.gov/STATS/Reports/Park/BOAF>. Estimates for visitation numbers were compiled from each year's December Year-to-Date reported counts.

³⁶³ Heidelberg, personal communication, October 4, 2020. Heidelberg remembered that the diversity of the BOAF folder into Boston NHP's Equal Employment Opportunities quota, and thus prevented more diverse staff from being hired at Boston NHP's other sites.

historical societies, schools, and other organizations. Both also stepped into leadership roles at the site when needed, to serve as temporary site manager or as liaisons with the site's collaborators.³⁶⁴

With its larger staff, Ken Heidelberg arranged for park rangers to provide regular tours of the Black Heritage Trail, stationed seasonal park rangers at key resources, coordinated Black History Month activities, and collaborated on special outreach and education programs with the Regional Office, Boston NHP, and other parks. The superintendent's expectation of the site manager of Boston African American NHS continued to be that he would make sure the "trains [ran] on time".³⁶⁵ Demand was so high at times that Heidelberg reported that the entire staff, including the site manager, had to cover tours.³⁶⁶ In 1996, the site had inadequate time and staff to offer more than "the most basic core programs."³⁶⁷ As a result the site had to close on the weekends, and eliminate winter seasonal hiring.

The expansion of programming took on a variety of forms. Federal funding for research on the Underground Railroad resulted in new interpretive programs, including a puppet show for young children beginning in 1994.³⁶⁸ The site's interpretive program became also enhanced beyond the Black Heritage Trail through its educational outreach program, via a partnership with Boston NHP and Boston Public Schools for the "People and Places" program. As mentioned above, Heidelberg also staged a 54th Regiment Parade each year for the first half of the decade, but by 1995, the site no longer had the staff time nor money to support the program.³⁶⁹

The varied interpretive programs offered under Heidelberg's management belied a lack of investment in interpretive planning, which became increasingly problematic during the 1990s. While the Museum had undertaken the research to create the Black Heritage Trail in the 1960s and 1970s, the histories of the resources along the trail were not well developed. Additionally, no single research document articulated the interpretive narrative of the site. Ten years after the founding of

³⁶⁴ Superintendent's Meeting Minutes from the 1990s document the frequent attendance of Williams, Middleton, and Heidelberg at conferences, receptions, giving lectures, and partaking in seminars, many of which took place in the evenings. SMM, BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

³⁶⁵ Martin Blatt, Oral History Interview conducted by Teresa Bulger and Nedra Lee, June 8, 2021. Boston African American National Historic Site Administrative History Oral History Project.

³⁶⁶ "BOAF/MAAH Joint Staff Meeting Minutes," March 4, 1991. Folder "NPS BOAF Collaborations," Box A008.6, Executive Director Sylvia Watts-McKinney, Institutional Archive, MAAH Archives, Boston, MA; Superintendent Burchill, "BOST Annual Report" FY 1998.

³⁶⁷ "BOAF Ideas on Budget," Spring 1996. Folder 13, Box 7, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

³⁶⁸ Boston African American NHS began development of the puppet show in 1993, focusing on the Underground Railroad and the Sarah Roberts case. The program was continued into the late 1990s; Superintendent Burchill, "BOST Annual Report" FY 1997; Superintendent Burchill, "BOST Annual Report" FY 1998.

³⁶⁹ David Cunningham (Secretary, 54th Regiment Company A), to Charles Taylor (Boston African American NHS), letter, May 13, 1995. Folder "54th Regiment," Box A008.6, Executive Director Sylvia Watts-McKinney, Institutional Archives, MAAH Archive, Boston, MA.

the site, its training materials included the Black Heritage Trail brochure itself and a number of books and articles related to Black history in Boston.³⁷⁰ Furthermore, the interpretive program at Boston African American NHS remained a largely descriptive, “culture history” approach to the story of the Black community in nineteenth-century Boston. Broader questions about the meaning of the social movements of the nineteenth century within the context of New England and the wider country were largely undeveloped. This stands in stark contrast to the original intent and impetus for the trail, which included in part to highlight the city’s “struggle with a liberal Boston social conscience which has supported social change elsewhere but has resisted advancements at home.”³⁷¹

The need for additional research and historical context to support the interpretive themes of the site were flagged in the early 1980s by Boston NHP and the Regional Office’s historians. During planning for the 1984 GMP, Dwight Pitcaithley and Paul Weinbaum suggested a Historic Resource Study (HRS) could address a wide range of research topics to both generate basic information about the community on Beacon Hill and to ask critical questions about race relations and class in Boston in the nineteenth century.³⁷² Weinbaum had undertaken research on many of the site’s resources and also provided critical feedback about the one-dimensional history presented in the site GMP.³⁷³ In 1984, the Regional Chief of Cultural Resources, Francis McManamon, recommended that the NPS allocate \$50,000 for the study.³⁷⁴ The HRS did not get funded, and the

³⁷⁰ “Required Reading List for Summer of 1989,” Addendum to the Annual Statement for Interpretation and Visitor’s Service for Boston African American National Historic Site, 1991. Folder 5, Box 12, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA; The reading list includes several articles and books specifically related to the Massachusetts 54th Regiment and the archaeology and history of the Black community on Beacon Hill. Essential works included *Black Bostonians* (James and Lois Horton) and “The African Meeting House” (Beth Ann Bower and Byron Rushing). Other sources included the unpublished “Blacks of Beacon Hill” (Mary Young) and published sources such as *A Brave Black Regiment* (Louis F. Emilio), *The Sable Arm* (Dudley Taylor Cornish), *Blake, or The Huts of America* (Martin Delany), and *There is a River* (Vincent Harding), and Sidney Kaplan’s “The Black Soldier of the Civil War in Literature and Art.”

³⁷¹ The Boston 200 Corporation, *Boston: The Official Bicentennial Guidebook* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1975), 203.

³⁷² “Historic Resource Study Topics,” Folder “BOAF HRS 1983–1984,” Box 16 of 90, BOAF, NARO CRM Division Records 1931–1995, RG0079 National Park Service, National Archives, Waltham, Massachusetts. The topics appear to have been developed by Paul Weinbaum (BNHP Historian) and Dwight Pitcaithley (NARO Regional Historian) in conversations with each other.

³⁷³ Superintendent John Burchill, “Annual Report 1984,” Folder BNHP Annual Reports 1978–1989, Box Staff Meetings and Annual Reports, Superintendent Files, BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown MA:33; Burchill reports that “National Register Documentation was prepared for the 15 sites of Boston African American National Historic Site.”; Historian, BNHP [Paul Weinbaum] to Planner, NAR [Rolf Diamant], memorandum, re: “BOAF - GMP,” June 13, 1984. Folder 2, Box 6, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA. While several National Register nominations for individual sites are on file with the NPS, a comprehensive National Register nomination for Boston African American NHS as a whole was not drafted until 2020.

³⁷⁴ Chief of Cultural Resources, NAR [Francis McManamon] to Chief, Programs and Budget, NAR [Charles Clapper], memorandum, re: “Historic Resource Study, BOAF,” September 20, 1984. Folder “BOAF HRS 1983–1984,” Box 16 of 90, BOAF, NARO CRM Division Records 1931–1995, RG0079 National Park Service, National Archives, Waltham, MA.

site's interpretive narrative remained skeletal. From within the site, calls for these studies continued, including in the 1987 Resource Management Plan and the 1989 Boston African American NHS Interpretive Prospectus, but neither call for more research funding was heeded.³⁷⁵

With few funding pools to draw from but with hopes of enhancing interpretation along the Black Heritage Trail, the site pursued funding for a research study through the NPS's ethnography program. This program, which the NPS initiated in 1981, had just gained funding in 1990 and was seeking parks which could integrate applied ethnography into their planning and research programs.³⁷⁶ The site was approached in the summer of 1993 to participate and in 1994 staff at both Boston parks participated in a seminar on ethnography and a private contractor produced a report. First conceptualized as a project to create a "'mental map' of the North Slope African American community at the turn of the century," the resulting report did not produce any usable interpretive material.³⁷⁷ The site continued to lack well-developed interpretive materials.

The inability of site and regional leadership to gain funds for a historic resource study and develop a strong research program at the site continued into the 1990s. This may have been due to the fact that the site's existing interpretive program stood, even in its anemic state, ahead of many Park Service units, which had yet to explore or acknowledge the ways that African Americans are integral to American history.³⁷⁸ In contrast to the majority of the National Park Service's parks and historic sites, which had not asked how Black history formed a part of their stories, the Boston African American NHS provided representation for Black Americans. The existence of huge gaps in knowledge at the site did not seem to perturb Superintendent Burchill, nor the 1990s regional staff who might have the capability to find funds to generate a historic resource study, historic structure reports, interpretive plans, or theme studies of particular topics related to Black history in Boston.

³⁷⁵ BOAF Resource Management Plan, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA, Box 16, Folder 15; National Park Service, "Interpretive Prospectus," Boston African American National Historic Site, Boston, Massachusetts, February 16, 1989. BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA, Site Manager Files: Lowe, Box 11, Folder 3.

³⁷⁶ National Park Service, *Legacy: Muriel 'Miki' Crespi: National Park Service Chief Ethnographer* (Washington DC: National Center for Cultural Resources, Archeology and Ethnography Program, 2008), 15, 22.

³⁷⁷ Historian, BOST [Louis Hutchins] to Regional Ethnographer, NARO, memorandum, re: "Boston Ethno-History Project Report," December 16, 1994. Folder 3, Box 11, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA; Lee D. Baker, "Exploring the Veil: The Hidden Legacy of the African Meeting House," Folder 3, Box 11, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

³⁷⁸ Sociologist Richard Miller wrote in his 1991 analysis of the NPS: "A new, 'inclusionary' or 'multicultural' approach is insisted upon by those who recognize that NPS priorities were previously focused—regardless of other controversies—almost entirely upon the positive historical accomplishments of Americans of European descent"; Richard E. Miller, "The National Park Service and the Afro-American Experience: An Independent Assessment from the Black Perspective." Prepared for the National Park Service (Washington DC: Afro-American Institute for Historic Preservation and Community Development, 1991), 2.

In the absence of financial support, the staff could do little to invigorate the interpretive program, although some tried. In 1994, Garrett Lee, working in the regional planning department after having served at Boston African American NHS as a park ranger, took on the task of attempting to begin a historic resource study by outlining a number of sites that could be added to the site under the theme of the “Abolitionist Movement.”³⁷⁹ His efforts proved foundational almost ten years later, when Boston NHP Historian Martin Blatt began advocating for a historic resource study in 2002.³⁸⁰

The site’s Black Heritage Trail brochure and secondary source reading was supplemented by documentation projects undertaken by the Regional Office, including the publication of historic structures reports from the African Meeting House in 1994 and the Abiel Smith School in 1998.³⁸¹ While a brochure guided the tour, each tour would be enhanced by the specific knowledge of the park ranger giving it, with alterations to the standard tour path and additional stops undertaken at the discretion of the ranger (Figure 12). These strands of information, however, were not brought together in a cohesive interpretive plan nor in new training materials.

Outreach from other parks and institutions represented a significant means for the expansion of interpretive programs at Boston African American NHS in the 1990s. Increasingly during this period, the academic community and the National Park Service alike recognized the importance of Black history to the understanding of American history. Through these new partnerships, the site’s interpretive program received an influx of energy, research, and public visibility.

Critical History at Boston African American NHS

Just as the African Meeting House opened in the late 1980s, the National Park Service began to take a critical look at its operations and interpretive frameworks to be more inclusive and reflect the cultural diversity of the nation. This self-reflection involved interrogating the themes and narratives that guided interpretation at its historical parks as well as the mechanisms by which it hired and retained its staff. With “inclusivity” as the ideal, the histories of African Americans and other minority groups were added to many National Park interpretive programs, in particular those

³⁷⁹ Garrett Lee, “Exploring Abolitionist Themes,” April 1994. BOST Archives, Resource Management Records, Chief of Cultural Resources/Historian [Marty Blatt], African American History, Box 1, Folder BOAF; An undated version of this study, scoped as a “Boundary Study” is available in BOAF, Central Files, Box 5, Folder 5.

³⁸⁰ “Historic Resource Study, Boston African American National Historic Site. Scope of Work,” circa 2002, BOST Archives, Resource Management Records, Chief of Cultural Resources/Historian [Marty Blatt], African American History, Box 1, Folder BOAF.

³⁸¹ Yocum, Historic Structure Report: African Meeting House; Barbara Yocum, Historic Structure Report: Smith School House, Boston African American National Historic Site, Boston National Historical Park, Boston, Massachusetts (Boston: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1998). Notably the Smith School House HSR was written in 1990, but not published until 1998.

related to the Civil War, although these additions did not necessarily lead to a critical analysis of a park's core interpretive program.



Figure 12. Black Heritage Trail Map, circa 1990s. Note additional stops and alternate route indicated on the map. *National Park Service, Boston African American National Historic Site, Resource Management Records.*

This renewed look at American history was the result of a number of dominoes falling in the 1980s and early 1990s. In the late 1980s, NPS historians began to recognize the deficiencies in the existing “Thematic Framework” used to categorize the significance of units of the National Park Service.³⁸² In 1990, Congress called for a revision to the framework to be more inclusive of the “full diversity of American History.” A collaboration between the NPS and the Organization of American Historians resulted in a call for a framework which incorporated social history, multiple

³⁸² Laura Feller and Page Putnam Miller, “Public History in the Parks: Public History and the National Park Service.” *Perspectives on History: Newsmagazine of the American Historical Association* (January 2000), accessed December 21, 2021, <https://www.historians.org/>; Whisnant et al., *Imperiled Promise*, 25.

perspectives, and interdisciplinary research, instead of a focus on linear change and progress narratives.

Congressional action related to Civil War-focused national parks in the late 1980s reflected this new attention to cultural diversity. When drafting legislation for the expansion or establishment of new Civil War-era parks, Congress required that the wider historical context of the Civil War to be part of the interpretation at those parks.³⁸³ Another important congressional action was the authorization of the Underground Railroad Special Resource Study in 1990.³⁸⁴

To assess problems at existing parks, the National Park Service commissioned a study on African American history interpretation at its parks.³⁸⁵ To encourage the development of research on the contributions of non-white Americans, the NPS began to publish research on these groups. Three volumes of the NPS journal *CRM* focused attention exclusively on Black history in 1996, 1997, and 1998.³⁸⁶ In addition, the National Park Service made other important strides toward inclusion in the 1990s with the founding of a number of national parks focused on civil rights history, Native American history, and Black history.

Former National Park Service Chief Historian (1995–2005) Dwight Pitcaithley credits this shift to a number of factors, including the growing body of literature on African American history and slavery, but also “the growing number of museums and historic sites dedicated to African American history” and “the growth of better-educated and more sophisticated cadre of historic-site and Museum administrators.”³⁸⁷

³⁸³ Dwight T. Pitcaithley, “‘A Cosmic Threat’: The National Park Service Addresses the Causes of the American Civil War,” in *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*, eds. James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton (New York: The New Press, 2006), 172.

³⁸⁴ National Park Service, *Underground Railroad Special Resource Study, Management Concepts and Environmental Assessment* (Washington DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1995). In 1990, Congress authorized the NPS to conduct a Special Resource Study of the Underground Railroad, its routes, and operations in order to preserve and interpret this aspect of United States history. In 1998, President Clinton signed the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Act. That act established a program which provides support and technical assistance to historic sites associated with the Underground Railroad. The Museum’s education program, “Resisting for Justice—The African Meeting House and the Rescue of Shadrach Minkins,” was selected for inclusion in the Network to Freedom Program.

³⁸⁵ Miller, “The National Park Service and the Afro-American Experience.”

³⁸⁶ Patricia Wilson, “Historic Preservation and the African American Community: A Measure of Commitment to Cultural Diversity,” *CRM* 17, no. 5 (1994): 21–25. The three thematic *CRM* Volumes on the subject included: Ronald Greenberg (editor), “Connections: African American History and CRM,” *CRM* 19, no. 2 (1996); “African American History: A Remembering,” *CRM* 20, no. 2 (1997); and Ronald Greenberg (editor), “Slavery and Resistance,” *CRM* 21, no. 4 (1998).

³⁸⁷ Pitcaithley, “A Cosmic Threat,” 171.

At Boston African American NHS, this Service-wide reexamination of the Park Service's interpretive framework led to renewed attention to the site. One of the earliest analyses observed that the Black Heritage Trail remained somewhat siloed to one corner of Boston's NPS landscape. In 1992, historian Richard Miller took issue with the fact that the Black Heritage Trail and the Freedom Trail were spatially and narratively distinct, leading to the perception that "one trail [is] for Blacks and another named 'freedom,' which seems to be for everyone else."³⁸⁸ Even though this did not appear to be the intention of the Park Service's design, the practical effect was one of segregating Black history from white history.

For some observers, Boston African American NHS fulfilled the congressional mandates for interpretive inclusivity by the very fact that the site highlighted the contributions of Black historical figures and communities. Ethnographer Helán Page examined Boston NHP in the mid-1990s for interpretive blind spots with respect to African American History.³⁸⁹ She chose to omit an analysis of Boston African American NHS because "our assumption, based on prior experience with BOAF, was that it seems to model what BOST might emulate ... BOAF is already doing an exceptionally good job of articulating African American historical perspectives, encouraging African American visitorship, and implementing African Americans' cultural resources management priorities to the extent that funding allows." With this intentional omission, the researcher chose not to ask how a Black history site may need to improve. In the case of Boston African American NHS, this oversight obscured the fact that the site lacked research funding to bolster its interpretive framework and skirted around the issue of the effects of systematically underfunding an important Black history site.

Throughout the 1990s, the NPS tapped that site as a locale for African American history programming. Boston African American NHS joined the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Program as "a repository for information on the Underground Railroad for the NPS Northeast Region" and park ranger Tara Morrison, then the education specialist, worked to identify Underground Railroad sites in New England.³⁹⁰ In 1994 alone, the site hosted the International Conference on Population and Development in March, a Service-wide training for the "African Americans in the National Park Service Ethnography Program" in April, and a Regional "Intercultural Training" session in September, all in addition to the site's regular programming and the Museum's programming.³⁹¹ The Superintendent's Meeting Minutes and notes in *The*

³⁸⁸ Miller, "The National Park Service and the Afro-American Experience," 107.

³⁸⁹ Helán Page, "African Americans and National Parks in the New England Cluster." Unpublished Technical Report, Prepared for Rebecca Joseph, Director of Regional Ethnography, New England System Support Office, National Park Service (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1998), 1.

³⁹⁰ Nancy Walker, "Study sought to identify Underground Railroad sites," *Boston Globe*, April 28, 1990, 348W; Superintendent Burchill, "BOST Annual Report" FY 1998.

³⁹¹ "BNHP News Notes," *Broadside* (Spring 1994), 7; SMM, "April 19, 1994," BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA; SMM, "October 4, 1994," BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

Broadside demonstrate that Heidelberg and Williams were frequently invited to participate in conferences and community discussion groups on topics such as Black history and race throughout the 1990s.

Boston African American NHS staff helped stage a host of Black history programs in concert with other parks. In the early 1990s, the NPS Regional Office launched a curriculum development and outreach program focused on the history of Black mariners and asked the site to participate.³⁹² The program ran for several years in the mid-1990s and blossomed into a partnership with Salem Maritime National Historic Site.³⁹³ In 1993, Boston NHP won a \$175,000 grant for a three-year program hosting an annual teachers' institute to implement the curriculum-based programming, known as the *People and Places Project*, which came to involve Boston African American NHS as a major participant.³⁹⁴ A major public history program staged by Boston NHP in 1997 focused on the Robert G. Shaw/54th Regiment Memorial, one of the site's key resources.³⁹⁵ While site staff, and especially Site Manager Ken Heidelberg, were involved in all of these efforts in some capacity, they were primarily coordinated outside the site, although using the site's status as a Black history site to undergird their programs. These efforts served the site's mission of elevating and disseminating information about the contributions of Black Bostonians before and during the Civil War, and in many cases, introduced an important means by which a progressive approach to history was introduced to the site when they were not able to pursue these projects through base funding.

The arrival of Boston NHP Historian and Chief of Cultural Resources Marty Blatt in 1996 enhanced attention to the importance of critical history at Boston African American NHS. Blatt brought to Boston his experience as a public historian and six years as historian for Lowell National Historical Park where he worked during John Burchill's tenure as superintendent of that park. As historian Seth Bruggeman has noted, Blatt's arrival at Boston NHP formed part of a larger pattern of Burchill courting Lowell staff members with Boston positions: Carter Lowe was site manager from 1989–1990; Celeste Bernardo was an interpretive ranger in the 1990s and later deputy superintendent under Terry Savage in the 2000s; John Debo served as deputy superintendent from 1986–1988; and Peter Promutico worked in the administrative division in the late 1990s and early 2000s.³⁹⁶ Blatt began to work with the staff at Boston African American NHS in 1992 when he

³⁹² "From Boston We Set Sail ... African Americans in the Maritime Industries," February 1992. Folder 12, Box 7, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

³⁹³ SMM, "October 19, 1993." BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA. The "Parks as Classroom" project, coordinated with the Salem Maritime NHS, highlighted African Americans in the Maritime Industry.

³⁹⁴ SMM, "August 10, 1993." BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

³⁹⁵ Kenneth Heidelberg to Monica Fairbairn, letter, July 9, 1991. Regarding the NARO Office initiating a "African Americans in the Maritime Industry" educational outreach program. Folder "National Park Service," Box A008.22, Exec. Dir. Sylvia Watts-McKinney Files, Institutional Archives, MAAH Archives, Boston, MA.

³⁹⁶ Bruggeman, *Trails of Freedom*, 348.

planned the *Meaning of Slavery* conference at Lowell NHP, which focused on questions about the interconnectedness of the Northern and Southern industrial complexes in the nineteenth century and placed Black history, if not Black historians, at the center of New England history.³⁹⁷

Blatt brought this focus on critical history to both Boston NHP and Boston African American NHS and began his dual appointment as historian and chief of cultural resources with the staging of the centennial celebration of the Shaw/54th Regiment Memorial, one of Boston African American NHS's key resources. This event represented the beginning of a shift in the interpretive program at Boston NHP but also represented a moment when Boston African American NHS's visibility became elevated, leading to a period of renewed interest and attention between 1997 and 2000.³⁹⁸

Robert G. Shaw/54th Regiment Memorial Centennial Celebration

The 1997 commemoration of the centennial anniversary of the dedication of the Robert G. Shaw/54th Regiment Memorial (Centennial Celebration) became one of the largest public history events ever staged by Boston NHP. What had been planned as a small celebration, march, and rally on par with the annual marches that Site Manager Heidelberg had been organizing since 1991 took on a new direction with the arrival of Blatt to the planning team in 1996.

Boston African American NHS served as “headquarters” for the annual 54th Regiment parade event and Heidelberg sat at the head of the planning committee. Each year Company A, a Black Civil War reenactor group first organized around the filming of the movie *Glory*, would travel to Boston and march in a parade, ending at the State House, to commemorate the march of the 54th Regiment out Boston in 1863 on their way to the battle at Fort Wagner. The event represented a collaborative effort with the Museum that in some cases was successful in soliciting grants to help cover costs.³⁹⁹ NPS funding for the parade had always been minimal, and by the mid-1990s this resulted in frustration from parade participants. In 1995, Company A expressed frustration at the “inept, unprofessional, excruciatingly lackadaisical and unpleasant manner” of the management of the event regarding the short notice given to Company A, the inadequate funding, and the lack of

³⁹⁷ Notably, this conference addressed a specific critique of Lowell NHP which was articulated in the NPS study of the interpretation of Black history at NPS Sites. In 1991, historian Richard Miller called for revisiting Lowell's history arguing that “Lowell NHP begs for a comparative interpretation with the South's cotton culture without which the textile mills of Massachusetts could not have been sustained.” Miller, “The National Park Service and the Afro-American Experience,” 12.

³⁹⁸ Bernadette Williams, Oral History Interview conducted by Teresa Bulger, March 12, 2021. Boston African American National Historic Site Administrative History, Oral History Project. Williams points to this period as when BOAF was “at its best.”

³⁹⁹ The Park and the Museum submitted a successful joint grant application in 1992 for the parade and Abolitionist Rally; Ken Heidelberg and Monica Fairbairn to Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities, letter, May 29, 1992. Folder 15 Fiscal Reports (47, 49–57), Box 7, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

publicity for the event.⁴⁰⁰ As a result, no parade took place in 1996. Heidelberg planned to start the program again, however, with the centennial of the Shaw/54th Regiment Memorial as a pretense for attracting renewed attention to the site.

A Steering Committee for the Centennial Celebration was established in January 1996 as a joint effort between the NPS, members from Boston arts and culture groups, educational institutions, and veterans' groups. Heidelberg did not come with a strong vision of what the celebration would be or how to execute it, resulting in meandering meetings suffering from organizational disarray.⁴⁰¹ Heidelberg invited Marty Blatt to join the Steering Committee and as the new Boston NHP historian, Blatt proposed a two-day symposium to supplement the activities already planned for the weekend.⁴⁰² He reached out to a number of educational institutions and organizations to partner with the NPS, including the Massachusetts Historical Society (MHS), via his friend Donald Yacovone. Blatt and Yacovone soon recognized that Blatt's idea would require an injection of funding, interpretive vision, and a marketing campaign.⁴⁰³

Soon, Yacovone and Blatt began to take on large roles in the planning committee, with Blatt serving as the point person ("liaison") for the Steering Committee and beginning to reach out to a bevy of universities, city and state officials, and politicians for financial support and commitments to attend. From his position outside a federal agency, Yacovone helped to orchestrate fundraising for the project, which was projected to cost more than \$100,000 and for which the NPS had not appropriated funds. Each member reached out to the people and organizations they could. For example, Yacovone arranged for MHS president Len Tucker to invite General Colin Powell. State Representative Gloria Fox attempted to get discretionary state funds allocated for the event.⁴⁰⁴

The fundraising campaign successfully raised \$150,000 from a wide array of public and private corporations, individuals, and organizations. This resulted in the staging of a four-day agenda

⁴⁰⁰ David Cunningham Jr. (Secretary, Fifty Fourth Massachusetts, Company "A") to Charles Taylor (Boston African American National Historic Site), letter, May 13, 1995. Folder "54th Regiment," Box A008.6, Executive Director Sylvia Watts-McKinney, Institutional Archive, MAAH Archives, Boston, MA.

⁴⁰¹ Early meeting minutes detail a wide range of people and disparate ideas. The discussion wandered, with contributors sometimes caught up on minor details; Folder "Shaw Steering Committee," Box 1, Chief of Cultural Resources/Historian (Blatt), BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

⁴⁰² Marty Blatt [Chief of Professional Service/Historian Lowell NHP] to Shaw/54th Regiment Memorial Centennial Committee, memorandum, re: Proposal for a Symposium, February 26, 1996. Folder "Shaw Steering Committee," Box 1, Chief of Cultural Resources/Historian (Blatt), BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

⁴⁰³ David Yacovone, to Marty Blatt, letter, September 10, 1980. Folder "Shaw Steering Committee," Box 1, Chief of Cultural Resources/Historian (Blatt), BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

⁴⁰⁴ "Minutes from the Centennial Celebration Steering Committee Meeting on 5/23/1996" Folder "Shaw Steering Committee," Box 1, Chief of Cultural Resources/Historian (Blatt), BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA; Gloria Fox [State Representative], to Marie Kelly [Mass. Cultural Council], letter, June 13, 1996. Folder "Shaw Correspondence," Box 1, Chief of Cultural Resources/Historian (Blatt), BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

which included a research-centered academic symposium held at Harvard University, a public parade and rededication ceremony at the monument with keynote speakers Dr. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and General Colin Powell, and the largest gathering of Black Civil War reenactors in the North with an encampment of 200 people on the Boston Esplanade (Figures 13 and 14).⁴⁰⁵

Where relationships with Company A had frayed in years past, the success of the Centennial Celebration earned praise from reenactors. The director of Company A, William W. Gwaltney, wrote to Marty Blatt to express his thanks and emphasized that “the very fact that you pulled together over 200 African American reenactors from all areas of the country was nothing short of amazing.”⁴⁰⁶

The Centennial Celebration represented a highly successful project, both raising the profile of Boston NHP and introducing a progressive approach to Boston history which acknowledged the contributions of Black Americans to the country’s ongoing struggle to seize and embody freedom in a multitude of ways. While Heidelberg continued to serve as co-chair of the Steering Committee through the completion of the project, he and other members of the committee were sidelined as Blatt and Yacovone took charge.⁴⁰⁷

Heidelberg served as an administrator who had an everyday focus on meeting the operational needs of the site and the Museum for tours and interpretive programs by managing his staff and advocating for the site to have budgetary control. He did not, however, have experience in fundraising, nor did he benefit from a large network of contacts in the Boston academic and preservation communities, which Blatt capitalized on to get the Centennial Celebration planning off the ground.

Regardless of the specific role that Heidelberg and Boston African American NHS came to play in the Centennial Celebration, the event benefited the site and held the promise that perhaps the site could keep up the interest and energy that had been part of the celebration. Site Administrator

⁴⁰⁵ Martin Blatt and Erin Beatty, “Another Kind of Glory: Celebrating the Centennial of the Monument to Robert Gould Shaw and the Fifty-fourth Massachusetts Regiment,” *Public History News* 17, no. 2 (1997): 7, 16.

⁴⁰⁶ William W. Gwaltney [Supt Fort Laramie NHS and Sec. Lt. Company “B”, 54th Mass Volunteer Infantry] to John Burchill [Supt. BNHP] and Marty Blatt [BNHP], email, June 27, 1997. Re: Hope and Glory. Folder “Shaw Committee,” Box 1, Chief of Cultural Resources/Historian (Blatt), BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

⁴⁰⁷ In order to streamline the committee’s efforts, Blatt and Yacovone often took action without consulting the group. Recognizing that the entire program remained still tenuous and uncertain in June 1996, Yacovone proposed to Blatt that they strategically nail down a “headliner” for the program, after which they would tell the group; Donald Yacovone, to Marty Blatt, letter, June 25, 1996. Folder “Shaw Correspondence,” Box 1, Chief of Cultural Resources/Historian (Blatt), BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA; Heidelberg, personal communication, October 7, 2020.



Figure 13. Members of the 54th Regiment, Company A, a Civil War reenactor group, May 1997. The regiment performs a demonstration on the Boston Esplanade as part of the public history component of the Centennial Celebration. *National Park Service, Boston African American National Historic Site, Resource Management Records.*



Figure 14. General Colin Powell gives the keynote address at the Centennial Celebration of the Monument to Robert Gould Shaw and the 54th Massachusetts Regiment, held on the Massachusetts State House lawn on May 31, 1997 *National Park Service, Boston African American National Historic Site, Resource Management Records.*

Lauren Macchia identified the years immediately following the Centennial Celebrations as the site's best years.⁴⁰⁸ Site staff, including Heidelberg, Williams, and Middleton, became involved in several research and outreach projects. Middleton ran a Summer Youth Program and received a grant to cover a portion of the project.⁴⁰⁹ Heidelberg led the NPS's Regional Underground Railroad Initiative and began attending Regional Strategy Meetings and Superintendent Conferences.⁴¹⁰ Both Heidelberg and Williams served as NPS representatives at a few local events and conferences.⁴¹¹

The event also elevated the site to the national consciousness in a way it had not been before. In April 1998, NPS Director Robert G. Stanton, the first African American director of the National Park Service, visited the site. During his visit, Director Stanton unveiled the new NPS Underground Railroad Guidebook, participated in a public ceremony at the African Meeting House, and took a tour of the Black Heritage Trail (Figure 15). The site saw itself again highlighted in December 1998, when First Lady Hilary Clinton visited the African Meeting House as part of her Save America's Treasures tour, announcing a \$40,000 donation to the restoration effort at the African Meeting House (Figure 16).⁴¹² A 2002 study of race, gender, and recreation within the National Park Service praised Boston African American NHS for its many outreach and interpretive programs that brought Black history to new audiences.⁴¹³

The Centennial Celebration themes of military service, citizenship, and race continued as prominent features of Marty Blatt's work. Blatt continued the momentum he brought to the academic symposium on the 54th Regiment by writing a book on the proceedings and branching out into other Black history projects.⁴¹⁴ In 2000, as planning for a new General Management Plan

⁴⁰⁸ Lauren Macchia, Oral History, May 26, 2021.

⁴⁰⁹ SMM, "July 7, 1998," BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA; SMM, "August 4, 1998," BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

⁴¹⁰ SMM, "January 20, 1998," BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA; SMM, "July 7, 1998," BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA; SMM, "October 6, 1998," BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA; SMM, "May 11, 1999," BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

⁴¹¹ SMM, "July 7, 1998," BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA; SMM, "August 4, 1998," BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA; SMM, "May 11, 1999," BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

⁴¹² SMM, "January 12, 1999," BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

⁴¹³ Donald A. Rodriguez and Nina S. Roberts, *State of Knowledge Report: The Association of Race/Ethnic, Gender and Social Class in Outdoor Recreational Experiences Study* (Fort Collins: Department of Natural Resource Recreation and Tourism, Colorado State University, 2002), 16–17.

⁴¹⁴ SMM, "March 10, 1998," BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA; SMM, "September 15, 1999," BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA; The proceedings were compiled into the book: Martin H. Blatt, Thomas J. Brown, and Donald Yacovone, *Hope and Glory: Essays on the Legacy of the 54th Massachusetts Regiment*. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000).



Figure 15. Site Manager Ken Heidelberg and Park Ranger Frank Middleton giving a tour of the Black Heritage Trail to NPS Director Robert Stanton during the director’s visit to Boston African American National Historic Site on April 7, 1998 *National Park Service, Boston African American National Historic Site, Resource Management Records.*

was initiated, Blatt also began to work toward reinvigorating the pursuit of a historic resource study for the Boston African American NHS. He recognized that the site’s reliance on a few site publications such as historic structure reports and a loose collection of research materials put the site in a position where it could not fully address the themes of race relations, the meaning of freedom in nineteenth-century Boston, or the full extent and complexity of the nineteenth-century Black community.⁴¹⁵

⁴¹⁵ “Historic Resource Study, Boston African American National Historic Site, Scope of Work,” circa 2002. Folder “Shaw Committee.” Box 1, Chief of Cultural Resources/Historian (Blatt), BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.



Figure 16. Museum of African American History Director Sylvia Watts-McKinney shows First Lady Hilary Clinton an exhibit at the African Meeting House during Mrs. Clinton’s Save America’s Treasures Tour in December of 1998 *Courtesy of Sylvia Watts-McKinney.*

Site preservation projects also seemed to have turned a corner after the Centennial Celebration. As described above, the site finally broke ground on the Abiel Smith School restoration project in the spring of 1998 and another round of project funding for the African Meeting House restoration was included in the NPS FY 1999 budget. Similarly, after the opening of the Abiel Smith School in January 2000, Superintendent Burchill made a strong case for a new increase in base operating funds for the site. At the turn of the century, the Boston African American NHS’s fortunes looked promising.

Changes in Leadership

While the interpretive and preservation prospects of Boston African American NHS were seemingly on the upswing in the late 1990s, the site stood at a turning point as major staffing changes came about at the end of the decade. Superintendent Burchill, who had stood at the helm of both Boston African American NHS and Boston NHP for fifteen years, decided to retire in the autumn of 1999. In February 2000, he transferred to the Regional Office and Peter Steele served as Acting Superintendent until November 2000.⁴¹⁶ The loss of Burchill also meant the loss of his

⁴¹⁶ Peter Steele (Acting Superintendent), “Boston National Historical Park, State of the Park, 2000,” On file, NPS Electronic Technical Information Center (ETIC), <https://pubs.nps.gov/>, accessed February 14, 2022.

political connections with congressmen and senators, which had smoothed the way for NPS funding in years past. Burchill's departure also represented an opportunity to refocus Boston African American NHS's interpretation and planning needs, as preservation funds remained in place for the second phase of the African Meeting House restoration. These funds would prove inadequate, however, and in the decade to follow, the site's partnership with the Museum would become strained as the Museum found itself struggling to complete the African Meeting House restoration.

For its part, the Museum underwent an important shift in leadership at the turn of the millennium as well. In 1999, Executive Director Sylvia Watts-McKinney stepped down when her husband's job prompted a move to the Washington, DC area. Beverly Morgan-Welch accepted the position of executive director and brought a new management style utilizing her project management skills as a former executive and community relations professional at Raytheon. Morgan-Welch focused on courting corporate sponsorship for the Museum and raising local community awareness of its programs and purpose. Her clear-eyed view of the state of the African Meeting House restoration project, the outdated collaborative agreement with the NPS, and a passion for elevating and celebrating the history of Black people in Boston led to major changes at Boston African American NHS. She described her move to the Museum as a "calling"—a job she took not for the monetary compensation but for the ability to contribute to the education and preservation missions of the Museum.⁴¹⁷

Meanwhile, Boston National Historical Park had its own problems. Anemic 1990s NPS funding had resulted in cuts to base funding for that park's operations, and although Burchill had been able to secure considerable project-based preservation funding for many of the Freedom Trail's historic sites, Boston NHP still suffered from a lack of cohesive management and interpretive goals. In the 1990s, visitation along the Freedom Trail had stagnated. Boston NHP commissioned a Freedom Trail Comprehensive Study, completed in 1996, to analyze the needs of the many site partners, business interests, and others to develop a vision and plan to unite the interests of those along the trail and promote heritage tourism.⁴¹⁸ The recommendation of the report detailed the need for a centralized visitor center, public art and exhibitions, and even a light show and virtual reality to attract new audiences.⁴¹⁹ The study called for a multi-million-dollar overhaul of the Freedom Trail, an ambitious agenda that Burchill recognized to be far beyond the capacity of the Park Service to meet. Facing mounting deferred maintenance costs, Burchill suggested that the way forward for preservation and programming improvements along the trail would be "large private contributions

⁴¹⁷ Beverly Morgan-Welch, Oral History Interview conducted by Teresa Bulger and Nedra Lee, June 7, 2021. Boston African American National Historic Site Administrative History, Oral History Project.

⁴¹⁸ David Dixon and Goody Clancy, *The Freedom Trail: A Framework for the Future*. Prepared for Boston National Historical Park (Boston: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1996).

⁴¹⁹ "Boosters: Spruce up Freedom Trail with Technology," *Transcript* [North Adams, MA], 17 May 1996: 16.

from donors aware of the fragility and importance of the Freedom Trail.”⁴²⁰ Just how the need for improvements to the Freedom Trail and a new visitor center would be met remained left to the next superintendent to determine.

⁴²⁰ Brian MacQuarrie, “Freedom Trail is fading: consultant says route past city’s historic sites needs overhaul to draw tourists,” *Boston Globe*, January 30, 1996, 17, 21; “Oldest black church gets restoration funds,” *Bay State Banner*, July 28, 1983.

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CHAPTER 6. MAKING NEW PLANS, 2000–2009

The National Park Service in the early 2000s

In the early 2000s, the National Park Service endured an era of increased financial austerity. The September 11, 2001, attack on the World Trade Center triggered fiscal and security changes within the Department of the Interior, including new spending priorities and management strategies for the NPS. At the same time, Congress became reluctant to increase funding for the agency. Between 2001 and 2009, NPS operating funds grew at a slower rate than during the previous decade and all other appropriations were reduced or eliminated.⁴²¹ By the mid-2000s, the Park Service's Washington Office issued Service-wide policies which underscored a business-centered approach to preservation and an increased emphasis on partnerships to achieve these preservation goals. The new guidelines called for the "pursuit of the best contemporary business practices and sustainability" and a "commitment to cooperative conservation and civic engagement."⁴²² In 2006, the NPS Education Council observed that funding for interpretive and educational programming at national parks suffered due to inflation, the ballooning cost of full-time employees, and the limited availability of non-labor funds.⁴²³ That year, NPS Director Mary A. Bomar advocated for interpretive programming informed by "good business practices" as well as seeking out a diversity of funding sources and developing "a culture of philanthropy for our national parks."⁴²⁴

Despite the tightening of the purse strings, during this period the NPS actively pursued documentation and programming which sought to elevate Black history and attract more diverse audiences. This trend represented a continuation of the increased attention that Black history had received in the Park Service during the 1990s. In October 2000, for example, Congress passed Public Law 106-291, an Omnibus Appropriations Bill which included funding for the "Network to Freedom" grants program. The grants program served to implement the recommendations of the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Act of 1998, with an emphasis on partnerships that would help protect and interpret sites associated with the Underground Railroad. Additionally, the NPS undertook the African American National Historic Landmarks Study from 2005 to 2008 which evaluated the NHL program's "comprehensiveness in commemorating

⁴²¹ Pitcaithley and Galvin, "It's not a matter of money."

⁴²² National Park Service, *Management Policies 2006*, (Washington DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2006), 2.

⁴²³ National Park Service Education Council, *Interpretation and Education Program Business Plan: Helping People Enjoy, Care About, and Care for National Parks* (Washington DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2006), 19.

⁴²⁴ NPS Education Council, *I&E Program Business Plan*, 8.

nationally significant African American history.”⁴²⁵ Other documentation efforts included the Harriet Tubman Special Resources Study, completed in 2008, which identified alternatives for the resource protection, visitor services, national commemoration, and public awareness of Harriet Tubman.⁴²⁶ This study would support the eventual establishment of the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Historical Park in 2013. Finally, another landmark during the 2000s was Congress’s passage of the 2003 National Museum of African American History and Culture Act (P.L. 108-184), which enabled the founding of a national Museum for the commemoration and celebration of Black history to be established on the National Mall in Washington, DC.⁴²⁷ The Park Service, despite the budgetary challenges it encountered during this period, continued to make strides toward the expansion of Black representation in the system, even as this progress was slow.

In Boston, these national trends played out in the stagnating budget of Boston African American NHS, an increasing demand for programs focused on Black history, and changes to the relationship between the site and the Museum. As Terry Savage took over the position of superintendent at both Boston African American NHS and Boston NHP, he received a difficult financial and operational outlook, which only became more complicated after September 11, 2001. His leadership style gave primacy to the operational and security needs of Boston NHP and Boston African American NHS. This approach encouraged operational independence on the part of park partners and had the unintended effect of weakening the relationship with partners like the Museum of Afro American History. From the Museum’s perspective, the new superintendent at Boston African American NHS had trouble recognizing the full urgency of the African Meeting House restoration project and paid little attention to maintaining the Site-Museum cooperative relationship. Without a strong advocate for the Museum at the helm of Boston African American NHS, the Museum took over control of resource stewardship.

Park planning took a front seat during the period between 2000 and 2009. Site leadership, especially the site manager and supervisory park ranger, worked with Boston NHP and the region to re-envision the site’s course through the preparation of a new General Management Plan. Site Manager Ken Heidelberg saw this process as an opportunity to address ambiguities in the site’s relationship with the Museum, demonstrate the interpretive and outreach potential of the site, and

⁴²⁵ National Park Service, Organization of American Historians, and National Museum of African American History and Culture, *African American National Historic Landmark Assessment Study*, (Washington DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2008), 1.

⁴²⁶ National Park Service, *Harriet Tubman Special Resource Study: Environmental Assessment* (Washington DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2008).

⁴²⁷ “An Act to establish within the Smithsonian Institution the National Museum of African American History and Culture, and for other purposes.” P.L. 108-184. 108th Congress), December 16, 2003, accessed March 29, 2022, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/108th-congress/house-bill/3491>. This represented a recommitment to such a Museum, which had begun as part of the same law which established Boston African American NHS in 1980, and which wouldn’t be fulfilled until the Museum opened in 2016.

bargain for more funding to fulfill its educational, interpretive, and preservation mandates. In the shadow of funding cutbacks and the wider administrative and operations goals of Boston NHP, however, the new GMP barely made a ripple. Superintendent Savage focused his attention on the concerns of Boston NHP, especially crafting ways to potentially bring in revenue or relieve some of the maintenance and utility burdens shouldered by that park. As a result, he had less attention available for Boston African American NHS, a circumstance which strained both the site staff and the patience of the Museum of Afro American History.

While planning progressed in fits and starts at the management level during the early 2000s, the site's programming benefitted from a group of new park rangers who were highly motivated to tell new stories about the Black community on Beacon Hill. Historian Martin Blatt informally stepped into the role of park historian and helped to guide the research and programming efforts of the new rangers. As discussed above, Blatt had brought attention to the potential and importance of Black history within Boston NHP in the late 1990s and became a natural intellectual advisor as Boston African American's interpretive program continued to develop. The interpretive program strengthened, even though often held together by volunteer and temporary park rangers.

The first decade of the 2000s ended with drastic changes to the administration and operations of Boston African American NHS. Boston NHP and Boston African American NHS reorganized in 2008, resulting in the consolidation and recasting of administrative roles in a move toward cost-sharing to address budget concerns at both parks. Site Manager Ken Heidelberg retired in 2008 and did not get succeeded until 2010. With these changes, the drive toward making Boston African American NHS more independent fell by the wayside. While frustrating for the old guard at the site, these shifts addressed the financial realities of the site and its parent park.

Administration

When Terry Savage became superintendent of Boston NHP and Boston African American NHS in November 2000, he expressed optimism for the future of “protecting and presenting” the historic properties within the parks.⁴²⁸ Superintendent Savage acutely focused on both maintaining the partner relationships and physical improvements that John Burchill had established, while working toward new goals such as an “orientation facility” and renovations at Charlestown Navy Yard. These new goals built on the 1996 Freedom Trail Comprehensive Plan, a study which had underscored a need to identify new income streams, better coordinate visitor services, and reach new audiences.⁴²⁹ At the same time, Superintendent Savage also expressed the need to bring in

⁴²⁸ Terry Savage, “A Message from Superintendent Savage,” *Broadside*, no. 1 (2001): 1.

⁴²⁹ Dixon and Clancy, *The Freedom Trail*, 5; Savage noted the importance of the study in an interview about the career of Representative Joe Moakley (D-MA). Peter Steele, “In Memoriam: Congressman John Joseph Moakley,” *Broadside*, nos. 2 & 3 (2001), 1–2.

funds via a “cost recovery program” to help offset utility costs and meager base fund increases.⁴³⁰ The wider Park Service trends already began to affect the bottom line in Boston.

Superintendent Savage met with a host of challenges when he took the position and his strategy for meeting these challenges was remarkably apolitical. Savage did not arrive with the same array of political connections that his predecessor had built and rarely looked outside the Park Service for support. Instead, Savage looked to Boston NHP’s assets to help alleviate its financial woes. One of his early plans to generate income for Boston NHP was to monetize the resources in Charlestown Navy Yard, especially renovating and leasing the Hoosac Stores warehouse.⁴³¹ The Hoosac Stores project represented a difficult adaptive reuse development which met logistical and political hurdles. Savage remembered being frustrated by the project, as it became central to his vision for the redevelopment of Charlestown Navy Yard and disappointed that it never came to fruition.⁴³² Hoosac Stores represented just one piece of a broader plan to generate income and reduce costs at the Boston NHP. Savage recognized the dwindling funding available to both the Boston NHP and Boston African American NHS and the mounting costs of maintaining the navy yard. After September 11, 2001, security at Charlestown Navy Yard became a high priority, and Boston NHP de-prioritized other park division focuses (i.e., other than security) and put Boston African American NHS on the back burner.

While Superintendent Savage did not generally pursue large site preservation and restoration projects during his tenure, he did actively pursue NPS support for a Boston NHP visitor center. While that park had an information kiosk on Boston Common, Savage advocated for the renovation of Faneuil Hall’s market floors for use as a more formal visitor center. This project would ultimately require \$7 million to complete, and Savage credits the park’s outreach to Massachusetts Senator Kennedy for federal support of the project.⁴³³

Superintendent Savage saw Boston African American NHS’s primary responsibility as providing Black Heritage Trail tours for the Museum which required minimal oversight from the superintendent’s office. In a recent interview, Savage remembered wanting to “maintain our distance from [the Museum]” because that institution owned the properties and would ultimately “manage the details of what happened there.”⁴³⁴ In essence, Boston African American NHS staff

⁴³⁰ Savage, “A Message,” 1.

⁴³¹ Hoosac Stores represented one of the first projects announced during his tenure, first as part of a plan for a hotel, then later as the potential home for the North Bennet Street School; Sean Hennessey, “Hoosac Stores Lease Announced,” *Broadside*, no. 1 (2005), 12.

⁴³² Savage, Oral History interview conducted by Teresa Bulger, February 9, 2022, Boston African American National Historic Site Administrative History Oral History Project.

⁴³³ Terry Savage, Oral History, 2022.

⁴³⁴ Savage, Oral History, 2022.

implemented the Museum's program, not a self-determined site program. As Savage gave the Museum space for interpretive independence, he also expected they would establish more financial independence. During the early 2000s, the NPS would attempt to transfer responsibility for utility payments to the Museum, though with little initial success.

Meanwhile, in fiscal year 2000, Boston African American NHS's base operating funds increased substantially, from approximately \$450,000 to \$693,000, more than a 50 percent increase.⁴³⁵ As noted above, this increase was intended to help meet the site's increased responsibilities with the opening of the Abiel Smith School.⁴³⁶ By 1999, the recently restored school had opened to the public and added to the cooperative agreement between the site and the Museum of Afro American History. An increase in funding made sense to ensure that the investment the National Park Service had made thus far could be maintained moving forward.

The site's base funding increase represented an even distribution between the site and the Museum, with each adding approximately \$120,000 to their budgets. Support for the Museum increased from approximately \$80,000 a year to \$200,000 a year, though this level of funding did not last for long.⁴³⁷ For the site's part, the additional funding was directed toward hiring 3.5 full time positions (3.5 FTE). Immediately following the boost, however, the site's budget plateaued while its "buying power" declined as utility prices, retirement fund costs, and inflation rose.

Site Manager Ken Heidelberg spent the better part of the decade arguing that the increase the site had received still fell short of Boston African American NHS's needs. He raised these issues immediately after the base increase. Reporting on the site's budget at the end of fiscal year 2000, Heidelberg pointed out that the ONPS increase in reality "kept the Site's budget stagnant as the Site give[s] substantially more funds to the Museum of Afro American History, absorbs pay increases, locality increases, performance upgrades, and now rent for office space."⁴³⁸ By the mid-2000s, Heidelberg reported the site to be over-programmed and projecting shortfalls that would

⁴³⁵ U.S. Department of the Interior Office of Budget, *Budget Justifications and Performance Information FY2002, National Park Service*. "Fiscal Year 2002 Park and Program Summary," (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, FY 2002), NPS-127; In FY 2002, the park hired two full-time GS-9 Rangers, but the balance of the hiring increase went to hiring seasonal rangers or other park costs. Ken Heidelberg, "State of the Site 2002, Boston African American National Historic Site," Folder 3, Box 2, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

⁴³⁶ "Support for ONPS fund request for Boston African American National Historic Site," August 19, 1995, Folder 3, Box 6, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

⁴³⁷ "2/1/01 Budget Meeting Narrative for Boston African American National Historic Site," February 1, 2001. Folder 9, Box 7, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA. The Museum's program support increased to \$160,000 while financial support utilities, maintenance, and telephone came to about \$38,000, a figure which in part went to the Museum.

⁴³⁸ Ken Heidelberg, "Boston African American National Historic Site, Northeast Region, Annual Report 2000," Folder 3, Box 2, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

only snowball in the years to come.⁴³⁹ In 2004, Boston NHP cut a range of interpretive programs unexpectedly; including programs on Black Revolutionaries, the Underground Railroad, and an urban youth recruiting program.⁴⁴⁰ The site's plan to reduce costs included cost-sharing of utility bills with the Museum, the hiring of fewer seasonal employees, scheduled closures two days a week, and the avoidance of equipment purchases. Meanwhile, the site was receiving high marks from visitors, with 92 percent of visitors reporting 100 percent satisfaction with their visits.⁴⁴¹

Instead of seeing a site that received base funds which fell short of their needs, Savage saw the site as somewhat oversupplied with resources due to the 2000 increase in ONPS funds for Boston African American NHS. At the end of 2000, the Museum had received a total of \$250,600 from the National Park Service for programs, including \$222,100 of regular programming support and an additional \$28,500 for the NPS "Trailblazers" program which was undertaken in partnership between the Museum and the site.⁴⁴² This would be the last year that grants to the Museum reached these heights. As a large proportion of site funds went to the Museum, and part of Savage's fiscal strategy was seeking help from park partners, he recast Museum support as an appropriate place to cut. At the close of 2001, Savage reported that the "park is now developing alternatives for future directions and management of BOAF with the Museum of African American History."⁴⁴³ In 2002, as part of the renegotiation of the cooperative agreement between the site and the Museum, Savage and Heidelberg sought to draw down financial support for the Museum, especially with respect to utilities and related services. Boston NHP implemented similar reductions in support for utility costs at park partners such as the Old South Meeting House and the Old State House. Boston African American NHS did not enforce the new cost-sharing arrangement with the Museum immediately; however, the site did begin implementing them after signing the 2008 cooperative agreement. NPS funding for Museum programs remained relatively consistent from 2002 to 2008 at approximately \$160,000 a year, before the site cut this funding in half in fiscal year 2009.⁴⁴⁴

⁴³⁹ "Boston African American National Historic Site, Financial Performance: An Overview of Financial Performance." Folder 7, Box 9, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

⁴⁴⁰ Diane Allen, "Cutbacks Eyed for U.S. Parks in Boston," *Boston Globe*, 19 Mar 2004: 25, 29.

⁴⁴¹ Ken Heidelberg, "State of the Site 2002, Boston African American National Historic Site," Folder 3, Box 2, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

⁴⁴² MAAH Consolidated Statement of Revenue, December 31, 2000." Folder "Dec 2000 Financial Statements," Box A039.4, Permanent Financial Records, Institutional Archives, MAAH Archives, Boston. MA.

⁴⁴³ Terry Savage, "Boston National Historical Park, State of the Park, Fiscal Year 2001," On file, NPS Electronic Technical Information Center (ETIC), accessed February 14, 2022, <https://pubs.nps.gov/>.

⁴⁴⁴ "BOAF Budget," Folder 7, Box 9, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA. "Advances and Allocation of Working Funds, 2008," Folder 7, Box 7, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA; "Cooperative Agreement, H1723-08-0801, United States Department of the Interior National Park Service, Boston African American National Historic Site, And The Museum of Afro-American History, Inc." August 12, 2008, Cultural Resource Manager-Steve Carlson, Active Files, BNHP, Charlestown, MA [Hereafter: Cooperative

While the Museum enjoyed increased programming support during this period, it did not see similar support with respect to resource stewardship. When Superintendent Savage began his tenure at the site, the African Meeting House restoration project had been recently awarded \$1.4 million in project funding in FY 1999. The cost estimate behind this award had been too conservative, however, and the award's deficiency was exacerbated by inflation and unexpected additional costs. Boston NHP could not make up the difference. By Savage's account, the financial needs of the restoration forever faced a disadvantage because the African Meeting House did not represent a federal government asset, and as a result, getting money for the project proved a "tough row to hoe."⁴⁴⁵ The fact remained, however, that Old State House and Faneuil Hall, both owned by the City of Boston, underwent multi-million dollar restoration projects in the 1990s. During the same period, the Museum of Afro American History faced the task of raising most of the money needed for its restoration with little support from the Park Service.

Museum-Site Relationship: The Museum Takes the Lead in Resource Stewardship

The Site-Museum relationship in the 2000s became strained as the priorities of the two organizations diverged. Superintendent Savage sought to minimize the involvement of the site in Museum operations and interpretation, with the exception of NPS park rangers performing Black Heritage Trail tours on the Museum's behalf. As part of this approach, the site reduced its financial programming support for the Museum and held less frequent partner meetings. Boston NHP intended this shift to shore up the financial stability of the site and allow for more independent operations. While Beverly Morgan-Welch and the Museum Board recognized the benefits of independent institutional identities, they resisted the distancing that occurred during this decade by keeping open lines of communication and reiterating the responsibility of the NPS for the restoration of the African Meeting House and of the site for assistance with programming needs.

The relationship between Boston African American NHS and the Museum of Afro American History had, until the 2000s, been built on close relationships between the leadership at both institutions. Superintendent Savage's more "hands-off" management style eroded some of the cooperative spirit that had grown over the previous twenty years. Executive Director Beverly Morgan-Welch remembered that the Museum met great difficulty in communicating the gravity and magnitude of the story of Black Boston and the African Meeting House to Superintendent Savage. Whereas Superintendent Burchill and Congressman Moakley had "put the Museum on the

Agreement 2008]; "Contract Income," April 10, 2002, Box A001.3, General Records, Institutional Archive, MAAH Archives, Boston, MA.

⁴⁴⁵ Savage, Oral History, 2022.

map with the Park Service,” Savage did not take up the mantle of advocacy for the Museum and the African Meeting House in the same way.⁴⁴⁶

One arena where conflicts between the two organizations played out lay in the formulation of revisions to the cooperative agreement. As noted in the previous chapter, the cooperative agreement had gone largely unrevised during the 1990s, with the notable exception of the addition of the Abiel Smith School to the agreement in 1999. When the cooperative agreement between the site and the Museum again expired on January 31, 2002, the relationship between the two became somewhat nebulous. The site did not get authorized to release support funds to the Museum until a new agreement was signed and, at the same time, site administrators, including Site Manager Heidelberg and Deputy Superintendent David Brouillette, felt the agreement should be revised to shift more financial burden onto the Museum. Heidelberg had been dealing with budget shortfalls for years, and one proposed strategy for site cost saving was to have the Museum absorb the cost of utilities. This move would bring close to \$20,000 annually back into the site’s budget. In April 2002, a revised agreement was forwarded to the Museum for signature, including the stipulation that the NPS would “discontinue financial support for the maintenance and upkeep of the Abiel Smith School and African Meeting House in Boston.”⁴⁴⁷ Site Manager Heidelberg reflected that the changes to the agreement gave it “some teeth,” which would allow the site to “not be second class.”⁴⁴⁸

The proposed withdrawal of support, arriving as it did months after the expiration of the cooperative agreement, bewildered the Museum leadership. Due to the financial reliance of the Museum on Park Service funding, Executive Director Morgan-Welch pointed out that with this late-stage revision it “might appear that the Museum has been placed, most deliberately in a position of disadvantage in the negotiation” although she remained confident in the partnership.⁴⁴⁹ Morgan-Welch requested a meeting with the leadership at Boston National Historical Park, including Deputy Superintendent David Brouillette and Chief of Administration Peter Promutico,

⁴⁴⁶ Morgan-Welch, Oral History, 2021.

⁴⁴⁷ “Museum of Afro American History Board Meeting, June 12, 2002, Consent Agenda Reports,” Folder “April 10–June 12, 2002,” Box A001.4, General Records, Institutional Archive, MAAH Archives, Boston, MA.

⁴⁴⁸ Site Manager, BOAF [Ken Heidelberg] to Chief of Administration [Peter Promutico], memorandum, re: “Cooperative Agreement with Museum,” May 8, 2002. Folder 1, Box 3, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

⁴⁴⁹ Executive Director, MAAH [Beverly A. Morgan-Welch], to Superintendent, BNHP [Terry Savage], memorandum, re: “Cooperative Agreement,” May 13, 2002. Folder 1, Box 3, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

to negotiate the terms of the new agreement. At the Museum Board meeting, some members questioned whether the NPS wanted to continue the partnership at all.⁴⁵⁰

Despite these misgivings, the site and the Museum signed a new cooperative agreement in July 2002. The new agreement redistributed some financial and interpretive responsibilities to the Museum. The Museum would “be responsible for day-to-day maintenance of all facilities including all mechanical systems and staffing for the purpose of providing interpretive and visitor services and housekeeping services.”⁴⁵¹ While the NPS agreed to execute janitorial and utility maintenance, these services would be undertaken on a reimbursable basis. The Museum would also be responsible for all interpretation, while the limits of the NPS’s responsibilities would be preservation, technical assistance, and law enforcement. These changes would be implemented on a “phased transition basis,” rather than all at once. Despite plans to reduce the financial and labor burden on the site, support for the Museum remained at the level of approximately \$160,000 a year through at least the mid-2000s and the Park Service continued to provide tours.⁴⁵²

Though the NPS does not appear to have immediately followed through on the cost-sharing portion of the agreement by charging the Museum for its services, the Museum’s confidence in the Park Service’s commitment to the common mission of the two institutions had been shaken. Further signs of the distance growing in the relationship appeared to be borne out as the Museum attempted to undertake the African Meeting House restoration project.

On paper, the restoration of the African Meeting House stood ready to begin in 1999. Executive Director Beverly Morgan-Welch took the reins from Sylvia Watts-McKinney at the Museum in the summer of 1999 with assurance that the project could soon go out to bid.⁴⁵³ Following approval of the drawings, the engineering consultants confirmed that the sitework, restoration, and elevator could be completed within the budget, at a cost of \$904,807.⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵⁰ “Notes from meeting on the NPS and MAAH cooperative agreement held on May 21, 2002, at the law offices of Hill and Barlow,” Folder 2, Box 4, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

⁴⁵¹ “Cooperative Agreement No. 1443CA1720-02-001 Between the U.S. Department of the Interior National Park Service and the Museum of Afro-American History, Incorporated,” July 2002. Folder 1, Box 3, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

⁴⁵² Notably, no record of a transition plan has been identified and it is unclear if these changes took place as planned; “Cooperative Agreement No. 1443CA1720-02-001 Between the U.S. Department of the Interior National Park Service and the Museum of Afro American History, Incorporated,” July 2002. Folder 1, Box 3, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

⁴⁵³ Sylvia Watts-McKinney, to Executive Director, MAAH [Beverly Morgan-Welch], memorandum, re: “Briefing Memo I: National Park Service,” October 14, 1999. Folder “SWM Transition Memos, 1999–2000,” Box A009, ED Beverly Morgan-Welch, Institutional Archive, MAAH Archives, Boston, MA.

⁴⁵⁴ A.M. Fogarty & Associates, Inc., to Stull & Lee, memorandum, re: “African Meeting House, Boston, MA,” January 27, 2000. Folder 3, Box 6, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

Despite this, Morgan-Welch had her doubts. While her predecessor and the NPS had not questioned the drawings, she could see that they had been originally drawn up in the early 1980s and were based on a historic structure report from 1982. Any changes that had been made to the drawings in the mid-1990s to bring them “up-to-date” proved minimal. Quite simply, “they were old.”⁴⁵⁵ After bringing the plans to a number of architects for evaluation, Morgan-Welch concluded them to be not only outdated, but they called for an HVAC system that had since been found to be structurally detrimental. The drawings required a “redo,” and she went to Superintendent Savage and let him know that she “absolutely would not” proceed with the restoration without more funds and updated plans.⁴⁵⁶ Superintendent Savage disagreed and thought the project should proceed. The project had been vetted, revised, and approved at all levels within the NPS bureaucracy, and changing course would seem to undermine the process itself. The NPS put the project on hold, citing the “pending revision of the scope of work by the Museum of Afro American History” as the Museum wanted to “improve the A/V and performance capability of the sanctuary and to undertake a more extensive restoration of the interior of the building.”⁴⁵⁷ In addition to interior improvements, the project, as scoped, did not include archaeological investigations in advance of sitework nor emergency repairs to the Abiel Smith School in the wake of water damage in 1999, which further diminished funds for the African Meeting House restoration project.⁴⁵⁸

From Superintendent Savage’s perspective, the more pressing need lay in shoring up the financial outlook of Boston NHP. As such, he focused on gaining funding for historic properties owned by the NPS at Charlestown Navy Yard and making plans to convert NPS properties into leasable spaces. The secondary importance placed on the African Meeting House became symptomatic of the wider problem of convincing NPS personnel of the significance of Black historic sites during this period. For example, the Museum also had trouble communicating the importance of the project to NPS historic architects, one of whom obstructed the project “at every turn,” used demeaning language, and was finally excused from the project altogether.⁴⁵⁹ The Museum encountered obstructions in communicating the importance of Black people in the ways we tell

⁴⁵⁵ Morgan-Welch, Oral History, 2021.

⁴⁵⁶ Beverly Morgan-Welch, *personal communication*, April 23, 2021.

⁴⁵⁷ Preservation Specialist, BNHP [Stephen P. Carlson] to Superintendent BNHP [Terry Savage] and others, memorandum, re: “Section 106: Briefing Book,” Jul. 27, 2001. Folder 4, Box 11, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

⁴⁵⁸ Contracting Officer, BNHP [Nancy Tansino], to Facility Manager, and others BNHP [Dave Rose and others], memorandum, re: “Abiel Smith School Water Infiltration,” Sept. 24, 1999. Folder 3, Box 6, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

⁴⁵⁹ Morgan-Welch, Oral History, 2021.

American history. In a recent interview, Executive Director Morgan-Welch reflected that “it has been difficult for the country to see African Americans at the heart of its history.”⁴⁶⁰

Finding that Boston NHP or Boston African American NHS stood unwilling or unable to reevaluate plans for the African Meeting House restoration, Morgan-Welch used what funds she had to hire historic architects John G. Waite and Associates to assist in assembling an application for the Save America’s Treasures (SAT) fund. This fund, set up by First Lady Hilary Clinton, financed matching grants for historic preservation projects for iconic buildings in need of restoration and is administered through the National Park Service. As noted above, Clinton had visited the site in December of 1998 as part of her Save America’s Treasures (SAT) tour. In late 2000, as the Clintons prepared to leave the White House, Morgan-Welch attended Mrs. Clinton’s farewell address and became motivated to apply for an SAT grant. When Morgan-Welch approached Superintendent Savage about co-sponsorship of an application in 2001, he rebuffed her and told her she had missed the deadline. The Museum applied anyway, and in 2002, received \$300,000 from SAT to undertake an update to the historic structure report, draw up new plans for the restoration, and undertake an archeological mitigation in the African Meeting House backlot.⁴⁶¹ With new architectural plans in place, it became clear that the restoration project would require close to \$4 million to complete, far outstripping the project funds available to the Museum through the NPS.

Meanwhile, the NPS had distanced itself from the problem entirely. Ken Heidelberg recalls appealing to Superintendent Savage for more project funding, pleading that you “can’t do 2002 work with 1998 money.”⁴⁶² The project, however, was not reconsidered for more funding. In fact, the restoration does not appear to have been on the minds of park planners either, as the site’s new General Management Plan, drafted between 2000 and 2006, did not mention the restoration needs of the African Meeting House. Instead, the GMP described the meeting house and Abiel Smith School as “restored and opened to the public for interpretation, education, and special events” despite the fact that the meeting house had been closed to the public starting in 2003 and the restoration remained unfinished.⁴⁶³ While the National Park Service did not make large investments in capital projects in the wake of the September 11th attacks, the elision of the restoration as a long-term planning issue in any regard seems to demonstrate a strong disconnect

⁴⁶⁰ Morgan-Welch, Oral History, 2021.

⁴⁶¹ Morgan-Welch, Oral History, 2021. With regard to the archeology being funded by SAT funds, see: Hampton Tucker [NPS Historic Preservation Services], to Beverly Morgan-Welch [MAAH], email, re: “African Meeting House Save America’s Treasures Grant,” March 14, 2005. Folder 3, Box 4, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

⁴⁶² Heidelberg, personal communication, October 7, 2020.

⁴⁶³ NPS, GMP: BOAF 2008, 3.

between the priorities of the Museum, site leadership, and the realities of the preservation needs of the site’s resources.

The Museum’s efforts to raise money for the restoration stretched out over the following decade, involved a herculean effort on the part of Executive Director Morgan-Welch and the entire Museum Board of Directors, and relied on not a small amount of luck. Morgan-Welch recalls that after being awarded the SAT grant, she found herself “in the room” with preservationists and fundraisers who would become important figures in her network. These connections proved vital as the relationship between the site and the Museum remained strained, as the Museum became excluded from park partner meetings and other relevant meetings to site decision making.⁴⁶⁴

To raise the money needed for the African Meeting House restoration, the Museum broadened its funding base by joining the National Trust for Historic Preservation, soliciting a bevy of private donations, and attaining corporate sponsorship. Even with these efforts, the funding for the project fell short as the cost of the entire project ballooned to \$8 million and the economy experienced a downturn beginning in 2008.⁴⁶⁵ The Museum actively sought political and Park Service support wherever Board members could make connections. Through the efforts of these Board members, conversations about the project moved from “What African Meeting House?” to “Has that project been completed yet?”—this level of recognition “began to get [the Museum] more traction and funding.”⁴⁶⁶

Ultimately, Morgan-Welch attributes the funding of the project to several factors, not the least of which became a shift in management at Boston NHP. In August 2009, Terry Savage retired, and the leadership at the site shifted temporarily to Celeste Bernardo and then to Cassius Cash in early 2010.⁴⁶⁷ As will be discussed in the following chapter, this shift in leadership proved key to completing the African Meeting House restoration in 2010 and 2011.

Boston African American NHS Planning and Interpretive Improvements

While Superintendent Savage stood somewhat distant, Boston African American’s staff nonetheless had high hopes for advancing the site in the 2000s by drafting a new General

⁴⁶⁴ Morgan-Welch, Oral History, 2021. Morgan-Welch reported that on more than one occasion she would find out about meetings only through back channels, rather than from Superintendent Savage himself. The poor communication with, and at times intentional exclusion of, the Museum continued throughout the decade.

⁴⁶⁵ L. Finch, “\$4m grant to help restore the African Meeting House,” *Boston Globe*, August 29, 2010.

⁴⁶⁶ Morgan-Welch, Oral History, 2021.

⁴⁶⁷ Sean Hennessy, “Cassius Cash Named Superintendent,” *Broadside*, no. 1 (2010): 1.

Management Plan, making improvements to signage and site interpretive materials, gaining a further increase in base funding to support operations, and expanding interpretive programs.

While Boston African American NHS represented a “branch” of Boston NHP in many practical ways, it also stood as a discrete site with specific management needs separate from Boston NHP. Recognizing that the existing 1984 General Management Plan did not meet these management needs, Site Manager Ken Heidelberg called for a reimagining of the site’s vision, goals, and partner relationships as early as 1995.⁴⁶⁸ In 1997, Park Planner Ruth Raphael found that the 1984 GMP proved inadequate for decision making in light of the site’s 2,000 percent growth in visitation since 1983, the restoration of the African Meeting House and the Abiel Smith School, and the “increase in interpretive resources, increase in special events, the critical need for administrative space, and the identification of new resources to be included in the boundary.”⁴⁶⁹ Raphael estimated the projected cost of a new GMP would range between \$250,000 and \$275,000. The following year, the NPS allocated \$54,000 in project funds to begin the process.⁴⁷⁰

The site staff had far-ranging ideas for a new vision for Boston African American NHS that included the acquisition of land, establishment of a center for scholarly research, the incorporation of a Friends group to help fund the site, and “autonomy for the site.”⁴⁷¹ While these management objectives did not make it into the final GMP, drafted by 2006 and finalized in 2008, they reveal that site staff continued to have high hopes for the independence of the site from Boston NHP and from the Museum of African American History (renamed in 2006). As the process progressed however, the importance of partnership with the Museum got reiterated, as well as the site’s reliance on Boston NHP.

At a park partners planning meeting in December of 2000, attendees drafted a common mission statement between the site and the Museum, which re-centered the Site-Museum partnership as central to the achievement of the site’s mandate.⁴⁷² Input from the Museum also broadened the

⁴⁶⁸ Ken Heidelberg, “Draft Proposal for Boston African American National Historic Site,” Circa Spring 1995. Folder 9, Box 5, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

⁴⁶⁹ Planner, BNHP [Ruth Raphael] to Superintendent BNHP [John Burchill] and others, memorandum, re: “Proposal for General Management Plan for Boston African American National Historic Site,” May 1, 1997. Folder 2, Box 6, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA; Raphael also noted the 1984 GMP to be still in draft form, unsigned.

⁴⁷⁰ Ken Heidelberg, “Boston African American National Historic Site Annual Report FY1998,” Folder 3, Box 2, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

⁴⁷¹ “BOAF strategy for GMP plan, Circa 1997 or 1998,” Folder 9, Box 14, Site Manager Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

⁴⁷² NPS, *GMP*, 19; “Mission and Goals, Boston African American National Historic Site,” Folder 6, Box 26, Planning Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA. The shared mission statement got drafted because of the December 6, 2000, meeting between the NPS staff, Museum staff, members of the Museum Board of Directors, and representatives of Suffolk University.

site's topical focus to move it beyond the antebellum era. While the site's enabling legislation focused on Boston's abolitionist community before and during the Civil War, the Museum stressed the continuing relevance of the abolitionist community. As such, the site incorporated language about "the continuing impact of [the struggle for equal rights] on the nation" into its interpretive goals.⁴⁷³

NPS also conducted several studies in preparation of the GMP in order to craft management recommendations. Among these were an Historic Resource Study (2002), a Collections Management Plan (2003), and an Archaeological Overview and Assessment (2007).⁴⁷⁴ The historic resource study, as described in Chapter 5, had been needed for a long time, as no comprehensive document yet existed that detailed the full ownership history, social context, and significance of each of the site's resources. The 2002 historic resource study addressed these problems directly, marshalling a variety of primary documents, the research of local historians, and academic secondary sources. As well as documenting the existing structures recognized as part of the site, the authors identified thirteen additional buildings with strong associations with the pre-Civil War Black community on Beacon Hill and recommended the addition of these buildings to the site.⁴⁷⁵ Park planners incorporated these recommendations into the GMP as part of the preferred alternative to improve interpretive programming and outreach at the site.⁴⁷⁶

The Collection Management Plan (CMP) examined the Museum and archival collections of both Boston African American National Historic Site and the Museum of Afro American History. As the site is not a collecting institution, the majority of its collections consist of archival documents related to site management. On the other hand, the Museum's collections consist of institutional records and archives, donated objects, art, and furniture, as well as archaeological collections. At the time, the Museum's collections were scattered amongst a number of repositories and one of the goals of the CMP was to provide recommendations that would help the Museum "gain complete physical and intellectual control over its Museum collection."⁴⁷⁷ Recommendations for the Museum included rehousing collections, consolidating the collection into fewer storage locations, and deaccessioning materials not directly related to the nineteenth-century abolitionist

⁴⁷³ NPS, *GMP*, 20; See also "Mission and Goals, Boston African American National Historic Site," Folder 9, Box 5, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

⁴⁷⁴ Kathryn Grover and Janine V. da Silva, *Historic Resource Study: Boston African American National Historic Site*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2002); Northeast Museum Services Center, *Collection Management Plan: Boston African American National Historic Site, Museum of Afro American History, Boston, Massachusetts* (Boston: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, June 2003); Public Archaeology Laboratory, *Archaeological Overview and Assessment: Boston African American National Historic Site, Boston, Massachusetts* (Lowell, MA: National Park Service, Northeast Regional Archaeology Program, 2007).

⁴⁷⁵ Grover and DaSilva, *Historic Resource Study*, 9.

⁴⁷⁶ NPS, *GMP*: BOAF 2008, 27.

⁴⁷⁷ NEMSC, *Collection Management Plan*, 142.

communities in Boston and Nantucket. The GMP planners incorporated the CMP's recommendations to transfer the site's collection of rare books to the Collection of African American Literature at Suffolk University, and to store the site's management records at the Boston NHP Building 107.⁴⁷⁸

The Archaeological Overview and Assessment reviewed archaeological studies undertaken along the Black Heritage Trail to identify known and potential archaeological resources within the site. Most significant amongst these studies became those undertaken by the Museum in the African Meeting House backlot in the 1970s and 1980s (which included deposits associated with 2 Smith Court), and in the Abiel Smith School backlot in the 1990s. Additional small-scale studies at the Peter Faneuil School, the Mount Vernon Street Sewer, and the lawn of the Massachusetts State House suggested that some archaeological resources may remain intact within the site.⁴⁷⁹ In an effort to facilitate future archaeological collaborations, the study recommended research on the collections and the continued development of relationships with partners and the Beacon Hill community.⁴⁸⁰

To prepare for the GMP, park planners also undertook an Alternative Transportation Study and made plans with the NPS Harpers Ferry Center for Media Services to produce a Comprehensive Interpretive Plan, although the latter did not come to fruition.⁴⁸¹

The GMP planning team consisting of an NPS planning specialist, Boston African American NHS leadership, Museum leadership, and other select partners, including the City of Boston and Suffolk University, met throughout 2000 and 2001 to map out common planning objectives and identify problems.⁴⁸² The alternatives developed as a result of these meetings included a wide range of options from the maintenance of the status quo to purchasing the properties on Smith Court and creating a living history park. Those alternatives which became a part of the GMP included a “no action” alternative, a plan to improve site operations (Alternative 1), and a plan to broaden the site's reach through an increase in programming and interpretive scope in addition to improving site operations (Alternative 2/ Preferred Alternative). Achieving any of the management

⁴⁷⁸ NPS, GMP: BOAF 2008, 65.

⁴⁷⁹ NPS, GMP: BOAF 2008, 63.

⁴⁸⁰ PAL, Archaeological Assessment, 98–100.

⁴⁸¹ NPS, GMP: BOAF 2008, 17; “Alternative Transportation Study,” Folder 9, Box 5, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA; “Draft Project Agreement, Long Range Interpretive Plan, June 2000,” Folder 9, Box 5, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA; Park Ranger Frank Middleton also wrote a proposal for gaining Project funds through the PMIS system for a Long Range Interpretive Plan in February of 2009; SMM, “February 17, 2009,” BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

⁴⁸² National Park Service, *Boston African American National Historic Site, General Management Plan Workbook, Partners Meeting, December 6, 2000.* On file in the Boston NHP Archive Library. The shelf copy contains extensive notes from the meeting, presumably taken by Ken Heidelberg.

prescriptions laid out in the plan, however, would of course be contingent on funding, Service-wide priorities, and the participation of park partners.⁴⁸³

The GMP highlighted how far the site continued to be from fully realizing its potential. Preservation and resource management goals included actions as basic, but persistently difficult, as establishing cooperative agreements with the property owners within the site. Most actions and policies were too broad to be useful, while other requests, such as calls for more staff, were unlikely to be heard. Still, many of the goals outlined in the document hint at the direction the site would go in the years ahead, especially with respect to a closer relationship with Boston NHP. The GMP called for a connection of the Freedom Trail and the Black Heritage Trail, interpretive programs that highlighted connections between the Black community’s abolitionist struggles and the American Revolution, and the coordination of Boston African American NHS’s planning and management with that of other Boston NHP sites.⁴⁸⁴ The plan detailed interpretation goals such as the continuation of ranger tours and the development of a visiting scholars program.

During this period, Savage remained focused on reaching an agreement with the City of Boston to redevelop the market floors of Faneuil Hall as an NPS visitor center.⁴⁸⁵ The renovation of the market floors would be the only major project funded by NPS at either Boston park during Savage’s tenure, although the renovations themselves would take a decade longer.⁴⁸⁶ Meanwhile, the GMP process dragged on, and by 2006, much of the energy and hopefulness that had characterized the early planning stages had faded. In May 2006, Savage signed a draft version of the plan “as final” even as errors and other concerns remained outstanding.⁴⁸⁷ When the GMP finally got published in 2008, major shifts in leadership at the Boston parks lay afoot.⁴⁸⁸ In 2006 and 2007, Boston African American’s senior park rangers alternated attendance to the superintendent staff meetings. Site Manager Ken Heidelberg retired in mid-2008, and Superintendent Savage retired in August 2009. The managers who took their places would inherit a management plan that laid out an idealistic vision of the site and its relationship with the Museum

⁴⁸³ NPS, GMP: BOAF 2008, 16.

⁴⁸⁴ NPS, GMP: BOAF 2008, 20–23.

⁴⁸⁵ Peter Steele (Acting Superintendent), “Boston National Historical Park, State of the Park, 2004,” On file, NPS Electronic Technical Information Center (ETIC), accessed February 14, 2022, <https://pubs.nps.gov/>.

⁴⁸⁶ Savage, Oral History, 2022. Savage indicated that the NPS was very reluctant to fund large project and only through appealing to Senator Ted Kennedy was he able to get \$7.5 million dollars appropriated for the renovation. The renovation would take place in the early 2010s, with the visitor center opening in 2012.

⁴⁸⁷ SMM, “May 8, 2006,” BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA; Williams, Oral History, 2021. Williams undertook additional edits with Kathryn Grover and other scholars in August and September of 2006. See SMM “Aug. 7, 2005” and “Sept 25, 2006,” BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

⁴⁸⁸ The General Management Plan was published digitally in 2008 and in hard copy in 2009. There are slight differences between these versions, including the absence of a preface, written by Ken Heidelberg and Bernadette Williams, from the printed version.

of African American History as out of step with the financial realities, Boston NHP organizational changes, and the technological innovations that had occurred since the GMP process had begun a decade before.

Park Rangers Make Interpretive Improvements

While the General Management Plan occupied a central focus of management staff at the site in the 2000s, park rangers pursued a wide variety of interpretive projects which took advantage of the energy surrounding the planning process, the research interests of individual staff members, and the expertise of senior staff, especially that of Boston NHP Cultural Resource Manager and Historian Marty Blatt.

As discussed above, Marty Blatt came from an academic background and had knowledge of public history methods and practices that both Boston parks utilized to their advantage. In addition, he showed a special interest in elevating Black history at both Boston NHP and Boston African American NHS and had the skills and connections to grow the interpretive programming of the parks. This collaboration led to important changes in the interpretive program at the site.

The basic interpretive program of the site accounted for the largest part of the park rangers' labor. This program stationed rangers at the Shaw/54th Regiment Memorial and the African Meeting House and called for regular Black Heritage Trail tours during the warmer months. Park Ranger Ryan McNabb assumed this administrative challenge when he began in 2000. At times, the limited site staff implemented the program with assistance from volunteers at the Museum. Several of the site's rangers still found ways to pursue their research and educational interests beyond the basic mandate of their jobs, often using their own time.⁴⁸⁹ Superintendent Savage and Site Manager Heidelberg gave the park rangers the creative space to explore their interests in historical topics or new media.

Park rangers Ryan McNabb, Kerri Greenidge, Frank Middleton, and Horace Seldon led the charge on developing new interpretive programming. In 2003, Greenidge created an activity booklet for elementary school children on the history of the abolitionist movement, and in 2006, published the

⁴⁸⁹ The Museum launched a volunteer program in 2003, under the direction of Crystal Wall. This program coordinated with Park Ranger Ryan McNabb for training purposes; Chandra Harrington (MAAH Director of Operations), to Friends of the Museum of Afro American History, memorandum, RE: Volunteer Coordinator, July 24, 2003. Folder "Volunteers," Box A001.4, General Files, Institutional Archives, MAAH Archives, Boston, MA.

popular audience book *Boston's Abolitionists*.⁴⁹⁰ Greenidge and McNabb worked together to develop a program for the annual *People and Places* teachers' conference in 2003.⁴⁹¹

Horace Seldon brought his background in social justice work at Community Change, Inc. to his volunteer and staff positions at Boston African American NHS. In 2000, he identified abolitionist David Walker's house on Joy Street, developed a new program based on Walker's life and the book *David Walker's Appeal*, and put together multiple research projects on a variety of topics which highlighted Boston's Black history. In 2006, Seldon founded a Beacon Hill community research group called the "Beacon Hill Scholars" and orchestrated the "History Nuts" seminar series. Later, Frank Middleton built upon Seldon's work and founded the "BOAF Research Team" to bring together "local scholars, teachers, journalists, and Beacon Hill scholars."⁴⁹²

One outreach effort underscores the independence of park rangers in pursuing projects which fit their personal vision of the educational and interpretive goals of the site. After Dallas County Community College faculty from Texas brought students to Boston African American NHS as part of educational trips in the early 2000s, park ranger Ryan McNabb traveled to Dallas to give virtual tours of the site to college students in 2006 and 2009 (Figure 17). Students and faculty described the presentations as enlightening and even moving, with one professor describing McNabb's presentations as "personally defining moments in the psyches and identities of each person with whom [he shared] them."⁴⁹³ The Texas program served the mission of the site in terms of both education and outreach, while enabling the NPS to "[tap] into another audience."⁴⁹⁴ The choice to pursue this particular opportunity was not part of a wider interpretative or outreach plan, however, but rather hinged upon whether the site had enough full-time and temporary park rangers to cover interpretation shifts during the short trip. With this experience as a model, it is highly likely that Boston African American NHS has a host of untapped audiences. An outreach plan may have helped park rangers to leverage the site's message and outreach capacity into not only the growth of its audience, but making connections with potential volunteers, future park rangers, or potential donors.

⁴⁹⁰ Kerri Greenidge, *Boston's Abolitionists* (Boston: Applewood Publishers, 2006).

⁴⁹¹ "Boston African American NHS, Goals and Objectives 2003," Folder 4, Box 5, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

⁴⁹² SMM, "May 19, 2008," BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

⁴⁹³ Ryan McNabb, "Boston African American National Historic Site Outreach Extends to Texas," *Broadside*, no. 1, (2009). 8.

⁴⁹⁴ Ryan McNabb, Oral History Interview conducted by Teresa Bulger June 7, 2022. Boston African American National Historic Site Administrative History Oral History Project.



Figure 17. Park ranger Ryan McNabb presents a lecture on the “Men of the 54th Massachusetts Regiment” to students at Dallas County Community College in 2009. McNabb stands in front of a projected image of the Robert G. Shaw/54th Regiment Monument, which depicts a number of African American soldiers. *National Park Service, Boston African American National Historic Site, Resource Management Records.*

While financial problems and disagreements about the African Meeting House restoration had created tension between the site and Boston NHP, research and interpretive programming brought the two closer together in the early 2000s. As noted above, Marty Blatt’s work to elevate Black history in the late 1990s proved key to these efforts. In the new millennium, Blatt organized the “Changing Meanings of Freedom” conference in 2000, helped to facilitate the “Resisting for Justice” *People and Places* program, and facilitated the “Rebellion and Revolution” collaboration between several Boston-area NPS units in 2002.⁴⁹⁵ Within Boston NHP, he brought a renewed focus on Black soldiers in the American Revolution in 2003 through the “Patriots of Color” program, which built on the research of independent scholars to document the African American participation in the Battle of Bunker Hill as well as the Lexington and Concord campaigns. In 2005, Blatt also facilitated a collaboration with Discovery Roxbury, a history and education-focused nonprofit, in a program on “Roxbury and the American Revolution.” Roxbury continued to be one of Boston’s most diverse communities, just as it had been when Byron Rushing first envisioned the public outreach role of the Museum of Afro American History in the 1970s and 1980s. Rushing also participated in the public workshop portion of the 2005 program, which not

⁴⁹⁵ Rodriquez and Roberts, *State of Knowledge*, 16–17.

only highlighted Roxbury's role in the American Revolution generally, but the roles of African American and Native American participants in the Siege of Boston.⁴⁹⁶

Blatt helped to shift the site toward new outreach and educational opportunities in the 2000s just as Ken Heidelberg stepped back from his leadership position. As a result, some of the previous outreach programs, such as the Underground Railroad puppet show and the annual 54th Regiment "Company A" marches, fell by the wayside. Blatt served as both the chief of cultural resources for Boston NHP and the park historian. There is no doubt that to manage these roles, much of this work transpired after hours. This pattern underscores the ways that completing complicated and expensive history and education projects often hinges on the expertise and drive of only a few people.

Projects also floundered for the *lack* of sufficient staff and partners. One example is the Prince Hall History project, which took place between 2003 and 2007. After the Museum organized a symposium on the Prince Hall masons in 2003, Donald Yacovone at the Massachusetts Historical Society and Martin Blatt took an interest in having the papers of the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Massachusetts published. Boston African American NHS became involved in the educational component of the project. In 2006, Bernadette Williams won a \$15,000 grant from the National Park Foundation's African American Experience Fund to create educational programming in collaboration with the Museum and the Prince Hall Masons;⁴⁹⁷ however, the initial impetus of the project to publish the papers of the Prince Hall did not come to fruition. The MHS's involvement ceased when Yacovone's position got eliminated abruptly in 2006.⁴⁹⁸ Yacovone had been a major driving force behind the project and the loss of his leadership likely contributed to the stalling of the publishing, conference, and exhibition plans.

Even as some projects stalled and leadership shifts at both Boston African American NHS and Boston NHP made execution of programming difficult, site staff still sought ways to pursue new historical research and build the site's reach. In 2009, Boston NHP and Boston African American NHS hosted the "Abolitionism in Black and White" symposium, which represented a collaboration with Longfellow National Historic Site (now Longfellow House Washington's Headquarters NHS), in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The two-day event comprised not only an academic conference, but a stage performance of a play about Harriet Jacobs, abolitionist and author of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself* (1861). The symposium was offered both

⁴⁹⁶ Stephen Carlson, "Civic Engagement: A Special Supplement," *Broadside*, no. 2 (2006), 8.

⁴⁹⁷ "Prince Hall History Project Minutes, March 10, 2004," BOST Archives, Cultural Resource Manager [Martin Blatt] Files, Box 1, Folder Prince Hall Masons; Superintendent's Management Team Meeting, Jan. 9, 2006," BOST RMR, BNHP, Boston, MA; Williams, Oral History, 2021.

⁴⁹⁸ "Prince Hall History Project Meeting Minutes, Jun 21, 2006," BOST Archives, Cultural Resource Manager [Martin Blatt] Files, Box 1, Folder Prince Hall Masons.

to the general public and to teachers as a means of earning professional development credits.⁴⁹⁹ Clearly, Boston African American NHS's interpretive program thrived during the 2000s because of the drive of its park rangers, the leadership of Martin Blatt, and a spirit of collaboration embraced by both Boston African American NHS and Boston NHP staff.

Administrative and Operational Consolidation at the Boston Parks

While the interpretive program at Boston African American NHS grew stronger in the 2000s, the site continued to face financial hardship that mounted higher with each passing year. At the end of the decade, leadership at Boston NHP began to make changes that moved toward sharing resources between the park and the site in an official manner, as part of a larger project to consolidate operations and administrative costs. These changes included consolidating office space, reclassifying some site employees under shared titles between Boston NHP and Boston African American NHS, and the reassignment of individuals where they did not find a place in the new structure. While these changes began under the leadership of Superintendent Savage beginning in 2006, the site did not finalize the changes until Deputy Superintendent Celeste Bernardo took a leadership role at Boston African American NHS beginning in the summer of 2008. Long-time leadership at the site, including Supervisory Park Ranger Bernadette Williams and Site Manager Ken Heidelberg, saw the changes to the site between 2006 and 2008 as a defining moment. On paper, Boston NHP administrators like Sandy Corbett and Inez Wolins were implementing a "Management Action Plan" designed to make both Boston NHP and Boston African American NHS more efficient and able to accomplish their missions more effectively. In practice, the changes also dismantled and redistributed the resources of an African American history site that had until that point been actively working to establish operational independence.

Changes began in late 2006 as the site's GMP was being finalized and the Northeast Regional Office was undergoing a "rightsizing" plan to increase efficiency.⁵⁰⁰ Shortly thereafter, Sandy Corbett, Deputy Superintendent of Operations for Boston NHP, began the process of formulating a "Management Action Plan" (MAP) for Boston African American NHS. Corbett framed six central issues to be addressed in the MAP, some of which focused on increasing managerial efficiency, and bore little relation to any management goals outlined in the lengthy GMP process. Among Corbett's concerns: "opportunities for improvement" to newly established park partnerships; the prospect of reducing costs by changing office locations; strategies to "integrate the management of [Boston NHP and Boston African American NHS] to optimize efficiencies and

⁴⁹⁹ Ryan McNabb, "Abolitionism in Black & White: The Anti-Slavery Community of Boston and Cambridge," *Broadside*, no.1 (2009): 4.

⁵⁰⁰ SMM, "Sept. 25, 2006," BOST RMR, BNHP, Boston, MA; The timing of the Northeast Regional reorganization may be related to the issuance of the 2006 NPS Management Policies; National Park Service, *Management Policies 2006*.

effectiveness in our programs;” potential reimbursement to Boston NHP for services provided to the site; reimbursement to the site for services rendered for other parks; and how to “integrate BOAF and BOST from an administrative support standpoint.”⁵⁰¹ Changes happened within Boston NHP as well, and the November 2006 All Employees Meeting promised to lay out the “Vision for BNHP” moving forward as the park sought a framework of “Most Efficient Organization.”⁵⁰² The management choices to follow were consistent with the 2006 Interpretation & Education (I&E) Business Plan and 2006 NPS Management Policies.⁵⁰³

Changes to Boston African American NHS began the following year. In August 2007, the site’s staff met to define its “Interpretive Management Action Plan” (I-MAP). The site’s I-MAP priorities represented a mix of practical goals, such as developing interpretive and education programs in a “sustainable way” (sourcing funding from outside the NPS), with others more nebulous, such as establishing Boston African American NHS as a “site of conscience.”⁵⁰⁴ In an overlap with priorities outlined in the GMP, the I-MAP underscored the need for a long-range interpretive plan and a visitor center. Fiscal year 2007 had been a landmark year of interpretive events and tours, partnerships with community groups, new tours, book clubs, and community outreach.⁵⁰⁵ Despite the success of the interpretive programs, the site’s staff got redistributed to serve both Boston NHP and the site in late 2007 and early 2008.

In December of 2007, as part of “formalizing [the site’s] personnel plan,” park ranger Horace Seldon was shifted from a seasonal to a term park guide and park ranger Jarumi Crooks transferred to the Student Career Employment Program.⁵⁰⁶ Seldon continued to be awarded appointments until 2012, and thereafter worked on a volunteer basis until 2015.⁵⁰⁷

In February of 2008, Boston NHP moved the offices of the site’s leadership and the three longest-serving site employees out of the 14 Beacon Street location, including Site Manager Ken Heidelberg, Chief Park Ranger Bernadette Williams, and Park Administrative Assistant Lauren

⁵⁰¹ Deputy Superintendent of Operations, BNHP [Sandy Corbett], to Maryanne Gerbaukas, email, re: “BOAF MAP,” October 4, 2006. BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA, Central Files, Management Improvement Projects, Box 5, Folder 5.

⁵⁰² SMM, “Sept. 25, 2006,” BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA; The project team could not locate minutes from the November 2006 All Employees meeting.

⁵⁰³ NPS Education Council, *I&E Program Business Plan*; National Park Service, *Management Policies 2006*.

⁵⁰⁴ “BOAF I MAP priorities 2007,” BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA, Central Files, Box 6, Folder 4, K2621.

⁵⁰⁵ “Boston African American National Historic Site, Interpretive Report, Fiscal Year 2007,” Folder 4, Box 6, Central Files, BOAF RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

⁵⁰⁶ SMM, “December 31, 2007,” BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

⁵⁰⁷ Ryan McNabb, “Horace Seldon: Statement from the National Park Service,” August 2017, accessed March 31, 2022, <https://www.horaceseldon.com/statement-national-park-service/>.

Macchia. This office move represented an important shift for the site. Since 1984, the site and the Museum of African American History had shared spaces, or occupied adjacent floors for all but two years, between 1997 and 1999, when the Smith School underwent renovation (Table 2). This had the impact of facilitating close working relationships between site leadership, everyday staff at the site, and the staff of the Museum.

Table 2. Boston African American National Historic Site Office Space Timeline.

Year	Location(s)
1980	Boston African American NHS staff occupy offices within the BNHP Offices at 15 State Street, Boston, a 15-minute walk to the African Meeting House; Museum Executive Director Ruth Batson joins them in May of 1985.
1985	July: both Boston African American NHS and Museum take up offices at the Abiel Smith School, located adjacent to the African Meeting House. The organizations rent space from the United Services Organizations (USO), but the building was owned by the City of Boston.
1997	April: Boston African American NHS moved to office space at 14 Beacon Street, a 10-minute walk to the African Meeting House; Museum offices move to 138 Mountfort Street, Brookline, MA, on Boston University’s campus.
1999	Museum joins Boston African American NHS at 14 Beacon Street, on a separate floor.
2008	February: Boston African American NHS management including Site Manager Heidelberg, Chief Park Ranger Bernadette Williams, and Site Administrative Assistant Lauren Macchia transferred away from 14 Beacon Street.
2010	Mid-2010: Boston African American NHS site manager’s office returns to 14 Beacon Street when Terry Brown is hired.
2014	January: Boston African American NHS staff offices move to 15 State Street, including site manager; Museum offices stay at 14 Beacon Street, Boston.
2019	Museum offices move to 31 Milk Street, Boston.

The staff relationships within Boston African American NHS were also affected by the change. The small staff of the site had enabled the three- to eight-person team of staff members to interact freely and regularly with the site manager as the practical leader of the unit, who interfaced with the superintendent when necessary. The movement of Macchia, Heidelberg, and Williams away from site “headquarters” on Beacon Street undermined the close-knit structure of the site and the Site-Museum relationship. With the move, Lauren Macchia was transferred to the administrative division at Charlestown Navy Yard and began serving the administrative needs of both Boston NHP and the site as the Financial Administrative Support Officer.⁵⁰⁸ Ken Heidelberg also moved

⁵⁰⁸ “BNHP News,” *Broadside* (2008): 11; Lauren Macchia, Oral History, May 26, 2021.

to the Navy Yard, soon thereafter accepted a “buy-out package,” and retired that summer.⁵⁰⁹ Bernadette Williams, the last of the senior staff, proved to be an enigma for upper management.

Even though Williams remained a park ranger who had served for decades, had represented the site at innumerable public events and conferences, and worked directly with partners such as the Museum and the Prince Hall masons, she recalls they “didn’t know what to do with me.” She represented the independent spirit of the site that no longer found purchase in the redesign. Williams was reassigned as Volunteer Coordinator/Urban Outreach Coordinator as part of Boston NHP, with her office moved to 15 State Street. In 2010, the NPS sent her on an 18-month detail to Indiana Dunes National Park.

Although Boston African American NHS and Boston NHP changed rapidly, there remained still a bright future ahead. With the departure of Heidelberg and Savage, Celeste Bernardo became acting superintendent in late 2009. From this position, she began meeting with both the Park Service’s regional offices and the Museum of African American History to identify their priorities. She then crafted a five-year plan to acquire the needed funding for the African Meeting House restoration. As described above, the interpretive program at the site shifted to become more interwoven with other themes, sites, and personas of Boston history, a trend that would continue in the years to come. Finally, the site stood on the cusp of hiring its first African American superintendent, Cassius Cash, who would bring a vision for interpretation at both Boston NHP and the site that actively centered Black history in ways never attempted. While the site lost some of its institutional identity as a stand-alone site, it also gained the ability to draw on the personnel, scholarship, and audiences of its parent park more actively in the years to come.

⁵⁰⁹ Williams, Oral History, 2021; Superintendent’s Meeting Minutes, March 27, 2008; During this March 2008 meeting, Boston NHP awaited information from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) on the Voluntary Early Retirement Authority (VERA) approvals. Ken Heidelberg retired later that year.

CHAPTER 7. THE BOSTON PARKS UNITED, 2010–2015

At the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, national politics, and the economy shifted, punctuated by an economic crisis and a growing progressive political movement. The National Park Service found itself reckoning with what came to be known as the “Great Recession.” Officially stretching from 2007 to mid-2009, the long-term effects of the decline in economic activity associated with the Great Recession would lead to the steady reduction and stagnation of the Park Service’s operating budget. The Budget Control Act of 2011 forced across-the-board federal spending cuts, which translated into a 5 percent decrease in the NPS budget in early 2013 and beyond (known as “sequestration” at the time).⁵¹⁰

Just as the economic prospects of the country deteriorated, the nation also experienced a shift in its political outlook as Barack Obama became the nation’s first Black president in January 2009. Political pundits cited this historic moment as a sign that Americans could “shed their racial transgresses in a quest for equity for all.”⁵¹¹ As pointed out by a host of critics, the notion that America had entered a “post-racial” era proved belied by the persistence of institutionalized racism and white supremacy.⁵¹² Still, a “colorblind America” idealism permeated discussions surrounding President Obama’s election and mirrored the idealism of policies and goals in federal institutions like the National Park Service.

The National Park Service had long professed support for a socially, racially, and ethnically inclusive American history. This core value echoes throughout the rhetoric of Park Service publications, and often came into conflict with the reality of an institution that remained persistently white and received poor marks for its representation of the histories of Black and other

⁵¹⁰ Associated Press, “Sequestration impact on national parks detailed in memo,” *Politico*, February 22, 2013; Superintendent, BOST and BOAF [Cassius Cash] to File, Untitled Memorandum [A38 (BOST-S)], May 7, 2013. BOST Superintendent’s Reading Files, March–April 2013, BNHP Archives, Charlestown Navy Yard, Charlestown, MA; Superintendent Cash’s memo noted the 5% spending cut and detailed that “this cut comes just as we were planning for our busy summer season ... we will likely reduce the amount of ranger-led interpretive and education programs at the site; have reduced law enforcement presence; and may also be unable to waive special use application fees or provide co-sponsorship funding for community events”

⁵¹¹ The thesis that white supremacy underwrites modern practices of “colorblind racism,” which deny the role of race itself in shaping our nation’s social systems, is outlined in Eduardo Bonilla-Silva’s, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2017); President-elect Barack Obama, “A more perfect union.” Speech presented at the Constitution Center, Philadelphia, PA, March 18, 2008. As cited in Bettina L. Love and Brandelyn Tosolt. “Reality or Rhetoric? Barack Obama and Post-Racial America,” *Race, Gender & Class* 17, nos. 3–4 (2010): 23.

⁵¹² Waldo W. Martin Jr. “Precious African American Memories, Post-Racial Dreams & the American Nation,” *Daedalus* (Winter 2011): 72.

minority Americans.⁵¹³ Achieving meaningful inclusivity remained persistently out of reach. Yet, as the first decade of the new century came to a close, there appeared signs that the Park Service was beginning to move beyond these hurdles. The Park Service had completed a study of African American National Historic Landmarks in 2008 and would soon kick off its 2011–2015 “Civil War to Civil Rights” commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the end of slavery in the country. The Park Service reasserted its commitment to the inclusivity ideal in the years running up to the 2016 Centennial Anniversary of the founding of the NPS. In preparation for the centennial, the NPS issued a “Call to Action” (Centennial C2A), which reasserted its commitment to resource stewardship and education.⁵¹⁴ The Centennial C2A also professed the NPS commitment to “fully represent our nation’s ethnically and culturally diverse communities” as well as embrace “America’s complex heritage.”⁵¹⁵

The Park Service’s fiscal austerity and ambitious programming and outreach goals played out in Boston in a unique way based on the fresh leadership that reimagined Boston African American NHS and Boston HNP (hereafter collectively “Boston parks”). As described above, the departure of several long-term staff members and the consolidation of staff had created an opportunity to redefine what the Boston parks could or should be. Into this space stepped the new superintendent, Cassius Cash, who embraced the reformulation of the core mission to the Boston parks, park partnerships, and community outreach. Cash, as both the site’s first superintendent arriving from outside the Park Service and its first African American superintendent, would prove crucial to establishing a new direction for Boston African American NHS, now in its third decade.

The period between 2010 and 2015 represented a re-envisioning of the site, its relationship with Boston NHP, and its partnership with the Museum of African American History. Superintendent Cash sought to unite Boston’s historical parks with common goals, overlapping themes, and a cohesive staff that operated seamlessly. This new united outlook showed in the opening of a joint visitor center in Faneuil Hall and articulated new interpretive themes and management goals as laid out in the coordinated Foundation Documents for Boston African American NHS and Boston NHP. Cash hoped to interweave the interpretive programs of the two parks with new programs embracing the themes of Boston African American NHS in the context of Boston NHP sites and artifacts. While this did happen to a certain extent, the Boston parks continued to be largely separated physically and interpretively.

⁵¹³ Miller, “The National Park Service and the Afro-American Experience,” 107–109; Carolyn Finney, *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 17–29.

⁵¹⁴ National Park Service, *A Call to Action: Preparing for a Second Century of Stewardship and Engagement*, August 25, 2011 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, 2011).

⁵¹⁵ NPS, Call to Action, 5.

The period from 2010–2015 also saw major milestones in resource stewardship and partnerships as the second phase of the African Meeting House restoration finally reached completion and the Robert Gould Shaw/54th Regiment Memorial Restoration (i.e., “Shaw/54th Regiment Memorial”) launched. The African Meeting House restoration was accomplished through the continued fundraising and lobbying of the Museum of African American History, with support from the site. A major restoration effort for the Shaw/54th Regiment Memorial, initiated by Boston African American NHS staff, involved collaboration with the Friends of the Public Gardens, the City of Boston, and the Museum.

In 2013, the organizational structure of the Northeast Region shifted and the superintendent for Boston Harbor Islands National Recreation Area, Giles Parker, began to report to Superintendent Cash. Cash’s successor, Michael Creasey, became superintendent of the “National Parks of Boston” in 2015 which involved the full integration of all three Boston NPS units.⁵¹⁶ Also in 2015, the National Park Service launched its “Urban Agenda” and chose Boston as one of the ten model cities wherein the tenets of the Urban Agenda would be put into motion. The Urban Agenda focused on increasing the relevancy of the National Park Service for urban populations, creating a culture of collaboration with park partners, and encouraging collaboration between the units of the Park Service itself (OneNPS).⁵¹⁷ The Urban Agenda set the stage for the administrative, interpretive, and partnership goals for National Parks of Boston moving forward.

Administration

As Boston African American NHS entered its thirtieth year in the fall of 2009, the site refreshed its management structure and outreach. Cassius Cash became the site’s first Black superintendent in early 2010 after a six-month vacancy following Terry Savage’s retirement. Superintendent Cash brought a unique outlook to the Park Service as an outsider who had spent most of his career with the U.S. Forest Service.⁵¹⁸ His appointment marked the Northeast Regional Office’s desire to choose an applicant who could both redefine the Boston parks to be more inclusive for their audiences and could help to represent the diversity that the Park Service hoped to achieve. The regional director at the time, Dennis Reidenbach, officially made the appointment and stated that he chose Cash because of his successful history of forging relationships with communities, as well as being an individual who worked effectively with employees and partners.⁵¹⁹ As the first Black

⁵¹⁶ The Boston Harbor Islands “superintendent” position was not part of the National Parks of Boston organizational chart, but Giles Parker continued to occupy this position from 2015–2017. Giles Parker, personal communication, June 2023.

⁵¹⁷ Elizabeth Perry, “Cityscape Connections: National Park Service Relevance and Resilience in Urban Areas.” (PhD dissertation, Graduate College University of Vermont, 2018), 2; National Park Service, *Urban Agenda: Call to Action Initiative* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, March 2015), 9–19.

⁵¹⁸ Sean Hennessey, “Cassius Cash Named Superintendent,” *Broadside*, no. 1 (2010): 1.

⁵¹⁹ Hennessey, “Cassius Cash,” 1.

NPS superintendent in a city with a rocky history of race relations, the NPS no doubt hoped that Cash's appointment might help the Park Service to more effectively reach the city's Black and Brown communities.

Superintendent Cash brought a vision to unite Boston NHP and Boston African American NHS under a single thematic umbrella that explored "the legacy of freedom in the United States and its changing meanings."⁵²⁰ To do this, he sought to consolidate both the operations and interpretation at the Boston parks and to actively promote cooperation with park partners. In a recent interview, Cash recalled being "laser beam focused in bringing about a new type of cohesion amongst our partners from Boston [Boston NHP] and BOAF [Boston African American NHS]" which represented a break from Terry Savage's more arm's-length management style.⁵²¹ Cash credits meetings with park partners for the genesis of the "Trails to Freedom" idea, which would be used to jointly rebrand the two historical trails and also serve as a rationale for interweaving the interpretive themes of Boston NHP and Boston African American NHS.

In some ways, the unification that Cash sought represented the natural outgrowth of the operational consolidation that had begun in 2008 and 2009, including some of the goals articulated in the 2008 General Management Plan. The GMP had recommended that the site develop an interpretive narrative that "makes clear the connections and parallels between Boston's revolutionary struggle and North Slope equal rights efforts of the 1800s."⁵²² Additionally, critics had long observed that the Freedom Trail and Black Heritage Trail should be connected, if not united under a single interpretive framework.⁵²³ Still, Superintendent Cash's view that Boston African American NHS and Boston NHP were on *equal* footing was in fact new.⁵²⁴ As the first Black superintendent of the Boston parks, Superintendent Cash helped to lift up Black history at the Boston parks. His subjectivity as a Black man may have also positioned him to think more critically about the existing interpretation at both Boston NHP and the site. Further, as the first superintendent of the Boston parks hired from outside the NPS, Cash also brought a fresh perspective.

Superintendent Cash emphasized the importance of communication with his staff and park partners. He used his Park Leadership Team (PLT) to communicate management decisions, cooperatively think through park challenges, and field new ideas to improve diversity and

⁵²⁰ Hennessy, "Cassius Cash," 1; Laura Matchan, "Blazing the other freedom trail," *Boston Globe*, May 14, 2012: A1.

⁵²¹ Cassius Cash, Oral History Interview conducted by Teresa Bulger and Nedra Lee, March 4, 2021. Boston African American National Historic Site Administrative History Oral History Project.

⁵²² NPS, GMP: BOAF 2008, 20–22.

⁵²³ Miller, "The National Park Service and the Afro-American Experience," 107–109; Page, "African Americans and National Parks in the New England Cluster," 134–39; Rushing, "Testimony...September 10, 1973."

⁵²⁴ Matchan, "Blazing the other freedom trail," A6.

technology.⁵²⁵ The make-up of the team comprised the same staff as the previous “Superintendent’s Management Team,” although the guidelines and purpose of the PLT became more explicitly planned out.⁵²⁶ In the fall of 2010, for example, Cash had a third-party team survey the goals and expectations of the leadership team before group training sessions occurred later that year.⁵²⁷ At that time, the PLT did not yet have a sense of a collective purpose or team cohesion, although its members hoped that they could move beyond the administrative chasm that had separated division chiefs and the superintendent’s office in the past.⁵²⁸ By organizing the management at Boston NHP and Boston African American NHS into a “team” and utilizing management methods to resolve issues, Superintendent Cash intended to provide increased transparency and flexibility in order to establish new work patterns.

Boston African American NHS Site Manager Terry Brown assisted Superintendent Cash in the execution of this new management and interpretive framework. Brown brought to the position a long history with the Park Service, having served for 17 years at several historical parks such as Independence National Historical Park and the National Mall in Washington, DC.⁵²⁹ After arriving in Boston in the spring of 2010, he became a key player in implementing Cash’s vision of uniting the Boston parks. Brown facilitated the merging of marketing materials, exchanging interpretive staff, and encouraging the sharing of resources and joint research.⁵³⁰

The uniting of the Boston Parks did not happen all at once, however, but progressed in stages. After recasting some Boston African American NHS staff in new, shared roles in 2008, the next major step in the consolidation of the Boston parks proved to be the opening of the Faneuil Hall Market Floors Visitor Center (Faneuil Hall VC) as a dual Visitor Center in 2012. The following year Boston African American NHS and Boston NHP underwent “organizational integration.”⁵³¹

⁵²⁵ “Boston National Historical Park, Boston African American National Historic Site, Park’s Leadership Team Guide for Meetings,” Box Planning Documents and Meeting Notes 2012–2014. Deputy Superintendent’s Office, BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

⁵²⁶ The Park Leadership Team comprised the superintendent, deputy superintendent, the heads of each division, and the site manager at Boston African American NHS.

⁵²⁷ Joshua Leavitt and Campbell Gerrish, “Boston National Historical Park Leadership team, Sensing Summary --- November 2010.” Box Planning Documents and Meeting Notes 2012–2014. Deputy Superintendent’s Office, BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

⁵²⁸ Leavitt and Gerrish, “PLT Sensing Summary,” 2.

⁵²⁹ Sean Hennessy, “Terry E. Brown Named Site Manager at Boston African American National Historic Site,” *Broadside*, no. 1 (2010): 2.

⁵³⁰ Terry E. Brown, Oral History Interview conducted by Teresa Bulger and Nedra Lee, March 3, 2022. Boston African American National Historic Site Administrative History Oral History Project.

⁵³¹ National Park Service, *Foundation Document: Boston African American National Historic Site, Massachusetts*, (U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service: Boston, November 2015), 3. Hereafter: NPS, *Foundation Document: BOAF*.

Physically Uniting the Parks: The Faneuil Hall Market Floors Visitor Center

The Faneuil Hall VC had originally been conceived as a centralized “Freedom Trail” focused visitor center. During his tenure as superintendent, Terry Savage had actively pursued the creation of a new visitor center in cooperation with the City of Boston, in partial fulfillment of the recommendations of the 1996 Freedom Trail study.⁵³² Savage had facilitated the funding for the \$7 million restoration and renovation project, which relied upon funding from both the City of Boston and the National Park Service. By the end of fiscal year 2009 and Savage’s retirement, much of the preparatory work had been completed. This included “construction drawings, exhibit script, and image acquisition,” although the funds had yet to be transferred to Boston.⁵³³ Upon taking the helm at the Boston parks, Superintendent Cash began to reimagine the visitor center to reflect the collective, combined interpretive mission of the Boston parks, and to include both Boston NHP and Boston African American NHS on equal footing.

The Faneuil Hall Visitor Center was opened on Memorial Day weekend in spring of 2012. The new visitor center got branded as the “home base” for both Boston NHP and the site in a way that had not before been attempted. In a change from previous programming, both the Freedom Trail and Black Heritage Trail tours would leave from Faneuil Hall. This move sought to re-center the Black Heritage Trail, as it had previously started at the Shaw/54th Regiment Memorial, which some considered “off the beaten path” and “overshadowed by the Freedom Trail.”⁵³⁴ Importantly, the exhibitions and merchandise at the Visitor Center promoted both the site and Boston NHS, further reinforcing a corporate identity.⁵³⁵

The Faneuil Hall VC exhibitions embraced the changing ways that technology had begun to play a role in visitors’ experiences of historic sites in the second decade of the twenty-first century. A series of iPads mounted in the visitor center offered orientation materials for visitors, while a newly launched application for smartphone users provided virtual tour options for visitors walking the city. NPB also began to embrace popular social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, with new park rangers managing the accounts.⁵³⁶ As articulated as early as 1996, an embrace of “state of the art technology” remained overdue for the interpretive spaces of Boston NHP.⁵³⁷ This

⁵³² Dixon and Clancy, *The Freedom Trail*, 21.

⁵³³ “Boston National Historical Park, Boston African American National Historic Site, 2008 State of the Parks Narrative,” Box BOST Superintendent’s Reading Files, 2009–2010, BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

⁵³⁴ Quoting NPS spokesman Sean Hennessey in Matchan, “Blazing the other freedom trail,” A6.

⁵³⁵ Cash, Oral History, 2021.

⁵³⁶ SMM, “August 28, 2012,” BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA. Regional Social Media Manager John Tobiason was assisting Boston NHP in putting together iPad/smartphone applications.

⁵³⁷ Dixon and Clancy, *The Freedom Trail*, 21; At the time “state of the art technology” was more on the scale of Disney’s “Circle-Vision” with the iPhone still ten years away. “Circle-Vision” appeared in the 1996 document as a

embrace of rapidly changing personal technology also set into relief the degree to which the 2008 General Management Plan for Boston African American NHS proved woefully outdated, with technology barely mentioned as a means of engaging future audiences.

Resource Stewardship: The African Meeting House

Superintendent Cash prioritized the restoration of the African Meeting House and in doing so put the significance of the building on equal footing with the historic sites in Boston NHP. During the prior decade, no funding requests for additional restoration funds were entered into the NPS's project funding system (PMIS).⁵³⁸ This changed in early 2010, with the interim leadership at the Boston parks between the departure of Terry Savage and the arrival of Cassius Cash. In January of that year, Assistant Superintendent Celeste Bernardo met with Dave Brouillette (formerly Deputy Superintendent for Boston NHP), Denver Service Center and NPS Northeast Region Office staff, and Beverly Morgan-Welch to discuss the restoration of the African Meeting House.⁵³⁹ In March, Superintendent Cash filed for a "Categorical Exclusion" for the rehabilitation, exempting the project from further review under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).⁵⁴⁰ The project stood well-positioned to obtain this designation as Executive Director Morgan-Welch had been preparing for the project through research, documentation, and other planning efforts to make the project itself "shovel ready." Superintendent Cash recognized this work, which included cultural resource mitigation via an archaeological excavation, the preparation of full, modern architectural plans and construction documents, and extensive lobbying and fundraising. The exhaustive preparatory work that had been completed, the project's compatibility with the maintenance of the resource's integrity, and the lack of adverse effects on visitation and nearby property owners led to the granting of the NEPA exemption.

When the National Park Service issued its Fiscal Year 2011 Budget Justification in spring 2010, the \$5.193 million dollar "Complete Rehab of African Meeting House" finally showed up as listed. While the project had made it into the PMIS and through the review process to receive a high

potential exhibit in the visitor center, which would surround visitors in a circular amphitheater with a video theatre-in-the-round experience.

⁵³⁸ The Project Management Information System is the computerized system through which all parks submit requests for Project Funds, as opposed to Base Operating Funds.

⁵³⁹ SMM, "January 5 and 10, 2010," BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

⁵⁴⁰ "Categorical Exclusion Form, Rehabilitate African Meeting House, PEPC Project Number 30727," Box Superintendent's Reading Files, 2009–2010. BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA. The form details that the work will include archaeology, installation of a pile system for elevator and stair tower, replacing the HVAC system, restoring/constructing pews, exterior masonry, rehabilitation of courtyard, roofing, waterproofing and fireproofing, and rehabilitation of windows, doors, frames, hardware, structural steel, carpentry, millwork, ceramic, stone, and wood flooring, painting, and wall covering, gypsum and drywall. The entire estimated cost showed up as \$8.15 million, \$3.6 million of which had already been expended on some of the above projects.

score, it remained unapproved.⁵⁴¹ Morgan-Welch recalled that even getting on the list of potential NPS projects proved to be an accomplishment. While the line item for the African Meeting House rehabilitation went unfunded, the project appeared “in the room.” She recalled that this accomplishment happened in part due to the work of Celeste Bernardo and Cassius Cash. The large balance of the praise belonged to the work of the Museum Board in getting the word out and the advocacy of politicians, including Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick, bringing the condition of the meeting house and its immediate restoration needs to the attention of Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar.⁵⁴²

The Museum did not give up there. In August 2010, as the fiscal year came to an end, the NPS made a call for “shovel ready” deferred maintenance construction projects that were made to utilize leftover stimulus funds set aside as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009. Morgan-Welch recalled that she had a week to prepare an application to again secure the money for the restoration, during which time she received support for her application from Superintendent Cassius Cash and Deputy Superintendent Celeste Bernardo. Morgan-Welch recalled that it was “hard enough to raise four million from one source—but to have to raise it twice!”

The Government quickly approved ARRA funding for the African Meeting House rehabilitation project and, even before official award of the money on September 14, 2010, the *Boston Globe* reported the feat. In an interview for the *Globe*, Governor Deval Patrick described the ARRA fund as a natural fit as the African Meeting House restoration remained a much-needed preservation project and a source of economic stimulus for the tourism economy and the employment sector.⁵⁴³ Through the ARRA, the National Park Service was awarded \$4.138 million for the restoration and rehabilitation of the African Meeting House, in fulfillment of the cooperative agreement between the Museum of African American History and the National Park Service.⁵⁴⁴

After receiving funding, the restoration moved forward quickly, with construction beginning in December 2010.⁵⁴⁵ The restoration included an array of improvements that had been slated for

⁵⁴¹ U.S. Department of the Interior Office of Budget, *Budget Justifications and Performance Information FY2011, National Park Service*, “Exhibit 4, National Park Service, Summary Project Data Sheet, Maintenance or Capital Improvement Plan,” (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, FY 2011), CONST-51. Available online: <https://www.nps.gov/aboutus/budget.htm>.

⁵⁴² Morgan-Welch, Oral History, 2021.

⁵⁴³ L. Finch, “\$4m grant to help restore the African Meeting House,” *Boston Globe*, August 29, 2010.

⁵⁴⁴ “Recovery Act, Rehabilitate African Meeting House Boston, BOAF 151732, TAS:14 1041, NAICS: 712110,” Federal Grant Reporting, August 13, 2010. <https://www.federalgrants.com/RECOVERY-ACT-Rehabilitate-African-Meeting-House-Boston-BOAF-151732-TAS14-1041-NAICS-712110-This-project-will-be-funded-by-the-American-Recovery-and-Reinvestment-Act-of-2009-ARRA-and-is-subject-to-the-reporting-26232.html>.

⁵⁴⁵ SMM, “December 14, 2010,” BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown MA.

completion as early as 1980, when Congress first authorized the site. These included the construction of an exterior elevator for wheelchair access, the installation of an HVAC system, and restoration or replication of church pews, wall finishes, cast-iron posts, and other features to restore the building to its 1855 appearance.⁵⁴⁶ The restoration cost estimate came to nine \$9 million.⁵⁴⁷ In September 2011, with the restoration nearing completion, Governor Patrick toured the African Meeting House with site and Museum staff (Figure 18).



Figure 18. Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick takes a tour of the restored interior of the African Meeting House in September 2011. (From left to right): Boston African American National Historic Site Superintendent Cassius Cash, Museum of African American History Executive Director Beverly Morgan-Welch, and Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick. *National Park Service, Boston African American National Historic Site, Resource Management Records, Broadside Photo Files.*

By December of 2011, the African Meeting House officially reopened to the public as part of a rededication ceremony attended by Governor Patrick and Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar among other politicians, civil leaders, and supporters.⁵⁴⁸ An MAAH spokesperson underscored what a monumental accomplishment the restoration represented by describing the buildings as “the

⁵⁴⁶ Sean Hennessy, “African Meeting House to Reopen.” *Broadside*, no. 1 (2011): 1–2.

⁵⁴⁷ Sandra Larson, “African Meeting House opens after restoration,” *Bay State Banner*, November 30, 2011.

⁵⁴⁸ Morgan-Welch, Oral History, 2021; Museum of African American History, “Rededication of the African Meeting House, December 6, 2011” Program (Boston: Museum of African American History, 2011), 20. On file, Boston NHP Archives, Resource Management Records, Division of Cultural Resources, Chief of Cultural Resources/Historian (Blatt), African American History, Box 1 of 8.

Holy Grail for African American people and for people who are about freedom around the world. Slavery ended because of what happened right here.”⁵⁴⁹ Asked about the meaning of the restoration for the site, Bernadette Williams, then volunteer coordinator for Boston NHP, reflected that “a new chapter in the story of this holy place” had begun. Park ranger Ryan McNabb held out hope that the site could now “forge more powerful connections with [the historic community’s] legacy and inspire today’s generation to follow in their footsteps” and former site manager Ken Heidelberg noted that the restoration meant “the foundation of the freedom of a people has not been destroyed.”⁵⁵⁰

Resource Stewardship: Robert G. Shaw/ 54th Regiment Memorial

While the African Meeting House had stood as the central restoration project since the completion of the Abiel Smith School in 1999, by 2010, the condition of the Shaw/54th Regiment Memorial had deteriorated to a point where the monument needed immediate attention. Routine maintenance in 2014 revealed that the brick core of the structure had begun to crumble and proved to be in need of a major restoration which would cost several million dollars. The “Save the Shaw” Campaign, orchestrated by the Friends of the Public Garden in the early 1980s, began to fundraise again circa 2014. Site Manager Terry Brown took up the cause and began coordinating meetings between the Friends of the Public Garden, the City of Boston, and the Museum of African American History, in order to establish a cooperative agreement to jointly work to preserve the memorial.⁵⁵¹

The efforts of site staff such as Ryan McNabb renewed the relationship between Boston African American NHS and the 54th Regiment reenactors, Company A. In July 2012, for example, Company A held two events in coordination with the site, including one at the Shaw/54th Regiment Memorial.⁵⁵² In March of 2014, Company A returned to Boston in celebration of the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, although on that occasion, the Massachusetts Historical Society spearheaded the organization and staging of events with the reenactors.⁵⁵³

⁵⁴⁹ Larson, “African Meeting House opens after restoration.”

⁵⁵⁰ Boston African American National Historic Site, News Release: “What the African Meeting House Means to Us. The Shaw 54th: Restoring the Memorial and the Dialog on Race.” NPS Press Release, December 1, 2011, accessed March 31, 2022, <https://www.nps.gov/boaf/learn/news/African-Meeting-House-reflections.htm>.

⁵⁵¹ Brown, Oral History, 2022; Cooperative Agreement for the Shaw/54th Regiment Memorial Restoration, circa 2015.

⁵⁵² SMM, “July 17, 2012,” BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

⁵⁵³ Jan Gardner, “New England Literary News: Inspiration for Shaw memorial,” *Boston Globe*, February 23, 2014: N18.

The site's 2016 Foundation Document identified the restoration of the Shaw/54th Regiment Memorial as a vital preservation project which would require \$1.5 million to accomplish.⁵⁵⁴ Also during 2016, the site filed the project in the Park Service project management queue (PMIS) and listed it as a potential project in the Service-Wide Budget Justification for Fiscal Year 2017. Projecting forward to potential spending for 2019, the NPS listed the "Structural Stabilization and Restoration of the Robert Gould Shaw Memorial, with an estimated cost of \$1.952 million."⁵⁵⁵ The following year, the project had been bumped to Fiscal Year 2022, with an estimated budget of \$3.9 million.⁵⁵⁶ In 2019, the site announced that the restoration would begin in 2020, with half of its funding coming from the City of Boston and the Friends of the Public Garden, and the other half from the National Park Service, through funds provided to the NPS to address deferred maintenance on a matching basis with donations from partners from revenues from the sale of helium by the federal government.⁵⁵⁷ With the work completed in 2021, rededication of the memorial occurred in June 2022.

Park Partnership with the Museum

The arrival of Superintendent Cash to Boston African American National Historic Site saw the reestablishment of the Site-Museum bond as a relationship based on open communication.⁵⁵⁸ Regular "partner meetings" reiterated the common purpose of the site and Museum and put the Museum in the same room with the museums and other property owners in partnership with Boston NHP. In 2010, the site and the Museum shared in a celebration of the thirtieth anniversary of the founding of Boston African American National Historic Site. Speakers at the event highlighted the history of Black entrepreneurship in Boston and together the Museum, site, and gathered guests celebrated the awarding of \$4 million in ARRA funding for the restoration of the African Meeting House (Figure 19).⁵⁵⁹

⁵⁵⁴ NPS, Foundation Document: BOAF, 16.

⁵⁵⁵ U.S. Department of the Interior Office of Budget, *Budget Justifications and Performance Information FY2017, National Park Service*. "National Park Service Summary Project Data Sheet for Construction" (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, FY 2017), CONST-72.

⁵⁵⁶ U.S. Department of the Interior Office of Budget, *Budget Justifications and Performance Information FY2018, National Park Service*. "FY2018 Budget Justifications" (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, FY 2018), CONST-52.

⁵⁵⁷ Boston African American National Historic Site, News Release: "The Shaw 54th: Restoring the Memorial and the Dialog on Race." NPS Press Release, October 9, 2019, accessed June 1, 2022, <https://www.nps.gov/boaf/learn/news/the-shaw-54th-restoring-the-memorial-and-the-dialog-on-race.htm>. The Request for Proposals for the construction work was issued in February 2019.

⁵⁵⁸ Morgan-Welch, Oral History, 2021.

⁵⁵⁹ Sean Hennessey, "African Meeting House Restoration Project Approved," *Broadside*, no. 2 (2010): 2.



Figure 19. Speakers at the thirtieth anniversary celebration of the founding of Boston African American National Historic Site pose together on October 10, 2010. (From left to right, back row) Actor and Director Charles S. Dutton, Museum Executive Director Beverly Morgan-Welch, and Site Superintendent Cassius Cash. (Front row) Civil rights activist Cecilia Marshall, wife of late Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall (Photographer: Craig Bailey). *National Park Service, Boston African American National Historic Site, Resource Management Records, Broadside Photo Files.*

Site Manager Brown also facilitated communication, especially with regard to changes the site planned for the expansion of interpretive planning beyond Beacon Hill, and the hiring of new park rangers to help with tours.

After the 2011 restoration of the African Meeting House, the two institutions began to function more independently again, with the roles of the Park Service and the Museum more clearly defined in the cooperative agreement. Financial support provided to the Museum for programming on an annual basis, in fulfilment of the cooperative agreement, was at a dramatically lower level than in the previous decade. In 2011, program support dropped to \$25,000 for the year.⁵⁶⁰ In 2014, the

⁵⁶⁰ Cooperative Agreement 2008.

site and the Museum renewed their cooperative agreement without any protracted negotiation and with support adjusted to \$33,000 a year.⁵⁶¹

The restoration of the African Meeting House, and the revisions to the cooperative agreement implemented beginning in 2008 and onward, paint a picture of the Museum finally coming into its own. What had begun as a highly dependent relationship in the early 1980s, when the Museum needed the Park Service to furnish interpretive services, office space, and restoration assistance, had shifted significantly as the Museum grew. Under executive directors Sylvia Watts-McKinney and Beverly Morgan-Welch, the Museum had begun to actively seek out financial support from a wide network of public and private institutions, had expanded its education program, exhibits, and interpretive services, and had assembled a team of planners and community organizers to help raise the profile of the Museum on the national stage. Morgan-Welch recalled that when she left the Museum in 2015, there existed a “legion of people who believed in that meeting house and that history.”⁵⁶² Some of these partners included the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Massachusetts Cultural Council, and Mass Humanities.⁵⁶³

The independence of the Museum and its changing relationship with the site is visible in the use of the African Meeting House after the 2011 restoration. With this important milestone complete, the African Meeting House became reestablished as a site duty station; however, the building no longer served as a central hub for site gatherings in the way it once had. For example, prior to the closing of the African Meeting House to visitors for restoration in 2003, the site operated the “Resisting for Justice” *People and Places* program for classes eight times a year at this location. With that closure, the site operated the program out of the Smith School for a while, then out of Old South Meeting house, before terminating participation in the program in 2010. The reopening of the African Meeting House in 2011 did not bring back the program, in part because the Museum began charging admission and the site was not authorized to collect fees for programming.⁵⁶⁴ In

⁵⁶¹ “Cooperative Agreement, P14AC00951, Between United States Department of the Interior National Park Service, Boston African American National Historic Site, And The Museum of African American History” June 26, 2014, Preservation Specialist-Steve Carlson, Active Files, BNHP, Charlestown, MA [Hereafter: Cooperative Agreement 2014]. Note: Between 2017 and 2019, support once again increased to approximately \$80,000 a year according to modifications to the 2014 Cooperative Agreement.

⁵⁶² Morgan-Welch, Oral History, 2021.

⁵⁶³ Drawn from lists of sponsors for exhibits today identified via the MAAH website and those sponsors featured in the 2011 brochure celebrating the reopening of the African Meeting House; “Exhibits,” Museum of African American History Website, accessed July 1, 2022, www.maah.org/exhibits; Museum of African American History. “Rededication of the African Meeting House, December 6, 2011” Program, (Boston: Museum of African American History, 2011).

⁵⁶⁴ Ryan McNabb, personal communication, June 2023.

early 2015, the NPS moved Boston African American NHS's offices from Beacon Street to 15 State Street, further complicating communication between the two institutions.⁵⁶⁵

The Museum and site continued to have formal relationships with respect to certain public history and preservation causes, including a cooperative agreement with the Friends of the Public Garden, the Park Service, and the City of Boston for the restoration of the Shaw/54th Regiment Memorial. The Park Service continued to provide personnel to conduct Black Heritage Trail tours and stationed park rangers for interpretation at the African Meeting House and Abiel Smith School, when possible, although park rangers had reduced availability as new site programs and commitments took up more and more of their time. The day-to-day relationships of the park rangers, site manager, and Museum staff did not resemble the close, interwoven relationship between the two organizations manifested in the early 1980s. With clear parameters for the relationship laid out, however, the partnership gained a sense of stability through open communication, clear expectations, and support, even as both institutions diverged toward their own interpretive and development projects.

New Vision for Interpretation and Park Planning

Part of Superintendent Cash's vision for uniting Boston National Historical Park and Boston African American National Historic Site was the merging of the two interpretive programs. Superintendent Cash had brought to the fore the "Trails to Freedom" concept. Initially, Cash planned to create a new "Trails to Freedom" official NPS brochure, known as a Unigrid, which would combine both Boston African American NHS and Boston NHP.⁵⁶⁶ Ultimately, however, a combined Unigrid did not come about, and the site and Boston NHP continued to retain their separate identities while expanding the themes they sought to pursue. In 2014 and 2015, Boston NHP and Boston African American NHS began to lay out separate Foundation Documents, including the outline of plans for future interpretive frameworks.⁵⁶⁷ These interpretive frameworks proved ambitious, but remained only sketches of possible avenues of research and development. What played out became less an integration of the interpretive themes of the Boston parks and more an additive approach, in which Boston NHP included Beacon Hill under the umbrella theme of "Redefining Freedom."⁵⁶⁸ Logistically, however, the inclusion of Beacon Hill created problems

⁵⁶⁵ SMM, "January 6, 2015," BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

⁵⁶⁶ SMM, "December 4, 2012," BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

⁵⁶⁷ SMM, "October 28, 2014 and December 5, 2014," BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA; Boston African American NHS's planning meeting included multiple partners, such as the Museum of African American History and the City of Boston.

⁵⁶⁸ NPS, *Foundation Document: Boston National Historical Park, Massachusetts* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service: Boston, December 2015), Appendix C. Hereafter: Boston NHP, *Foundation Document*.

for Boston NHP, which already had difficulty accommodating demand for its “north” and “south” Freedom Trail tours for different portions of the city.

Even as interpretation at the Boston parks continued to operate somewhat independently, Site Manager Brown hoped that both could begin to tell the history of Boston “on a deeper level” which acknowledged Black history in Boston as complicated, heart-wrenching, and full of sacrifice, in addition to being a story of heroes and community perseverance.⁵⁶⁹ McNabb reflected that the impetus for some of these new interpretive programs became not only to expand on the original concept for the site, but to encourage repeat visitors.

While the Black Heritage Trail remained largely the same during the period between 2010 and 2015, Boston African American NHS staff developed a host of new interpretive trails. As mentioned above, this shift had begun in 2008 with new programs such as “Black Patriots of the American Revolution,” “Black Churches of Beacon Hill,” and “John Brown’s Boston.” Some of the tours initiated after Cash’s arrival included “Freedom’s Trial: From Civil Rights to Civil War,” which ran regularly during the 2012 season; “Mothers of Freedom”; “The Civil Rights Tour”; and “Charles Sumner’s Beacon Hill.”⁵⁷⁰ Also in 2012, an informal partnership with the Beacon Hill Scholars led to the launch of the Emancipation Trail,TM an interpretive trail focused on sites related to the history of abolition both on and off Beacon Hill from the American Revolution through the Civil War. The tour, which was launched in 2010 by educator Vincent Licenziato, included stops in Roxbury, Mattapan, and Back Bay in addition to Beacon Hill.⁵⁷¹ Horace Seldon involved himself in this effort, as well as partnering with the Boston Women’s Heritage Trail and spearheading the “History Nuts” lecture series.⁵⁷² In Boston African American NHS’s 2016 Foundation Document, the Emancipation TrailTM and the Boston Women’s Heritage Trail are both noted as opportunities for the site to expand its reach to more audiences.⁵⁷³

Beyond the site boundaries, some rangers found other ways to elevate the site and its themes. In 2012, Ryan McNabb began co-teaching a course at Harvard with historian John Stauffer, which culminated in student exhibits at Harvard’s Houghton Library.⁵⁷⁴ The following spring, McNabb helped Mary Blatt and the Freedom Rising Executive Committee to plan a program for the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation and was awarded \$10,000 from the African

⁵⁶⁹ Brown, Oral History, 2022.

⁵⁷⁰ Boston African American National Historic Site, News Release: “2012 Year in Review,” December 12, 2012, accessed June 1, 2022, <https://www.nps.gov/boaf/learn/news/2012yearinreview.htm>.

⁵⁷¹ SMM, “February 5, 2013,” BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

⁵⁷² SMM, “November 12, 2012,” BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

⁵⁷³ NPS, Foundation Document: BOAF, 18.

⁵⁷⁴ Boston African American National Historic Site, News Release: “2012 Year in Review.”

American Experience Fund to run the program “Freedom Rising: The Emancipation Proclamation and African American Service in the Civil War.”⁵⁷⁵ The symposium brought together scholars from top universities throughout the country and internationally, and was sponsored by more than a dozen history and preservation organizations. In addition to this outreach strategy, McNabb and Brown sought out collaborative projects with other parks such as Longfellow NHS and Springfield Armory National Historic Site (Figure 20).⁵⁷⁶



Figure 20. James Woolsey, Springfield Armory National Historic Site superintendent and Terry Brown, Boston African American National Historic Site site manager, shake hands circa 2014 *National Park Service, Boston African American National Historic Site, Resource Management Records*.

While all these moves toward additional programming and expanded interpretation kept in step with the goals of the site, they largely focused on moments of triumph, perseverance, and progress rather than asking “hard questions” of the past. Some contemporary observers also argued that the site’s interpretive program credited Boston’s progressive politics for the success of the Black community there, decentering the efforts of Black people who achieved freedom in spite of rather

⁵⁷⁵ Boston African American National Historic Site, News Release: “Freedom Rising Symposium Videos,” NPS Press Release, May 16, 2013, accessed June 1, 2022; SMM, “June 19, 2013,” BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

⁵⁷⁶ This effort began in 2012 and came to fruition in April of 2015 with the “Voice Beyond Bondage” program with the Longfellow NHS. SMM, “July 17, 2012,” BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA; “Voice Beyond Bondage” program with the Longfellow NHS; “Boston Division Chief Meetings, April 14, 2015,” Box Planning Documents and Meeting Notes 2012–2014. Deputy Superintendent’s Office, BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

than because of the social context they found themselves in.⁵⁷⁷ Marty Blatt recalled the “Trails to Freedom” to be a good idea for moving the Boston parks forward, but that at the time, the staff of both Boston African American NHS and Boston NHP “did not follow up.”⁵⁷⁸ Boston African American NHS’s Foundation Document set ambitious goals for the site to begin to explore the heterogeneity of the abolitionist movement, connections between the themes of the American Revolution and later fights for civil rights, and the intersection of the women’s rights movement and abolitionism and the civil rights movement.⁵⁷⁹ These themes would have required lengthy and costly research studies, a dedicated historian staff position, and the appetite to incorporate historical findings into interpretive programs. Complicating the matter, Boston African American NHS continued to lack a long-range interpretive plan, which would have set goals for research in order to further develop particular interpretive themes.

In late 2013, the National Park Service published *Imperiled Promise*, a study that analyzed the evolution of history and interpretation programs within the NPS. The study identified a number of patterns, such as a widespread disconnection between history and interpretation where important historical findings do not make their way to the public programs, a lack of expertise and resources to undertake needed research, and the stagnation of interpretive programs in rote narratives.⁵⁸⁰ Following this study, the staff at Boston NHP and Boston African American NHS decided that one change they could make would be to partner with local universities, such as UMass Boston, to create graduate certificate programs focusing on public history, which would also potentially attract new park rangers with the needed expertise.⁵⁸¹

Under Superintendent Cash’s leadership, site staff staged several programs at Boston NHP which focused on New England’s role in slavery, rather than perpetuating an image of the region as a uniquely free space where anti-slavery sentiments had always prevailed. In August 2015, the site hosted a remembrance of the transatlantic slave trade and its abolition at Faneuil Hall.⁵⁸² This intergenerational and interfaith ceremony, held in collaboration with the National Middle Passage and Port Marker Project and the Museum of African American History, was an important step in recognizing the history of slavery in Boston and that city’s status as a “Middle Passage Port.” Other site programming that sought to confront some of the history of racism in America included

⁵⁷⁷ Samantha Ferello, “Show Me Soul, America!: Memory and Representation in Massachusetts Museums of Black History” (undergraduate thesis, Tufts University, 2015).

⁵⁷⁸ Martin Blatt, Oral History Interview with Seth Bruggeman, February 2, 2019. Boston National Historical Site Administrative History Oral History Project.

⁵⁷⁹ NPS, Foundation Document: BOAF, 27–30.

⁵⁸⁰ Whisnant et al., *Imperiled Promise*.

⁵⁸¹ SMM, “January 7, 2014,” BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

⁵⁸² Michael Creasey (General Superintendent, National Parks of Boston), to Ingrid Askew (Co-Founder and Director, Interfaith Pilgrimage of the Middle Passage.” Letter, July 15, 2015. Box Boston NHP, Superintendent’s Reading Files, January–December 2015, BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

a discussion of the movie *Birth of a Nation* cosponsored with the American Congregational Association.⁵⁸³ Discussions of slavery’s role in Boston’s past on Freedom Trail and Black Heritage Trail tours alike had begun as early as 2012, with the movement of Boston African American NHS park rangers to duty stations on the Freedom Trail. For example, in 2013 and 2014, Boston African American NHS hosted a special themed tour entitled “A Hill Divided” which focused on the slave-trading families and cotton merchants of Massachusetts.⁵⁸⁴ This theme, however, would not be formally incorporated into the interpretive everyday programs along the Freedom Trail and at Faneuil Hall in particular, until years later.⁵⁸⁵

Some of Superintendent Cash’s strategies for creating organizational and interpretive unity hit snags. Staff-sharing plans across the two historical produced unexpected results. Due to staff shortages, park rangers from Boston African American NHS began to help out at Faneuil Hall, but Boston NHP park rangers did not cycle through posts at the Shaw/54th Regiment Memorial, the Abiel Smith School, and the African Meeting House.⁵⁸⁶ While this had the effect of bringing interpreters familiar with Boston’s Black history to the Freedom Trail, and therefore creating opportunities to introduce Boston African American NHS’s themes to Freedom Trail visitors, there occurred no reciprocal shift of Boston NHP park rangers to Boston African American NHS. Additionally, the initial plan to start the Black Heritage Trail at Faneuil Hall Visitor Center never came to fruition as the added distance made this impractical. The Shaw/54th Regiment Memorial remained the starting point for these tours. As a result, the organizational integration of the Boston parks resulted in a reduction in the number of staff available to run Boston African American NHS programs.⁵⁸⁷

Part of the reason for the staff shortages stemmed from the fact that the opening of the Faneuil Hall Visitor Center coincided with a more widely problematic hiring shift for the NPS. In 2011, the NPS suspended the Student Careers Experience Program (SCEP) and Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP) in accordance with Executive Order 13562, signed December 27, 2010.⁵⁸⁸ In Boston, the SCEP and STEP programs were integral to bringing in local, diverse seasonal hires in numbers which compensated for the spike in visitation and the number of

⁵⁸³ “Boston Division Chiefs Meeting, April 14, 2015,” Box Planning Documents and Meeting Notes 2012–2014. Deputy Superintendent’s Office, BOST RMR, BNHP, Charlestown, MA.

⁵⁸⁴ Ryan McNabb, personal communication, October 2022.

⁵⁸⁵ McNabb, Oral History, 2022. McNabb notes that discussions of slavery were not formally incorporated into tour scripts until 2017, with the advent of the “Social Justice Team” in the Visitor Experience Division.

⁵⁸⁶ McNabb, Oral History, 2022.

⁵⁸⁷ McNabb, Oral History, 2022.

⁵⁸⁸ Department of the Interior, Office of Policy Analysis. *The Department of the Interior’s Economic Contributions, Fiscal Year 2011*, July 29, 2012 (Washington DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, 2012), https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/uploads/2011-Econ-Report-FINAL-07_27_2012.pdf.

interpretive responsibilities during the summer months.⁵⁸⁹ In the past, many of the full-time Boston African American NHS park rangers originated as students in the SCEP or STEP programs. While replacement programs meant to hire high school and college-age students succeeded them, the transition to these programs did not take place in Boston, and instead, the Boston parks switched to hiring via competitive job listings on USAjobs.com. Whereas, previously, the site could attend high school and college job fairs and recruit students to apply to work directly at the site, after the summer of 2012, fewer positions became available and they could not be offered directly to local applicants. As a result, Superintendent Cash's hopes for a unified interpretive division met significant setbacks.

The Urban Agenda and National Parks of Boston

In 2015, the organization of Boston NHP, Boston African American NHS, and Boston Harbor Islands NRA underwent further recasting to address many of the staffing problems that the Boston parks had encountered as well as critiques of the history program forwarded in studies such as *Imperiled Promise*. After Cassius Cash left the site in the spring of 2015 to take the position of superintendent at Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Michael Creasey arrived as the site's new superintendent in July.⁵⁹⁰ Creasey had previously served as the executive director of the National Park Service Stewardship Institute and had been one of the principal architects behind the NPS's "Urban Agenda: Call to Action" (Urban Agenda) in 2015.

The Urban Agenda originated as an initiative born of the Park Service's Centennial Challenge to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Park Service in 2016, with the explicit focus on increasing the relevancy of the Park Service in urban communities and partner organizations. Creasey undertook a management assessment of the Boston NHP and Boston African American NHS in 2015 and concluded that "Boston had the right energy and new leadership in government, strong non-profits and educational institutions. There were a lot of changes and positive new energy and new ideas—the perfect mix" for implementing the tenets of the Urban Agenda.⁵⁹¹ As such, Boston got chosen as one of the "model cities" to see how these new ideas could help the NPS regain its relevance for residents of urban areas. In many ways, guiding principles of the Urban Agenda resonated with Cash's focus on community relevance and outreach. Many of the recent programs undertaken by NPB suggest that the "team" approach to interpretation is promising. For example, in 2020 the Social Justice Team's "Rocking the Cradle" and "Ghost of the Revolution" programs

⁵⁸⁹ McNabb, Oral History, 2022.

⁵⁹⁰ "Top Boston Park Ranger Takes the Reins, Settles in Charlestown," *Charlestown Patriot-Bridge*, 4 September, 2015, accessed online May 1, 2022, <https://charlestownbridge.com/2015/09/04/top-boston-park-ranger-takes-the-reinssettles-in-charlestown/>.

⁵⁹¹ "Top Boston Park Ranger Takes the Reins," *Charlestown Patriot-Bridge*.

earned them an award for “Excellence in National Park Service History” from the Organization of American Historians.⁵⁹²

When Michael Creasey took the position of superintendent of Boston NHP, Boston African American NHS, and Boston Harbor Islands National Recreation Area, he also introduced the concept of the “National Parks of Boston” (also NPB). This integrated approach to managing the cultural and natural resources, interpretive themes, and maintenance of the three Boston units of the National Park Service continued the team-oriented approach on which Cash had focused.

The implementation of the National Parks of Boston concept led to the further integration of Boston African American NHS into the management and interpretive strategy of Boston NHP and Boston Harbor Island NRA. In late 2015, under the National Parks of Boston interpretive and organizational framework, the need for an independent site manager for Boston African American NHS seemed less pressing. The responsibilities once handled by the site manager now became distributed among the deputy superintendent, the visitor experience staff, and the park rangers themselves. With the introduction of the National Parks of Boston model, Brown was transferred to the chief of interpretation position, with the site manager position set aside.⁵⁹³ While the elimination of the site manager position made sense within the new organizational framework, this change further diluted what remained of a cohesive sense of site identity.

The National Parks of Boston continues to grapple with persistent problems such as the underrepresentation of Black and minority staff among its ranks, and the difficulty in attracting local audiences and local applicants to seasonal and full-time staff positions. The site has also found itself straying from its close partnership with the Museum, as interpretation and exhibitions at the Museum are now staged independently of the site. Moving forward without a site manager at Boston African American NHS, the National Parks of Boston will need to find new mechanisms by which to engage with its park partners and the local Black community while addressing the ongoing interpretive and research needs of Boston African American NHS.

⁵⁹² Organization of American Historians, “Stanton-Horton Award Winners, 2020 Winners.” <https://www.oah.org/awards/uncategorized-awards/stanton-horton-award/winners/> Accessed June 1, 2022.

⁵⁹³ Brown, Oral History, 2022.

CHAPTER 8. EPILOGUE

The Start of the Site

When the legislation for the establishment of Boston African American National Historic Site passed in October 1980, the Museum of African American History and the National Park Service were more than ready for this new site. The City of Boston had welcomed Boston National Historical Park in 1974 as a means of improving the city's economy via the tourism industry—one piece of its wider urban renewal project. It did not take long for the NPS, Massachusetts politicians, and the Boston NHP's advisory commission to recognize that Boston NHP's resources and core narratives did not address the full scope of the city's history. The Boston park lacked an acknowledgement of the importance of Black history, and social and political activists of the time pointed out this fact. Furthermore, in the late 1970s, the National Park Service reflected on its own legacy of poor representation when it came to Black history. Only seven parks dedicated to Black history existed at the time.

While the NPS began considering additional Black history parks in the late 1970s, the Museum of African American History had been working for decades to research and elevate the stories of Black Bostonians with regard to the American Revolution and the Civil War, as well as the cultural contributions of Black Americans to art and literature. The Museum distilled the many strands of Black history in Boston to create the Black Heritage Trail, which came to focus on the abolitionist story on the North Slope of Beacon Hill. After a damaging fire at the Museum's core property, the African Meeting House, in 1973 the Museum needed funding and turned to the National Park Service. Making a case for an African American national park in Boston, the Museum laid out a boundary around Beacon Hill delineating a potential park and asked the NPS for help with preservation.

In short, the Museum saw the site as an avenue toward obtaining essential preservation funding at a critical time in that institution's development and the National Park Service saw the site as a way to bringing more Black representation into the National Park System.

The hope for the new park became that it could at once meet the needs of the City, the Museum, and the National Park Service. It would do these things without guaranteed "base" NPS funding for its first four years. Despite this set-back, the early site managers held up the hope that Boston African American NHS could help "complete" Boston NHP, bolster the strength of the burgeoning Museum, and heal some of the wounds of racial conflict in the city.

The Promise of the Site

Boston African American National Historic Site's 1980 enabling legislation focused first on the preservation of the nationally significant historic properties within its boundary, "for the benefit and inspiration" of all Americans. Beyond this relatively circumscribed mandate, however, the site stood also authorized to enter into cooperative agreements "to mark, interpret, restore, provide technical assistance, or any combination thereof" with the historic sites within the site. Fundamentally a "partnership park," Boston African American NHS's success in achieving its preservation, education, and interpretation goals would always be tied to its relationships with the organizations, property owners, and government entities that owned the buildings and structures it hoped to preserve and interpret.

By establishing a cooperative agreement with the Museum of African American History, the early Boston African American NHS site managers began a shared journey toward the preservation of the African Meeting House and the elevation of Black history for all Bostonians. Preservation was the key issue at play for the Museum of African American History in the formulation of the 1980s legislation. By delegating this role to the National Park Service, the Museum intended to set clear boundaries for the nature of the Site-Museum relationship and to be able to continue to control the intellectual property of the Black Heritage Trail and future programming. The Museum remained free to continue to pursue its mission in terms of outreach and community education in any way it saw fit. The Site-Museum relationship became complicated as these distinctions blurred. Over time, the Museum's financial needs beyond preservation became apparent. At the same time, the new site staff saw the site's mandate as necessarily including interpretation and education.

Traditional funding channels within the National Park System offered little help toward establishing the fledgling site or meeting its preservation goals. The site had limited ability to court preservation funds itself and instead relied on relationships with Massachusetts politicians like Joe Moakley to seek out supporters in the preservation community and within the political spheres of the Massachusetts and federal governments. As such, the site came to rely on the Museum for its intellectual foundation, and politicians for its voice within the preservation community. In later years, when political connections were not as strong and the Museum had developed its own identity in the preservation community, the advocacy and activism of the Museum would become a crucial avenue by which the site accomplished preservation projects.

The site's management lay based on a partnership model, meant to extend to the sixteen properties originally identified in the establishing legislation. That legislation called for the site to establish cooperative agreements with property owners. This goal reached fulfillment in the case of the African Meeting House, the Abiel Smith School, and the Shaw/54th Regiment Memorial. Private residents owned thirteen of the original sixteen sites included in the 1980 legislation, and ultimately, homeowners saw little incentive for entering into such an agreement. Early agreements with the owners of the Lewis Hayden House enabled the site to perform some needed restoration

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to the exterior, but funding for such projects dried up as the National Park Service drew back on its expansionist policies in the late 1980s. Federal funding for preservation of privately owned buildings became difficult to achieve.⁵⁹⁴ The site established agreements with the Museum for the African Meeting House and the Abiel Smith School, and the City of Boston for the preservation of the Shaw/54th Regiment memorial, but beyond these sites, the tool of cooperative agreements went unused.

Throughout its development, Boston African American NHS has had to balance its needs with those of Boston National Historical Park. Framed as the site's "parent park" in legislative materials, Boston NHP was intended to administer many of the site's support functions, in coordination with assistance from the Regional Office. As such, the site did not gain its own superintendent, historian, or cultural resource manager. Boston NHP's superintendent served both the site and Boston NHP, although the degree to which each successive superintendent engaged with Boston African American NHS varied over the years. With ambiguities as to the scope of control that the site manager would have over site operations, disagreements between the site manager and superintendent recurred throughout the site's history.

Boston African American NHS's ability to execute its mandate remained in the hands of the superintendent and, to the degree that he delegated authority, the site manager. Preservation projects succeeded or failed based on each superintendent's ability to elevate awareness of the site's needs and create relationships with individuals or entities that could lobby on the site's behalf. To some degree, the success of the site also depended on the superintendent's ability to recognize the significance of the site with respect to Black history and American history more broadly.

During the early years of the site, the superintendent delegated much of the responsibility for running the site to the site manager. This enabled the first site manager to begin to shape a distinct and independent institutional identity for the site, a project continued by successive site managers. Over the years, however, the feasibility of an independent site narrowed. On a broad scale, the reluctance of Congress to fund the National Park Service enough to fulfill its mandate resulted in repeated calls for austerity within the agency. Additionally, the increased personnel and utility costs overburdened the site just as its responsibilities at the African Meeting House and Abiel Smith School grew in the 1990s. The site manager position shifted from being one of relatively wide-ranging authority to one restricted to the coordination of tours, education groups, outreach activities, and keeping track of annual finances.

Site managers made repeated calls for administrative and operational independence to control the finances, research, and programming of the site separately from Boston NHP and the Museum. As time went on, however, it became increasingly difficult to see how, and for what purpose, the NPS

⁵⁹⁴ Rushing, Oral History, 2005.

would fund such a prospect. By the end of 2015, the reorganization of Boston's National Park Service units led to the redistribution of the site manager's responsibilities to other positions. With the elimination of the site manager position, no individual staff member exclusively serves Boston African American NHS; instead, fulfillment of the site's interpretive and educational mission is now dispersed amongst the staff of all three parks. The site's preservation responsibilities remain with the superintendent.

The Heart of the Site

Partnership remains the beating heart of Boston African American National Historic Site. The park stands as one of the earliest partnership parks within the National Park System, though in this capacity it is by no means unique today. In recent decades, the National Park Service has been increasingly turning to the "partnership model" as a key strategy to ensure the protection of significant natural and historic resources. From a Congressional perspective, these partnerships promise to help "leverage limited financial resources for park management, to respond to concerns about federal land acquisition, and to create park units in 'lived in' landscapes."⁵⁹⁵ Within the National Park Service, partnerships are seen as a means of achieving NPS's educational and interpretive goals as organizations with "compatible purposes" can help the NPS "deliver interpretation and education services" where parks face increasingly limited financial resources.⁵⁹⁶ Partnerships can take a wide range of forms, with federal, tribal, local, and state partners contributing to parks in a variety of ways. The relationship between Boston African American NHS and the Museum illustrates that park partners bring a variety of assets to the table beyond financial support for properties within the National Park System. In all partnerships, however, there needs to be give and take between partners.

In their partnership with the National Park Service, the Museum of African American History brought a variety of material assets and less tangible social and cultural connections to the relationship. This included ownership of a major Black history landmark, a long-established dedication to Black history, the perspectives of a diverse staff and Board of Directors, and connections within the Black cultural and historic preservation communities. At least during its early years, the Museum did not have financial assets that it could direct toward the Park Service and at times found itself in competition with the National Park Service for donors. While the Museum has grown as an organization over the years and its fundraising capabilities have expanded, programming support from the National Park Service continues to assist the Museum in achieving interpretation and education goals. The Site-Museum relationship is an example of how the park partnership model can be used as a mechanism for bringing varied cultural

⁵⁹⁵ Analyst in Natural Resources Policy (name redacted), "National Park System: Units Managed Through Partnerships," April 5, 2016 (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, 2016), 1.

⁵⁹⁶ NPS Education Council, *I&E Program Business Plan*, 40.

perspectives, sensibilities, expertise, and community connections into the National Park System through collaboration with diverse and intellectually independent cultural institutions.

The history of the Site-Museum partnership also illustrates some of the potential pitfalls of this model, which both parties need to avoid if the partnership is expected to thrive.

- **Communication.** Both partners need to clearly communicate their financial, labor, and interpretive expectations through a formal agreement. The existing cooperative agreement remains too vague to address most projects and issues that arise in the relationship. A joint annual workplan, as is required in philanthropic partnerships (Director's Order #21), would benefit both parties. Following this, a close working relationship should continue to identify potential problems or conflicts quickly.
- **Respect Differences.** When working with an organization like the Museum, which has a strong public outreach mission and a political project of uplifting the Black community, the NPS needs to recognize and respect that they will have overlapping, but not identical, interpretive, and educational goals. Conversely, the Museum should recognize the limitations under which the NPS functions, whether financial, operational, or political.
- **Recognize the Value of Each Other.** Whereas many NPS park partnerships are established to alleviate the NPS's financial burden of preservation and land ownership, this is not the only or necessarily the primary value in partnerships. Small cultural and historical institutions in marginalized communities can rarely contribute to the Park Service in this way. In the case of the Museum of African American History, the partner brings a wide range of social and cultural resources to the relationship. Conversely, the NPS does not simply represent a conduit for preservation funding for the Museum. Boston African American NHS and Boston NHP—and the NPS system more widely—have a broad range of resources and expertise that can potentially assist the Museum with interpretation, exhibits, preservation, and other realms of planning and programming.

The Future of the Site

Today more than thirty units of the National Park Service are dedicated to African American heritage, with dozens more incorporating Black history into their interpretive and educational programs.⁵⁹⁷ These parks take on a variety of shapes and sizes, with park partnerships playing an important role in the success of many of them. Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site, signed into law on the same day as Boston African American NHS, has grown from a site which owned no property in 1980 to a park with 25 (FTE) employees who manage thirty-nine acres,

⁵⁹⁷ "Visit," National Park Service African American Heritage Website, accessed November 20, 2023, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/africanamericanheritage/visit.htm>.

multiple historic buildings and monuments, and a visitor center.⁵⁹⁸ The site earned the designation of “national historical park” in 2018.⁵⁹⁹ The development of that park was due in no small part to the NPS’s relationship with the Trust for Public Land, which purchased and conveyed several properties to the NPS. Other Black heritage sites, such as the Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site in Virginia, Frederick Douglass National Historic Site in Washington, DC, and Pullman National Monument in Illinois, have also benefitted from philanthropic partnerships as they developed. At least one park has partnered with a minority-owned cultural institution to help fulfill the NPS’s educational and interpretation missions. The Harriet Tubman National Historical Park, for example, maintains a partnership with Harriet Tubman Home, Inc., a non-profit founded by the African Methodist Episcopal Church to manage and operate Tubman’s homestead. Established in 2017, the park relies almost entirely on partner sites to operate; the NPS supports only 2 (FTE) employees from base operating funds.⁶⁰⁰

While Boston African American NHS’s partnership with the Museum of African American History is not entirely unique, the relationship remains unusual. The Museum retains its sovereignty as an independent Black cultural institution, with full intellectual control over the exhibits and programming at the Abiel Smith School and African Meeting House. Even as the site and Museum have partnered on a number of events and studies in the recent past and the NPS continues to conduct Black Heritage Trail tours, the two institutions largely operate separately. NPS staff at times find this frustrating, especially when an exhibit topic touches on an element of Black history for which the NPS has expansive resources. Moving forward, both the site and the Museum could potentially benefit from working side-by-side more.

In 2001 the National Park System Advisory Board produced a report on the future of the national parks which remains relevant today.⁶⁰¹ This wide-ranging report underscored the potential of the national parks in many realms – education, outreach, and preservation. In achieving their potential, our national parks will necessarily rely on partnerships, collaboration with other agencies and academia, and the engagement of the public. The report calls on the NPS to be more inclusive through outreach to new audiences and collaboration with living cultures and communities in order

⁵⁹⁸ U.S. Department of the Interior Office of Budget, *Budget Justifications and Performance Information FY2024, National Park Service*. “National Park Service Summary Project Data Sheet for Construction,” (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, FY 2024), Overview-25, Overview-50.

⁵⁹⁹ “Establishing the Park,” Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historical Park, Georgia. Website, accessed November 30, 2023, <https://www.nps.gov/malu/establishing-the-park.htm>.

⁶⁰⁰ U.S. Department of the Interior Office of Budget, *Budget Justifications and Performance Information FY2024, National Park Service*. “National Park Service Summary Project Data Sheet for Construction,” (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, FY 2024), Overview-50; “Partners” Harriet Tubman National Historical Park, New York, Website accessed November 30, 2023, <https://www.nps.gov/hart/getinvolved/partners.htm>.

⁶⁰¹ National Park System Advisory Board, *Rethinking the National Parks for the 21st Century* (Washington, DC: National Geographic Society, July 2001).

to tell “the American story ... faithfully, completely, and accurately.”⁶⁰² The report also called for the NPS workforce to reflect “the diversity and talent of America.”⁶⁰³ The National Parks of Boston has made important contributions to expanding the reach of the NPS to new audiences, telling a more inclusive history, and hiring a diverse workforce. Challenges remain, however, especially as in recent years the ability to research and stage new programming, and hire Black park rangers, has proved difficult.

Today, Boston African American NHS’s goals, mission, and operations have been merged with those of Boston NHP, and to some degree Boston Harbor Islands NRA. While the site retains a line item in the annual NPS budget, all interpretive, administrative, maintenance, and cultural resources staff are shared between the Boston parks. This merger, which unfolded over the course of the seven years between 2008 and 2015, served the financial and interpretative planning needs of Boston NHP. The merger was intended to help dissolve the separation of the interpretive themes of the two parks, which to that point effectively segregated Black and white history. While the benefits of the financial consolidation made themselves known immediately, the interpretive and educational benefits of the merger were elusive. Without a site manager, the site lacks a specific advocate at division chief meetings. While reinstating this position may not be feasible, moving forward, there are a few potential avenues the site could take to make meaningful change. Boston African American NHS continues to hold great potential for elevating the history of the nineteenth-century freedom struggle in Boston and its legacy today. Fulfilling the promise of the park remains an ongoing process.

Representation. Few Black park rangers and staff work for the National Parks of Boston. Statistics of the racial make-up of NPB could not be obtained; however, conversations with staff past and present point to the paucity of Black personnel, in stark contrast to the period when Boston African American NHS maintained a separate staff.⁶⁰⁴ Part of this shift can be attributed to changes in the hiring process at the parks which have all but ended the hiring of students directly from local high schools and colleges. Instead of recruiting African American candidates directly, the site relies on the traditional competitive hiring process online, which has resulted in more white candidates.

The fact remains, however, that representation matters—both for the institution of the National Park Service itself and the audience it hopes to serve. While Site Manager Ken Heidelberg had uneven success getting the resources and attention he felt the site needed, he *could* control hiring and felt it important to hire African American park rangers when possible. Heidelberg remembered having to tell Superintendent John Burchill he needed to hire Bernadette Williams because “there

⁶⁰² NPSAB, *Rethinking*, 14.

⁶⁰³ NPSAB, *Rethinking*, 28.

⁶⁰⁴ Former Chief Park Ranger Bernadette Williams, former Superintendent Cassius Cash, and present Park Ranger Ryan McNabb noted this phenomenon; Cash, Oral History, 2021; Williams Oral History, 2021; McNabb Oral History, 2022.

is no way in the world I am going to send somebody white into a Black school to talk about the history, I mean the kids they just don't do that. You're going to tell me a white guy is going to tell me about my history? I don't want to hear it.”⁶⁰⁵ Black park rangers have more opportunities to connect with visitors by providing a voice which grounds the site in the experience of African Americans in America today. While it is difficult to quantify the benefit that diverse viewpoints and life experiences bring to the position of park ranger, the NPS has consistently asserted that it values diversity and NPB would do well to resist indifference and find ways to prioritize hiring Black employees.

Reinvest in Partnerships. The commitment to partnerships has been a core value of Boston African American NHS since its conception in the late 1970s and figures prominently in its enabling legislation. The site's greatest preservation accomplishments came through its partnerships, especially its primary partnership with the Museum of African American History. The site and the Museum worked together to complete three major construction projects: the first phase of the African Meeting House restoration (completed 1988), the restoration of the Abiel Smith School (completed 1999), and the final phase of the African Meeting House restoration (completed 2011). The Museum also served as an important partner in the restoration of the Shaw/54th Regiment Memorial, along with the Friends of Boston Public Gardens and the City of Boston (completed 2021).

To strengthen the partnership in the years to come, each party must recognize its mutual responsibility to the other. The National Park Service needs to recognize that the Museum bears the weight of the partnership, acting as a hub for the public education and interpretation of Black history in the City of Boston and in the region. In some ways, the Museum's work and identity legitimize the site, which has historically had problems with representation in terms of both staff and interpreting Black history. In turn the Museum needs to recognize the financial and operational constraints the Boston parks work under. As Congress continues to underfund the NPS, the ability of parks to support partners has weakened. When funds become available, the site should consider increasing its support of the Museum, which has declined in recent years.

Prioritize Research. The consolidation of Boston African American NHS with Boston NHP served in part to put the site on equal footing with its larger, parent park and to integrate the themes of both parks. While interpretation at the Boston parks is housed within one team, the Social Justice Team, the fact remains that the main tours have not changed substantively. Three trails—the Black Heritage Trail and the Freedom Trail, divided into northern and southern sections—dominate the interpretive framework of the NPB. Importantly, the staff of Boston African American NHS have worked to explore new topics by undertaking a host of research projects in the first decades of the twenty-first century. These include topic specific talks, research in support of the NPS Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Project, and documentation of the Shaw/54th

⁶⁰⁵ Heidelberg, personal communication, October 4, 2020.

Regiment Memorial for registration as a National Historic Landmark. Additionally, current superintendent Michael Creasey has made clear that the NPB hopes to “challenge patriotic stereotypes” that obscure the history of slavery and racism in our country and their legacies today.⁶⁰⁶ Without well-funded, intentional interpretive planning, however, it is unclear to what degree individual research findings and a progressive vision for the site can fundamentally change the interpretive program.

The NPS has acknowledged the long-standing pattern of interpretive staff failing to integrate the findings of historians and cultural resource professionals for a variety of reasons.⁶⁰⁷ At NPB, in order to put the parks on equal footing in a meaningful way and truly incorporate the themes and lessons of each with the other, a more active refiguring of the interpretive plan of NPB needs to take place. This interpretive plan would incorporate contemporary research on the history of race, class, the Civil War, the American Revolution, and the salience of these events and concepts for modern-day Americans. Further, without dedicated staff for Boston African American NHS projects, the number of resources devoted to social justice themes and Black history are completely at the discretion of the superintendent and the head of the Division of Visitor Experience and Engagement. While the individuals in these positions now support Black history research and events, there are no mechanisms in place to guarantee that this will continue.

Reconnect with the Community. During the Black Freedom Movement in the 1960s and 1970s, Black history museums were recognized for their work in both elevating Black culture and improving the lives of people in local Black communities. While the site continued this tradition upon its establishment through the close relationship it maintained with the Museum and the outreach that site managers and park rangers undertook over the years in Boston schools and neighborhood organizations, these programs have slowly fallen away over the last twenty years. In reflecting on the practice of community-based research, a group of leading Black historical archaeologists assert that “we cannot, in good faith claim an interest in accessing the past without serious engagement with communities that bear the unequal burden of its consequences in the present.”⁶⁰⁸ In order to maintain its relevance, the site needs to reconnect with the local Black community and respond to the types of programs and projects in which they are interested.

Resist Indifference. The site also needs to recognize the power it wields as a unit of the National Park Service, the nation’s leading federal preservation institution. Despite its small budget and

⁶⁰⁶ Michael Creasey, “Remarks: Bunker Hill Commemoration,” June 17, 2021. On file at Boston National Historical Park.

⁶⁰⁷ Whisnant, et al., *Imperiled Promise*, 24. This pattern dates to the 1960s when historians became tasked with dealing with adhering to the National Historic Preservation Act, specifically with Section 106 compliance and Section 110 documentation.

⁶⁰⁸ Ayana Omilade Flewellen, Justin P. Dunnavant, Alicia Odewale, Alexandra Jones, Tsione Wolde-Michael, Zoe Crossland, and Maria Franklin, “‘The Future of Archaeology Is Antiracist’: Archaeology in the Time of Black Lives Matter,” *American Antiquity* 86 (2021): 224–243, 231.

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shared staff, it has the potential to be a strong voice not only for the stories of past Black Americans, but also for those in the present. Since 2015, NPB has taken many steps toward addressing contemporary themes such as engaging with conversations on Black Lives Matter and the changing meanings of monuments like the Shaw/54th Regiment Memorial. NPB needs to continue these conversations to ensure the Boston parks remain “platforms for dialogue.”⁶⁰⁹ When Byron Rushing imagined the park in 1980, he didn’t see it as simply one branch of Boston National Historical Park; he believed it had the potential to have a farther reach into a wide variety of audiences, with broad messages that had relevance for contemporary conversations about freedom, inequality, and the power of communities. Boston African American National Historic Site still has this potential..

⁶⁰⁹Michael Creasey, “News Release: National Parks as Platforms for Dialogue,” June 19, 2020, accessed January 1, 2023, <https://www.nps.gov/bost/learn/news/national-parks-as-platforms-for-dialogue.htm>.

RESEARCH NOTES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Archive research for this project included the Resource Management Records (RMR) of Boston National Historical Park and Boston African American National Historic Site, both of which are housed at the Boston National Historical Park Archives, Charlestown Navy Yard, Boston National Historic Park, Boston Massachusetts. Notably, Boston African American NHS's collection benefits from a finding aid completed in 2019. Boston NHP's RMRs lack a finding aid, although access to the Superintendent's Meeting Minutes files greatly improved this study.

Research also included that portion of the Museum of African American History's management records known as the "Byron Rushing Collection," which is housed currently at Charlestown Navy Yard, Boston National Historical Park, Boston Massachusetts. Portions of this collection related directly to NPS have been photocopied and are accessioned into the RMR of Boston NHP and Boston African American NHS.

The Museum of African American History made their archival collections available and the research team was able to review information in the Institutional Archive for this project, however, these files truncated circa 2002. The collection benefits from a finding aid, but future analyses of the site and the Museum would benefit from additional research in collaboration with the Museum utilizing the recent records of the organization.

Future research could include the Schlesinger Library at the Harvard Radcliffe Institute, which retains a collection of Ruth Batson's papers. These papers offer a window into Batson's view of race relations in Boston and educational activism in the late twentieth century.

Future research could also more fully explore the Dean Howard Thurman and Sue Bailey Thurman collections at the Boston University Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center. These papers detail the myriad educational, spiritual, and preservation pursuits of this important couple.

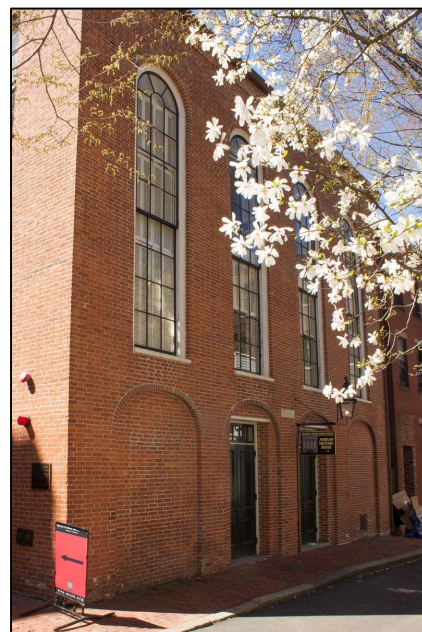
Finally, Northeastern University's Library Archives also houses important primary documents related to the Boston Public Schools Desegregation Project and the early history of the Museum of African American History.

APPENDIX A: HISTORIC RESOURCES WITHIN BOSTON AFRICAN AMERICAN NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

Boston African American National Historic Site comprises thirteen buildings and one object along the Black Heritage Trail. Two buildings on the Black Heritage Trail® are open to the public: the African Meeting House and the Abiel Smith School. The balance are private residences, with the exception of the Robert G. Shaw/54th Regiment Memorial, which is a public, outdoor memorial opposite the Massachusetts State House.

The fourteen historic resources currently recognized as contributing resources to Boston African American National Historic Site are:

African Meeting House, 8 Smith Court. Built in 1806, the African Meeting House is the oldest African American church building in the United States. Constructed by Black artisans and funded by donation drives within the Black community, the building served as a vital religious, civic, and educational center for the Black community on Beacon Hill throughout the nineteenth century.



Abiel Smith School, 46 Joy Street. Completed in 1835, the Abiel Smith School served as Boston's dedicated school building for the education of African American children. Agitation by Black community members for better school facilities in light of the over-crowded and unhealthy conditions of the existing schools for Black children led to the construction of the school. The building is one of the first public buildings designed by renowned architect Richard Upjohn.

Appendix A

Robert Gould Shaw and 54th Regiment Memorial, Beacon and Park Streets. This memorial honors General Robert G. Shaw and the 54th Massachusetts Regiment, the first all-Black regiment raised in the North. Shaw led the 54th Regiment in the Battle of Fort Wagner, South Carolina, in July 1863. Designed by renowned sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens, the memorial was completed in 1897, updated and repaired in 1984, and underwent a completed restoration 2020–2022.



George Middleton House, 5–7 Pinckney Street. Veteran George Middleton and the barber Lewis Glapion Middleton, who became a leader in Boston's African American community and a member of both the African Society and Prince Hall Masonic Lodge, owned this eighteenth-century wood frame house. Built between 1786 and 1791, this building is also the oldest surviving dwelling on Beacon Hill.

Phillips School, 65 Anderson Street. Built circa 1824 as a segregated school for white children, this represents one of the first integrated schools after the Massachusetts Legislature abolished racially segregated schools in 1855. In the early 1870s, Elizabeth Smith became the first African American teacher in the Boston public school system at this school.



Appendix A

John J. Smith House, 86 Pinckney Street. John J. Smith was a noted abolitionist, barber, and Massachusetts State Representative. After moving to Boston in the 1840s, he opened a barbershop which served as both a center for abolitionist activity and a rendezvous point for escaped enslaved people. Smith lived at the house from 1878 through 1893, during which time he was appointed the first African American member of the Boston Common Council.



Charles Street Meetinghouse, 70 Charles Street. Built in 1807 for the white Third Baptist Church of Boston, its design is attributed to architect Asher Benjamin. The meetinghouse became an early site of integrationist activism leading to the formation of one of the nation's first integrated congregations, the First Baptist Free Church. The meetinghouse became home to the First African Methodist Episcopal Church beginning in 1876 and proved to be the last African American institution on Beacon Hill when it left in 1939.

John Coburn House/Coburn's Gaming House, 2 Phillips Street. Built between 1843 and 1846, this house may have been renowned architect Asher Benjamin's last commission. Home to John Coburn, a clothing dealer and treasurer of the New England Freedom Association, this house also harbored at least one fugitive enslaved person. Additionally, Coburn participated in the defense of Shadrach Minkins against slave catchers and became co-founder and captain in the Massasoit Guard, an all-Black military company in the 1850s.



Appendix A

Lewis and Harriet Hayden House, 66 Phillips Street. Lewis Hayden was one of Boston's most daring and committed anti-slavery activists. Born enslaved in Lexington, Kentucky, he escaped with his wife Harriet and settled in Boston. There, he became a leader in the abolition movement, and the Hayden House became a safe house for freedom seekers on the Underground Railroad. Lewis Hayden lived at the house from 1850 until his death in 1891.



Smith Court Residences, 2/2a, 3, 5, 7, and 7a Smith Court. This collection of houses exemplifies the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century architecture of the north slope of Beacon Hill. The stories of their former occupants represent the varied political, social, and civic lives of the Black community members who once lived there. These include the Holmes Alley House (7a Smith Court), the William C. Nell House (3 Smith Court), the Joseph Scarlett

House and Peter Guss House (7 Smith Court), the Joseph Scarlett House (2/2a Smith Court), and the George Washington House (5 Smith Court).

NPS photos of all resources available on the Boston African American National Historic Site website, at: www.nps.gov/boaf/

APPENDIX B: BOSTON AFRICAN AMERICAN NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE LEGISLATION

PUBLIC LAW 96-430—OCT. 10, 1980

94 STAT. 1845

Public Law 96-430
96th Congress

An Act

To provide for the establishment of the Boston African American National Historic Site in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and for other purposes.

Oct. 10, 1980
[H.R. 7434]

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

Boston African
American
National
Historic Site,
establishment.
16 USC 461 note.

TITLE I—BOSTON AFRICAN AMERICAN NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

SEC. 101. In order to preserve for the benefit and inspiration of the people of the United States as a national historic site certain historic structures and properties of outstanding national significance located in Boston, Massachusetts, and associated with the creation and development of a free African American community within Beacon Hill prior to the Civil War, the Secretary of the Interior (hereinafter in this Act referred to as the "Secretary") is authorized to establish the Boston African American National Historic Site, including the African American Meeting House, within the area generally depicted on the map entitled "Boundary Map, Boston African American National Historic Site", numbered BOAF-80,000 and dated March 1980. The map shall be on file and available for public inspection in the offices of the National Park Service, Department of the Interior.

Map, public
availability.

SEC. 102. At such time as the Secretary determines that sufficient properties within the boundary of the site are the subject of cooperative agreements pursuant to section 103, he may establish the area as the Boston African American National Historic Site. Pending such establishment and thereafter, the site shall be administered by the Secretary in accordance with the provisions of this Act and the provisions of law generally applicable to the administration of national historic sites, including the Act of August 25, 1916 (39 Stat. 535; 16 U.S.C. 1, 2-4) and the Act of August 21, 1935 (49 Stat. 666; 16 U.S.C. 461-467).

Administration.

SEC. 103. The Secretary may accept any gift or bequest of any property depicted on the map referred to in the first section of this Act, and he is authorized to enter into cooperative agreements with the city of Boston, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, or any of their political subdivisions, or any private person or organization, including the Beacon Hill Architectural Commission, to mark, interpret, restore, provide technical assistance, or any combination thereof, and for such other activities as may be necessary for the preservation of any properties depicted on such map. Cooperative agreements shall contain, but need not be limited to, provisions that (1) the Secretary, through the National Park Service, or some appropriate private group contracted to the National Park Service for this purpose, shall have the right at all reasonable times to interpret the exterior of the properties, and such portions of the interior as have been mutually agreed upon, and (2) no changes or alterations shall be made in such properties except by mutual

Gifts or bequests,
cooperative
agreements.

94 STAT. 1846

PUBLIC LAW 96-430—OCT. 10, 1980

agreement between the Secretary and the other parties to such agreements. The agreements may contain specific provisions which outline in detail the extent of the participation by the Secretary in the restoration, preservation, or maintenance of such historic properties. The Secretary is authorized in his discretion to assist with maintenance directly related to public visitation of those properties covered by cooperative agreements consummated pursuant to this Act. No funds may be expended on a property until after the Secretary determines that there is applicable to that property a binding written cooperative agreement which remains in force and effect assuring the preservation and historical integrity of such property. If any fees are charged for the use of a property covered by a cooperative agreement, and Federal funds are committed in the cooperative agreements, the income from such fees shall be applied to the costs of maintenance and renovation of that property. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, no Federal fees shall be charged for entrance or admission to the historic site.

Fees.

Site
identification.

SEC. 104. The Secretary, in cooperation with other interested groups, may identify other significant sites relating to the nineteenth century free African American community on Beacon Hill, Boston, which are related to the historic site authorized by this Act, and, with the consent of the owners thereof, may mark them appropriately and make reference to them in any interpretive literature.

Management
plan, submittal
to congressional
committees.

SEC. 105. Within three complete fiscal years from the effective date of this Act, the Secretary shall submit to the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs of the United States House of Representatives and the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources of the United States Senate, a comprehensive general management plan for the historic site, pursuant to the provisions of section 12(b) of the Act of August 18, 1970 (84 Stat. 825; 16 U.S.C. 1a-1 et seq.).

Appropriation
authorization.

SEC. 106. Effective on October 1, 1981, there are authorized to be appropriated such sums as may be necessary to carry out the provisions of this Act. Notwithstanding any other provision of this Act, authority to enter into contracts, to incur obligations, or to make payments under this Act shall be effective only to the extent, and in such amounts, as are provided in advance in appropriation Acts.

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