



8 Smith Court, Beacon Hill  
Boston, Massachusetts

# AFRICAN MEETING HOUSE

*“ We have met here tonight in this obscure school-house, our members are few and our influence limited; but mark my prediction, Faneuil Hall shall ere long echo with the principles we have set forth. We shall shake the nation by their mighty power.”*

*William Lloyd Garrison at  
The African Meeting House  
January 6, 1832*

The African Meeting House is the oldest standing African-American church building in the United States. Completed in 1806, this award-winning National Historic Site is located on Beacon Hill, once the heart of Boston's black community. Known during the abolitionist era as the Black Faneuil Hall, the elegant brick Meeting House is a testament to African-American community organization, and a showcase of black craftsmanship.

The first Africans arrived in Boston as slaves in 1638. The Revolutionary war, in which many blacks fought and died, was a turning point in the status of African-Americans in Massachusetts; by the end of the 1700s, slavery was outlawed in the Commonwealth.

Blacks in Boston were concerned with establishing strong independent organizations, with educating their children, and with working to end slavery throughout the nation.

The African Meeting House was a focus of Boston's black community. A center of religious, political, and social activity, the building served as a church, a school, a meeting hall, and often as a residence, as well.



Lewis Hayden



"First Independent Baptist Church"  
Boston Almanac, by S. N. Dickinson,  
1843

Here the Rev. Thomas Paul served as the first pastor of the African Baptist Church. Here, in 1832, William Lloyd Garrison founded the New England Antislavery Society. Frederick Douglass, Wendell Phillips, and Charles Sumner spoke from the Meeting House podium. Here, too, Maria W. Stewart delivered her historic defense of women's rights in the early 1830s. Members of the historic Massachusetts 54th regiment of black Civil War soldiers enlisted at the Meeting House.

Numbering about 2000 at its pre-Civil War peak, the Beacon Hill African-American community, in its dedication to the Abolitionist cause, exerted a national and international influence far beyond its size.

In reaction to the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, black Bostonians developed a network of "safe" houses on the north slope of the hill. The community provided refuge to escaped slaves, seeing them safely to freedom on the Underground Railroad.

Carefully restored to its appearance in the mid-1850s, the African Meeting House is one of fifteen sites on the Black Heritage Trail, a 1.6 mile walking tour that introduces visitors to the history and architecture of the free African-American community that lived on Beacon Hill in the 1800s. The trail weaves its way through the largest concentration of pre-Civil War African-American historic sites in the United States.

**CAUTION!!**

**COLORED PEOPLE**

**OF BOSTON, ONE & ALL,**

You are hereby respectfully CAUTIONED and advised, to avoid conversing with the Watchmen and Police Officers of Boston.

For since the recent ORDER OF THE MAYOR & ALDERMEN, they are empowered to act as

**KIDNAPPERS**  
AND  
**Slave Catchers,**

And they have already been actually employed in KIDNAPPING, CATCHING, AND KEEPING SLAVES. Therefore, if you value your LIBERTY, and the Welfare of the Fugitives among you, Shame them in every possible manner, as so many HOUNDS on the track of the most unfortunate of your race.

Keep a Sharp Look Out for KIDNAPPERS, and have TOP EYE open.

APRIL 24, 1851



**Museum of Afro American History**  
**African Meeting House**

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