

Boston African-American

National Historic Site

National Park Service

U.S. Department of the Interior

Struggle Against Oppression

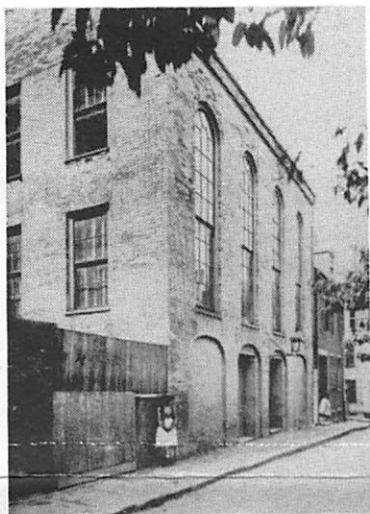


Photo courtesy of SPNEA, Boston, MA

Throughout the history of the United States, blacks have had to struggle against the most insidious and destructive forms of hatred and oppression. The combined effects of more than 200 years of slavery, persistent racism, and systemic economic exploitation have forced blacks to organize in a

unified fight for freedom and self-determination. As a part of their struggle, black people have erected edifices that have housed and perpetuated their movement. The African Meeting House on Beacon Hill is one such edifice.

State Law and Slavery

Slavery had been ruled illegal in the state in 1783, and runaway slaves attracted by the law, made the Beacon Hill community one of the largest concentrations of freed slaves in the nation. Originally in the North End, in an area they called New Guinea, but the community leaders decided to leave that crowded area for the relatively undeveloped north slope.

African Meeting House

The magnet and the keystone of the black community would be its new meeting house. this structure (the oldest stranding black church building still standing in the United States) was constructed with black labor in 1806, using timbers and window frames salvaged from the 1734 Old West Church.

Reverend Thomas Paul and his small congregation proved that blacks could achieve a position of independence and equality by erecting their own church. Blacks rejected the status of second class citizenship and chose to worship according to their own precepts. As a center of political organization, the African Meeting House fostered abolitionist activities. Community leaders as well as national leaders, i.e., Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, and Soujourner Truth gathered there to support the black movement, to combat the institution of slavery. In the same spirit of struggle for self determination, black families educated their children in the basement of the African Meeting House in 1808, when denied the basic right of a public education.



Photo courtesy of SPNEA, Boston, MA

Underground Railroad

When the first Fugitive Slave Law was passed in 1793, the community was galvanized into further action. A system of helping slaves to freedom overseas or into Canada emerged with the "Underground Railroad" which made the stops throughout the region. When the Fugitive Slave Act was modified in 1850 Beacon Hill became a

dangerous place for escaped slaves as well as free blacks. The African Meeting House as well as other buildings on Beacon Hill were used to hide fugitives from slave catchers.

Expression of Pride

Boston African American National Historic Site was created to commemorate the black communities of Beacon Hill in the nineteenth century and their courageous resistance to injustice, segregation, and slavery. Today, after a year-long, million dollar, historical restoration by the

National Park Service, the African Meeting House serves as an expression of Black Pride. It stands as a visible symbol of the struggle, toil, and the sustaining spirit of African Americans to overcome oppression.

AFRICAN MEETING HOUSE
1874

