



# MUSEUM OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY

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## Funds Received to Restore African Meeting House

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

#### **Museum of African American History Receives \$4 Million in Federal Stimulus Funds to Restore the African Meeting House - Boston**

**BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS** - Boston's African Meeting House, a National Historic Landmark on Beacon Hill, will be restored to its 19<sup>th</sup> Century state thanks to \$4 million in federal funding announced today. The National Park Service (NPS) approved the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funding for the Museum of African American History (MAAH).

Governor Deval L. Patrick worked closely with Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar to secure approval of the funds. "A primary goal of ARRA is getting people back to work," said Governor Patrick. "I am grateful to Secretary Salazar and NPS professionals who saw the merit in providing funding that not only stimulates the economy through construction and tourism, but will also preserve a building so very important to the history of the Commonwealth and the nation."

The African Meeting House, built and opened in 1806, is the oldest extant African American church building in the nation constructed primarily by free black artisans. Over more than two hundred years, this three-story brick building has served the diverse communities in the neighborhood, as a church, school, and vital meeting place for Boston's African American community in the 1800s, and a synagogue for the Jewish community during the twentieth century. Acquired by the Museum in 1972, it is the crown jewel in MAAH's collection of historic sites. The final destination on the Museum's Black Heritage Trail®, Rangers from the Boston African American National Historic Site provide free public tours.

Museum of African American History Executive Director Beverly Morgan-Welch and the new NPS Boston Superintendent Cassius Cash, worked to coordinate the details to complete the restoration project. “The African Meeting House is where the luminaries of the Abolitionist Movement gathered to end slavery in this nation,” said Morgan-Welch. “We are delighted to have the opportunity to return this hallowed space to its former glory.”

The restoration project will include an elevator stair tower to provide access to the upper floors, replacement of electrical, heating, cooling and fire suppression systems and repairs to interior finishes. Shawmut Design and Construction of Boston and architects Jack Waite and Associates of Albany, NY, are contracted to complete this project.

The Museum also received major grants from the 1772 Foundation, American Express, Bank of America, EMC, Liberty Mutual, National Grid, State Street Bank, Walmart, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and the Mabel Louise Riley and Webster Foundations, as well as Mayor Menino’s Office and the Massachusetts Cultural Facilities Fund. This support helped to continue the momentum necessary to secure ARRA funding needed to complete the restoration.

“During my tenure in Boston, I have learned so much about the American history that resides in this property,” said Superintendent Cash. Within the Meeting House, the New England Anti-Slavery Society was formed, children attended school, music and cultural events were presented, and during the Civil War, troops were recruited for the first black regiment from the North, the Massachusetts 54<sup>th</sup>. Cash continued, “We are all excited to have the work begin this fall.”

The adjacent Abiel Smith School, where the Museum presents public programs and exhibitions, will continue to be open while the African Meeting House restoration project is under way. To plan a visit the Museum of African American History, go to [www.maah.org](http://www.maah.org).

**About the Museum:**

Founded in 1967, the Museum of African American History is New England’s largest and most visible African American history museum with four historic sites and two Black Heritage Trails®. The Museum campuses in Boston and Nantucket feature historic sites that were the nexus of the free 18<sup>th</sup> and 19th century African American community.

The African Meeting House (1806), a National Historic Landmark®, and the Abiel Smith School (1835), sit side by side on Boston's Beacon Hill. On Nantucket's York Street sit the African Meeting House (1820's) now pristinely restored with a coved ceiling reflecting its maritime heritage, and the Seneca Boston-Florence Higginbotham House (c. 1774).

The African Meeting Houses in Boston and Nantucket are the oldest in the nation and the most significant of the Museum's collections of art, documents, books, photographs, archeology and artifacts. In these unpretentious yet majestic buildings, ordinary Americans accomplished the extraordinary, establishing anti-slavery societies and educational opportunities as well as cultural, religious, social and political organizations. Massachusetts was home to the most powerful and safest of black abolitionist communities and, at times, to the largest number of self-emancipated people who arrived via the Underground Railroad network.

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