



Museum of African American History

MEDIA ADVISORY: For release November 11, 2011

What: **African Meeting House: Rededication and 205th Anniversary Celebration**

The Museum of African American History (MAAH), Boston and Nantucket, completes historic restoration of the African Meeting House on Beacon Hill in Boston. This national historic landmark reopens for the first time in six years with a series of public events and tours beginning Wednesday, December 7. [MAAH also hosts a private Ceremony on Tuesday, December 6, 2011.]

When: **December 6 – 10, 2011**

- Tuesday 12/6 • Private Rededication Ceremony • By Invitation Only
- Wednesday 12/7 & Thursday 12/8 • Members Only Private Preview • 10am - 4pm
- Thursday 12/7 • 'Portraits of Purpose': Members Only Exhibit Opening • 6 - 8pm
- Friday 12/9 & Saturday 12/10 • Public Grand Opening • 10am to 4pm

Who: **Rededication Celebration Events** (see attached schedule for more details on public events).

12/6 • Private Rededication Ceremony with Spoken and Musical Tributes

First Lady Diane B. Patrick, Mayor Thomas M. Menino, Renowned a cappella singers Sweet Honey in the Rock, and others. [**EDITORS NOTE:** No advance coverage please. Private event begins at 10am; live and post-event coverage opportunities available, including pool video and sound].

12/7 – 12/8 • Members Only Preview of African Meeting House and Exhibit

National Park Service rangers lead members on guided tours of the newly restored African Meeting House. Preview 'Portraits of Purpose: A Tribute to Leadership, Boston 1980 – 2012,' a unique collection of 65 life-sized portraits by noted photographer Don West.

12/7 • Members Only 'Portraits of Purpose' Exhibit Opening

Preview exhibit of 65 life-sized portraits with noted photographer Don West. Hear spoken and musical tributes from people featured in the exhibit, including Ted Landsmark of Boston Architectural College, retired journalist Sarah Ann Shaw, and her daughter Klare. Guided tours of African Meeting House for members.

12/9 – 12/10 • Public Grand Opening

Guided tours led by National Park Service rangers of the African Meeting House, Paige Academy Nursery and Elementary School Drummers, "Portraits of Purpose" exhibit, and more.

Where: Museum of African American History, 46 Joy Street, Boston, Massachusetts

History: 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 200 years, this three-story brick structure has served diverse communities in Boston, as a church, school, and vital meeting place in the 1800s, and a synagogue in the 20th century. In 1967, **Sue Bailey Thurman**, wife of the Rev. Dr. Howard Thurman, founded the Museum of African American History, which acquired the African Meeting House in 1972. This National Historic Landmark is the crown jewel in the Museum's collection of historic sites on Boston's Beacon Hill and Nantucket.

It was in this gathering place for freedom where giants in the Abolitionist Movement spoke: **William Lloyd Garrison**, Editor of *The Liberator* newspaper and founder of the New England Anti-Slavery Society; **Maria Stewart**, first woman to speak before a group of women and men; and **Frederick Douglass**, one of the greatest leaders of his time, rallied black and white abolitionists, and ordinary men, women, and children to action. During the **150th anniversary of the Civil War**, the Meeting House stands as a reminder of the commitment by Boston's African American community to muster

AFRICAN MEETING HOUSE REDEDICATION, page 2 of 2

black troops and form the Massachusetts 54th and 55th Volunteer Infantry Regiments as well as the Fifth Cavalry.

The Museum of African American History has immortalized these selfless abolitionists who gathered together at the Meeting House and executed plans to abolish slavery, provide educational opportunities, and command equal rights for all. **President Abraham Lincoln** said that if there was any one place in America responsible for the end of slavery, it was Boston. That is in no small measure due to these extraordinary American patriots who exercised their First Amendment right to assemble at this hallowed space on Beacon Hill.

MAAH:

The **Museum of African American History** is New England's largest museum dedicated to preserving, conserving and accurately interpreting the contributions of people of African descent and those from Boston and across the nation who found common cause with them in the struggle for liberty, dignity, and justice for all.

Founded in 1967 and opened in 1986, its Boston and Nantucket campuses feature two Black Heritage Trails® and four historic sites; three are National Historic Landmarks. They tell the story of organized black communities from the Colonial Period through the 19th century. Exhibits, programs, and educational activities showcase the powerful history of individuals and families who worshipped, educated their children, debated the issues of the day, produced great art, organized politically, and advanced the cause of freedom through a strategic network of Northern coastal communities.

Restoration:

The 5,400 square-foot **African Meeting House** was constructed in 1806 with funds raised in both white and black communities. The facade is an adaptation of a design for a townhouse published by Boston architect Asher Benjamin. Cato Gardner, a native of Africa, was responsible for raising more than \$1,700 toward the total \$7,700 to complete the project. A commemorative inscription above the front door reads: "Cato Gardner, first Promoter of this Building 1806."

With the historic restoration complete, the building has returned to its appearance in 1855 and now is handicap accessible with a new elevator and stair tower of more than 1,600 square-feet.

Funding from many generous corporations, foundations, individuals and government agencies enabled the Museum to begin construction in May of 2006. The Museum is indebted to Governor Patrick and Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar, who worked together to secure an award of \$4 million from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and the National Park Service. With these funds, nearly 125 jobs have been created during this restoration.

The pristinely restored African Meeting House reopens to the public on the 205th anniversary. Today, the beauty and simple elegance of this treasured space and important period elements, from the pews and pulpit to the chandelier and wainscoting, create a setting that allows us to imagine the worship, lectures, school, concerts, and antislavery meetings that occurred here in an entirely new way.

Admission:

The Museum's historic sites, Boston and Nantucket, are accessible to all. Members and children 12 years and under: Free • Adults: \$5 • Youth (13 – 17) and Seniors (62+): \$3. Group rates are available on request.

Membership:

\$15 Eunice Ross Student/Senior; \$25 Lewis Hayden Individual • \$50 Susan Paul Family • \$125 National Trust Friend • Additional membership opportunities are available with increasing rewards at each level. Benefits for all members include free admission to Boston and Nantucket museums throughout the year.

Information:

Visit www.maah.org or call 617.725.0022, ext. 222.

Press:

Contact Lynn DuVal Luse, 617.233.3127

On request:

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND INFORMATION AVAILABLE:

- African Meeting House historical restoration; art, craftsmanship, economics, photographs
- History and timeline of the Museum of African American History
- The Museum's four historic sites and Black Heritage Trails® on Beacon Hill and Nantucket
- Rewarding partnership with the National Park Service
- A Gathering Place for Freedom and Rededication Events Schedule
- Living descendants of abolitionist giants of the African Meeting House
- Restoring, recycling, recreating, and reusing artifacts and archeology from the 1800s.