Black Entrepreneurs of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

A partnership between
the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston and
the Museum of African American History,
Boston and Nantucket

Federal Reserve Bank of Boston
Boston, Massachusetts
March 2009 – February 2010

Museum of African American History
Boston and Nantucket, Massachusetts
May – September 2009
THIS EXHIBITION focuses on enterprising black entrepreneurs of the 18th and 19th centuries in New England. Since the Colonial era African Americans have contributed to the economic development of this country. They have engaged in small-scale and large-scale commercial enterprises, ranging from home-based businesses and small shops to regional, national, and international companies. They developed products, selected markets, created economic networks, invested strategically, and sought to balance risks and rewards, costs and profits.

From the time that blacks first entered this country, they built on African economic traditions in the context of the New World economy. Many had participated as producers, brokers, traders, and merchants in the complex market economies of West and Central Africa before their involuntary arrival on American shores.

Once in this country, blacks seized opportunities to create enterprises and to participate in the commercial life of this developing nation. In the North, black entrepreneurs emerged in the small African American enclaves of northern coastal cities during the Revolutionary period. The black entrepreneurs who emerged in northern African American urban communities were both free blacks and self-liberated blacks from the South. As the African American urban population of free blacks, self-liberated southern blacks, and foreign-born blacks expanded during the nineteenth century, so entrepreneurial activities grew and diversified.

In Boston, by the mid-18th century more than one-third of the black population was free and all black Bostonians were free by 1783. The majority of them settled in the area now known as Beacon Hill where they built their own church—the African Meeting House.

In this exhibit, the careers of individual African American entrepreneurs highlight important business and economic concepts. One core economic concept is the market: the bringing together of sellers (producers) and buyers (consumers). Innovative entrepreneurs have to figure out what goods and services buyers need and want. Developing excellent marketing skills is crucial to expanding the pool of interested customers. Entrepreneurs often have to find financial backers to start up their ventures; and they have to cover their costs before they make a profit. Inventors create new ideas, new products, and new processes that fill existing needs and create new demand. Entrepreneurial ventures face uncertain outcomes; the risk of failure always weighs against the prospect of reward. The stories of these African American entrepreneurs are truly inspiring.
ECONOMIC CONCEPTS

**Network Effects** refers to the change in the value of a good to a consumer because the number of people using it changes. For example, owning a telephone becomes more valuable as more people participate in the telephone network.

**Markets** are places, institutions, or technological arrangements where or whereby goods and services are exchanged.

**Cost-benefit** analysis is a technique for deciding whether or not an action should be taken by comparing its benefits and costs.

**Innovation** means a new way of doing something.

**Profit** is income received for entrepreneurial skills and risk-taking, calculated by subtracting all costs from total revenues.

**Risk** describes a situation in which the outcome is uncertain. The concept lies at the heart of Capitalism and is largely responsible for economic growth.

**Reward/Return** The return of an investment is calculated as the profit generated by that investment divided by its original cost. The rate of return usually is expressed as a percentage over a year. There is a strong relationship between risk and return—the greater the risk, the higher the potential return.
INDUSTRY DESCRIPTIONS

Apparel  African Americans participated in the Apparel Industry in Boston and elsewhere in New England as tailors, dressmakers, seamstresses, milliners, and retail clothiers. In Boston, the second-hand clothing business engaged many African American entrepreneurs. In 1830, there were twenty-nine clothing shops in the city. Since before the Civil War, black tailors and black dressmakers contributed their talents to the development of the fashion industry. Their clientele included both black and white customers. The 1821 Boston City Directory first lists dressmakers; the 1830 Directory lists 20 mantua-makers, 46 dressmakers, 10 seamstresses, and 10 tailoresses. Usually operating out of their homes, dressmakers employed seamstresses and often combined dressmaking with hat-making. The need for military uniforms led to ready-made clothing; the yardstick, the pattern, and the sewing machine also produced changes in the apparel industry. African Americans dominated the high fashion merchant tailoring before the Civil War. By 1860, successful black merchant tailors’ annual incomes ranged as high as $10,000.
Arts, Entertainment, and Publishing
Throughout its history, Boston has been a vibrant cultural center for visual, literary, and performing arts fostering and hosting international cultural giants. The black cultural community was a part of, contributed to, and was influenced by this intellectual center. From Africa and the Caribbean, to the American South, the diverse world views of black Boston reflected their individual cultures, colors, sounds, landscapes and artistic traditions, and became synthesized with this unique Northern coastal city and cultural gathering place. From the revolutionary era and throughout the nineteenth century, African Americans established aesthetic traditions as creators of works of art; as authors, printers and publishers of literary works; as performers of drama and music; and as cultural consumers. In 1900 the Boston City Directory identified, black men and women in Boston’s arts and publishing industry: 29 actors and 18 actresses, four artists, 46 musicians, seven writers, two photographers, and four printers.

Real Estate and Boarding Houses
Black Bostonians who succeeded in generating profits from their business enterprises used these profits to enhance their entrepreneurial activities. Successful entrepreneurs like clothier John Coburn and laundress Chloe Spear invested in real estate. Real estate also could provide new means for acquiring wealth through property rentals and Boarding Houses. From private family homes with one or two boarders to whole buildings, boarding house owners provided lodging, laundry, and meals to a diverse clientele that included whites and blacks, single men and women, and married couples. Women played key roles in
boarding house operations as proprietors and supervisors of the day-to-day operations. In black Boston, boarding houses supported economic advancement of owners and tenants, facilitated strong community bonds, and helped to intensify political activity.

**Hair Care and Beauty** In Boston and other New England cities like Providence, Rhode Island and Hartford, Connecticut African Americans participated in the Hair and Beauty Industry as barbers, hairdressers, and wigmakers. Men and women entrepreneurs served black and white clients. Barbers and hairdressers constituted 9.5% of the taxpayers in the black Boston community in 1850. Until the Civil War barbering was among the most profitable African American enterprises. Hairdressing salons and barber shops served as vibrant community centers in which patrons and proprietors debated contemporary political and social issues, strategized activist efforts, and supported local community events and organizations. These shops facilitated invaluable connections and collaborations between diverse urban community members, while attending to the beautification needs of their clients.

**Hospitality** In the early and mid-1800s, black men and women parlayed their experience in food preparation and service with their own business knowledge to open successful catering businesses, restaurants and hotels. Before the Civil War, the catering industry was dominated by blacks who had successful enterprises in cities such as Boston, Philadelphia and New York. Most black hospitality businesses were supported by wealthy whites who valued the quality of service they received at these black establishments.

Catering enterprises often led to restaurant ownership and in some cases to the hotel business. George Downing, whose father owned an Oyster House in New York, opened his own Oyster House in the resort town of Newport, Rhode Island in 1846 and later built the luxurious Sea Girt Hotel on elegant Bellevue Avenue. Hospitality businesses ranged from single proprietors working from their homes to large establishments with sizeable staffs. In 1869, a group of twelve black caterers formed the Corporation of Caterers as a way of supporting each other and insuring high standards among their membership. By 1870, the Corporation had 500 members including business owners and employees in the catering business.
Beginning after the Civil War and by the end of the 19th century, white clientele moved to larger hotels and restaurants built with substantial amounts of venture capital that was unavailable to blacks. Black-owned hospitality businesses began to cater more to a black customer base. In Boston in 1900, the census listed 47 men who were restaurant owners, saloon, and hotel keepers and one woman restaurateur in the city.

**Inventors** African Americans’ scientific ingenuity has created numerous devices that have improved the quality of life and increased productivity and boosted business profits. A notable early invention was astronomer Benjamin Banneker’s watch created in 1753. Nineteenth century inventors were free-born, enslaved, and formerly enslaved people whose fields included dentistry, education, farming, and manufacturing. The U.S. Patent Law was enacted in 1790. Thomas Jennings was the first African American inventor to receive a patent in 1821. He used the proceeds from his dry cleaning process patent to liberate his enslaved family and contribute to the abolitionist movement. Lewis Temple of New Bedford invented the toggle harpoon that revolutionized the whaling industry, and Jan Matzeliger’s shoe lasting machine greatly advanced shoe manufacturing.

**Maritime** From its beginning Boston was the principal port of New England, although other cities and towns specialized in specific sectors of the maritime industry—whaling in Nantucket and New Bedford, slave trading in Bristol and Newport, Rhode Island, and the China Trade in Salem, Massachusetts. Beginning with the first century of settlement in Colonial America, Africans in America were very much involved in the maritime industry. Not only did the maritime trades serve as a route to freedom for enslaved African Americans, they served as a means to financial success. Of the 100,000 Americans at sea in 1800, fully 18% of these were African Americans. They were all ages but primarily young men in their twenties. At sea, African Americans served at all levels of the maritime industry from building and owning their own ships to working as seamen and whalers. On land, African Americans participated in maritime trades including ship building, sail making and rope making; Frederick Douglass worked as a caulker in the Baltimore ship yards. Some African American mariners engaged in coastal trading for fish and other local commodities; some participated in long-distance trading from New England south to the
Caribbean or across the Atlantic Ocean to Europe and Africa; some seamen ventured as far as Asia.

Professional Services

In Boston and throughout the nation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, African American professionals included ministers, teachers, physicians, and lawyers. Throughout most of the nineteenth century aspiring physicians and lawyers entered their professions as apprentices to practitioners. By the end of the century, however, many professionals had earned college and graduate degrees. In 1783, James Durham of New Orleans became the first African American physician, while Rebecca Lee Crumpler, the first woman physician, received her degree from Boston’s New England Female Medical College in 1863. In 1845, Macon B. Allen became the first African American licensed to practice law, while Charlotte Ray, the first woman lawyer, gained her law degree from Howard University in 1872. In 1900, 47,219 African Americans held professional service occupations, including 21,287 teachers, 15,219 clergymen, 1,734 physicians, 728 lawyers; in Boston in 1900, there were 13 teachers, 14 ministers, 10 dentists, 13 physicians, and 12 lawyers.
Christian Carteaux Bannister (1819–1902)
Hairdresser
In the early 1850s, Christiana Carteaux opened the first of at least four successive hairdressing salons on Boston’s Washington Street. In 1855, she opened a second salon in Providence, Rhode Island while continuing to operate her Boston salon. In her *Liberator* advertisements, Madame Carteaux announced that she would “attend to Cutting and Dressing Ladies’ and Children’s Hair, Dyeing and Champooing, [sic]” and that she had “a Hair Restorative, which cannot be excelled, as it produces new hair where baldness has taken place.” She was married to painter, Edward Mitchell Bannister.

Edward Mitchell Bannister (1826–1901)
Painter & Photographer
Edward Mitchell Bannister, the first African American to win a national art award, was born in New Brunswick, Canada. In 1850 he moved to Boston becoming a hairdresser and later began working in the salon of Madame Christiana Carteaux. They married in 1857 enabling him to become a full-time artist. A founding member of the Providence Art Club, his paintings of landscapes and seascapes met with critical and financial success. In 1876, *Under the Oaks*, won first prize at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia and sold for $1,500.
Cyrus Barrett (dates unknown)
*Cordwainer*

Cordwainers were skilled craftsmen who made leather shoes by hand to fit each individual customer. In the 19th century cordwainers made shoes; cloggers repaired them. Cyrus Barrett, a cordwainer, lived at 44 Belknap Street (now Joy Street) adjacent to the African Meeting House where between 1811 and 1840 a number of skilled craftsmen lived. Barrett was one of eleven African American cordwainers in the neighborhood and he, like other craftsmen, conducted his business out of his home. This shoe was discovered during an archeological dig behind the African Meeting House in 2005 and may have been made by Barrett.

Absalom F. Boston (1785-1855)
*Owner and Investor in a Whaling Ship, Inn, Store & Real Estate*

Absalom Boston, the son of weaver, Seneca Boston and Thankful Michah, a Wampanoag Native American, began his career as a mariner in 1800. In 1822, he captained his ship, the *Industry* with an all-black crew who immortalized him in song. In addition to whaling, he invested in real estate and owned and operated both an inn and a store. A member of one of the most influential black families on Nantucket, he led the equal school rights movement on Nantucket in the 1820’s.

William Wells Brown (1814-1884)
*Author, Historian, & Playwright*

William Wells Brown, the first African American travel writer, playwright and published novelist made his living as an antislavery lecturer and author. He moved to Boston in 1847 and wrote his first publication, *Narrative of William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave Written by Himself* which sold 13,000 copies in six editions. While living in Europe from 1849 to 1854, he published two travelogues and his first novel. He returned to the United States, and in 1856, produced his first antislavery drama, *Experience*, and in 1858, his second, *Escape*.

John P. Coburn (1809-1873)
*Real Estate Owner*

By 1830, Boston-born John Coburn, opened a clothing shop at 8 Brattle Street and established a second shop at 24 Brattle Street. He became a partner in a successful gaming parlor with his brother-in-law and rented residences to many in the black Beacon Hill community. Coburn’s business successes enabled him to invest in real estate valued at $5,000 in 1853, and $18,500 by 1873.
Rebecca Lee Crumpler (1831-1895)

Doctor & Author

Rebecca Crumpler, the nation’s first African American woman physician was born in Delaware. Moving to Boston, Lee entered the New England Female Medical College in 1860 and in 1864, was awarded her Doctor of Medicine degree. She practiced on Beacon Hill until the end of the Civil War when she served the recently emancipated in Richmond, Virginia. She returned to Boston to live and practice and in 1883 she published in two volumes, A Book of Medical Discourses.

Paul Cuffe (1759-1817)

Merchant Mariner

Paul Cuffe, captain, merchant mariner, trader, ship builder and owner, and whaler, was born on Cuttyhunk Island, Massachusetts, the seventh child of West African Coffe Slocum and Ruth Moses, a Wampanoag Native American. Growing up on his family’s 116-acre farm near Dartmouth, Massachusetts, Cuffe involved his family in his many commercial enterprises and employed all-black crews on his ships. His son Paul Cuffe, Jr. (c. 1791-1843), followed his father in the maritime business and wrote a lively account of his travels to Europe, the West Indies, and the South Pacific.

John Van Surly DeGrasse (1825-1868)

Doctor

Born in New York City, John Van Surly DeGrasse became the first African American member of the Massachusetts Medical Society in 1854. He received his medical degree from Bowdoin College in Maine in 1849 and established his medical practice in Boston. The first African American surgeon in the Union Army, in 1863, Dr. DeGrasse volunteered with the celebrated Massachusetts 54th regiment. His success enabled him to invest in real estate, valued at $6,000 in 1865, and in the arts, purchasing several paintings from Edward Bannister.

Mark Rene DeMortie (1829-1914)

Owner of Retail Stores, Brokerage Businesses, & Real Estate

Born in Norfolk, Virginia, during his lifetime, Mark DeMortie owned and operated diverse and profitable businesses. He came to Boston in 1851 where he opened a shoe store. During the Civil War, when the paymaster of the United States Army refused equal wages for black soldiers, DeMortie became the sublter to the Massachusetts 54th regiment crediting each man $2.00 a month for 18 months, equaling $14,000. When the soldiers finally received their equal pay, everyone repaid his debt to DeMortie. In 1866, DeMortie opened a tailoring establishment and in 1868, he moved to Chicago to become a
partner in a real estate and brokerage business. DeMortie also owned a sassafras oil factory and sawmill in Virginia. Married to Cordelia Downing, daughter of wealthy Rhode Island restaurateur George Downing, DeMortie returned to Boston in 1887 and resumed his tailoring business.

Frederick Douglass (1818-1895)
Author & Publisher
Frederick Douglass, “the most important African American leader...of the nineteenth century,” escaped to freedom in Massachusetts and became a brilliant public speaker and writer for the causes of abolition and women’s rights. Douglass’ career in journalism began in 1847 with The North Star in Rochester, New York and ended with The New National Era in 1874. He wrote three best-selling versions of his autobiography in 1845, 1855, and 1882. A strong supporter of the Republican Party, Douglass advised presidents and was rewarded with several political and diplomatic appointments in the 1880s.

George Thomas Downing (1819-1903)
Restaurant Owner
George Downing was a “restaurateur par excellence” in Newport, Providence, New York, and Washington, DC. After arson destroyed his Newport Sea-Girt House valued at $30,000 in 1860, Downing built a commercial real estate block on the site. He continued to invest in real estate into the late 1880s. Born in New York City, Downing was a political activist for racial justice throughout his long life.

Eliza Ann Gardner (1831-1922)
Mantua Maker
Eliza Ann Gardner attended the Smith School on Beacon Hill where she was an accomplished student. Learning sewing from her mother and business skills from her father, a sail maker, Gardner started her own business as a mantua maker. Popular from the 17th through the 19th centuries, mantuas were elegant flowing one-piece gowns worn over petticoats and open in the front, often made of expensive embroidered cloth. She participated in the antislavery movement with abolitionists Frederick Douglass and William Lloyd Garrison, and she was a leader in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion church in Boston.

George Franklin Grant (1846-1910)
Dentist & Inventor
George Franklin Grant was born in Oswego, New York. He moved to Boston and graduated from Harvard Dental School in 1870 where he served on the faculty for fifteen years. George Grant had a private dental practice in Boston with prominent white and black clients. Grant became a distinguished pioneering specialist, being recognized for
inventing a rubber oblate palate to treat cleft palates. Enjoying golf, he also invented the golf tee and patented it in 1899.

**Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (1825-1911)**
*Poet, Novelist, Essayist, & Lecturer*
Frances Ellen Watkins Harper won acclaim as a poet and a fiction writer. Her first volume of poetry and prose, *Forest Leaves*, was published in 1845 and went through twenty editions. In 1854, *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* appeared and sold 10,000 copies. Her most celebrated and final novel, *Iola Leroy*, was published in 1892. Serving on both the abolitionist and post-Civil War lecture circuits, she embellished her talks with selections from her poetry and sold her books at her presentations.

**Gilbert Harris (dates unknown)**
*Wigmaker*
Virginia-born Gilbert Harris arrived in Boston in 1892 where he was employed in a wig making shop. When the owner died, Harris took over the shop and developed it into the largest wig making business in New England, supplying local theatre companies and transacting some business by mail-order. He invested his profits in real estate, contributed generously to his church, and launched the Boston branch of the Negro Business League in his office in 1900.

**Lewis (1811-1889) and Harriet Bell Hayden (1820-1893)**
*Boarding House Keepers*
Born enslaved in Kentucky, the Haydens escaped to Canada via the Underground Railroad. They moved to Boston in 1849 and opened a boarding house in their home at 66 Southac Street, now Phillips Street, also sheltering approximately 100 self-liberated persons. Since Lewis Hayden also operated a clothing store on Cambridge Street, management of the boarding house was likely Harriet’s responsibility. Lewis Hayden was the first black government employee in the Commonwealth and won election to the Massachusetts Legislature in 1873.

**John Telemachus Hilton (1801-1864)**
*Hairdresser, Employment Agent, & Furniture Dealer*
Born in Pennsylvania, John T. Hilton came to Boston in the early 1820s where he established a hairdressing business. At Hilton’s shop, in addition to getting a haircut, a customer could purchase tickets for a local event, look for a job through Hilton’s employment agency, or purchase specialty items like fine soap. He also sold new and used furniture on a commission basis. Hilton was the first member of black Boston to be honored with a portrait commissioned by the Prince Hall Masonic Lodge.
Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins (1859-1930)
*Singer, Novelist, Playwright, Orator, & Editor*
Born in Portland, Maine, Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins had an impressive career as a singer, novelist, playwright, biographer, journalist, orator and editor. She was raised in Boston where her devoted stepfather, William Hopkins, introduced Pauline to the theater and her career as a singer. In 1879, Hopkins wrote her first play, *Slaves’ Escape: or The Underground Railroad* which was performed by the family theater company, the Hopkins Colored Troubadours. During her four-year tenure as editor of the *Colored American Magazine*, she wrote and published seven short stories and serialized three more novels.

Lewis Howard Latimer (1848-1928)
*Inventor & Author*
Born in Chelsea, Massachusetts, Lewis Latimer was an inventor, poet, musician, author, and artist. He received his first patent in 1874, improving water closets in railroad cars. Latimer worked with Alexander Graham Bell who entrusted the drawings for the telephone to him. While Thomas Edison invented the electric light, Latimer improved the longevity and brightness of the filament.

Joseph Lee (1849-1905)
*Caterer, Baker, Restaurateur, Hotelier, & Inventor*
Joseph Lee of Boston became prominent in the food service industry as a food preparer and as an inventor. Lee began his career as a baker, became the owner of two successful Boston area restaurants, and owned and managed two hotels. He opened the Lee Catering Company in 1902 serving elite families in the Back Bay of Boston. His first patent in 1894 was for a dough kneading machine for use in hotels. When Lee became frustrated at the waste of throwing away day-old bread, in 1895, he invented his bread crumb machine used in many major restaurants.

Mary Edmonia Lewis (1845-1911)
*Sculptor*
Edmonia Lewis is recognized as the first major African American sculptor and the first African American artist to achieve an international reputation. She had a studio in Boston, and at the age of twenty, she moved to Rome where she lived as a successful artist into the 1880s. In addition to showing her work in galleries, she used ingenious strategies to sell her work including newspaper advertising, subscription campaigns, auctions, and raffles.
John H. Lewis (1856-1915)
Tailor
John Lewis was born in Heathsville, North Carolina and spent his first eighteen years on a southern farm. In c.1875, he moved to Concord, New Hampshire to learn tailoring skills before coming to Boston around 1880. Lewis owed his considerable entrepreneurial success to making fashionable “bell” trousers. He started his business with $100 in capital and by 1896 he was the second largest merchant tailor in Massachusetts, fourth largest in the nation with an estimated annual income of $150,000.

Jan E. Matzeliger (1852-1889)
Inventor
Jan Matzeliger was born in Surinam. Arriving in Lynn, Massachusetts in 1877, he began work as a janitor for a shoe manufacturer. Six years later, Matzeliger revolutionized the shoe industry with his lasting machine that joined the sole of the shoe to the top. Before Matzeliger’s machine, an expert hand laster completed 100 shoes in a day, while the machine finished up to 700 shoes. By 1902, the invention was used throughout the industry. Matzeliger sold his patents to his backers for $15,000 stock in the company.

George Middleton (d. 1815)
Horse Breaker & Coach Driver
George Middleton’s success as a horse breaker and coach driver enabled him to partner with fellow entrepreneur Louis Glapion, a hairdresser, to build a house that is the oldest extant home on Beacon Hill built by African Americans. Known as Colonel Middleton, he led the Bucks of America, a black regiment that defended Boston merchants and protected local property during the American Revolution. In 1784, Middleton helped to found the African Masonic Lodge; in 1796, the African Benevolent Society; and in 1798, the African School.

Nellie Brown Mitchell (1845-1924)
Singer & Inventor
Born in Dover, New Hampshire, Nellie Brown Mitchell had a long and successful singing career that led her to invent the phoneterion, “an instrument used to reduce muscular tension in the voice” in the early 1880s. She attended the New England Conservatory of Music and her singing career took her all over the United State and Canada. Retiring from concertizing in the late 1890s, she devoted herself to teaching young African American women in Boston for many years.
Robert Morris (1823-1882)
Attorney & Judge
Robert Morris, born in Salem, Massachusetts, became the second black attorney in the nation. Admitted to the Suffolk bar in 1847, Morris served a diverse African and Irish American clientele from his office on State Street in Boston. He teamed with other attorneys to represent Sarah Roberts, in whose name black Bostonians sought to establish equal education rights. Morris became a justice of the peace, was admitted to practice before U.S. district courts, and served as judge of a magistrate court.

William Cooper Nell (1816-1874)
Employment Agent, Printer, & Author
William Cooper Nell, employment agent, historian, and printer, was born on Boston’s Beacon Hill. He became an employment agent advertising in the abolitionist newspaper, The Liberator. His 1851 pamphlet, Services of Colored Americans in the Wars of 1776 and 1812, and his 1855 book, Colored Patriots of the American Revolution, make him the first black military historian. He advertised and promoted his book throughout the country for $1 in antislavery newspapers and broadsides, and sold it on the antislavery lecture circuit.

Richard Potter (1783-1835)
Magician & Ventriloquist
Born in Hopkinton, Massachusetts, Richard Potter became one of the earliest known American ventriloquists and magicians. When only ten years old, he traveled to England and joined the act of magician and ventriloquist, John Rannie. When Rannie retired in 1811, Potter took over the business. During his performances, Potter would make eggs dance, walk on fire, and break eggs into a hat and make pancakes without damaging the hat. Tickets to his shows ranged from 25 cents to $1.00.

Nelson Primus (1842-1916)
Painter
Nelson Primus, painter of portraits, religious subjects and carriages was born in Hartford, Connecticut into a prominent black family. Primus moved to Boston in 1865 to pursue his career as a portrait artist needing to work as a sign painter, waiter and book peddler to support himself and his young family. Primus left Boston in 1895 and settled in San Francisco, California where he lived in, painted portraits of, and found friendship in the Chinese community.

Nancy Prince (1799-1859)
Author, Seamstress, & Employment Agent
Born in Newburyport, Massachusetts, Nancy Gardner Prince was a trained seamstress. She lived in Russia for nine years with her husband who was one of twenty paid black
servants at the court of the Czar of Russia. In Russia, Nancy began a business making fine clothing for babies and children with clientele including the Empress; so successful, she employed journeywomen and apprentices. Back in Boston, in 1850, she self-published her autobiography and travelogue, *Narrative of the Life and Travel of Mrs. Nancy Prince* which was published in three editions.

**John Putnam** (1817-1895)  
*Musician & Barber*

John Putnam, legendary fiddler, dance prompter, bandleader, and barber lived in Greenfield, Massachusetts. Putnam’s Orchestra was known as the region’s most popular dance orchestra and was always in great demand for contradance events where couples performed dance steps called by a prompter. Putnam, called the “Father of the Contradance,” aided in the Underground Railroad network in Western Massachusetts, operated two barbershops, and owned his own home.

**The Remond Family Entrepreneurial Family**  
*Caterers & Hairdressers*

John Remond (1785-1873) immigrated to the United States from Curacao in 1795. His wife, Nancy Lenox Remond (1788-1867) was born free in Newton, Massachusetts. John Remond began his career as a hairdresser and became a celebrated caterer and retailer of fine wines and specialty foods in Salem, Massachusetts. Nancy Remond was a fancy cake maker and caterer. Susan Remond followed in her mother’s footsteps and also opened a baking business. Three other daughters—Cecelia, Maritcha, and Caroline—operated the Ladies Hair Work Salon in Salem. Their wig factory is said to have been the largest in Massachusetts.

**Benjamin Franklin Roberts** (1814-1881)  
*Printer & Author*

Born in Boston, Benjamin Roberts, son of author Robert Roberts, opened his business in Boston in 1838, printing books, pamphlets, cards, posters, handbills and show bills. In 1848, Roberts, self-employed and supported by the black community, sued the City of Boston for his daughter, Sarah with Robert Morris, Boston’s first black attorney, joined by Senator Charles Sumner argued before the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court. In 1850, his landmark case failed. However the same basic argument prevailed with the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954.

**Robert Roberts** (1775-1860)  
*Author & House Servant*

Robert Roberts, author, butler and longshoreman was born in Charleston, South Carolina. Around 1803, a literate and skilled domestic servant, he moved to Boston. While
working for Governor Christopher Gore of Waltham, Roberts wrote this nation’s first book on domestic service, *The House Servants Directory*, published in three editions, 1827, 1828 and 1837. Thereafter, he worked as a stevedore in Boston’s harbor. A prominent and wealthy leader in the black Boston community, his estate was valued at more than $7,500.

**John Stewart Rock (1826-1866)**
*Dentist, Doctor, & Lawyer*

John Rock was born in New Jersey and became a teacher, dentist, doctor and attorney. He studied dentistry and opened his practice in Philadelphia in 1850. After earning his medical degree, he moved to Boston in 1854 where he practiced dentistry and medicine. Unable to continue in the medical field because of poor health, he studied law and passed the Massachusetts bar in 1861. In 1865, Rock became the first African American attorney admitted to practice before the United States Supreme Court.

**John James Smith (1820-1906)**
*Barber*

John James Smith born free in Richmond, Virginia, moved to Boston in 1848. After traveling west to participate in the California Gold Rush, he returned to Boston and opened a barber shop on Beacon Hill. His shop became a gathering place for self-liberated people and abolitionists including Charles Sumner, William Lloyd Garrison and Lewis Hayden. Smith served as Grand Master of the Prince Hall African Lodge. He and his wife raised and educated six children, five daughters and a son who all went on to distinguished professional careers.

**Joshua Bowen Smith (1813-1879)**
*Caterer*

Born in Coatesville, Pennsylvania, Joshua Smith settled in Boston in 1836 where he worked as head waiter at the Mount Washington House. By 1849, he established his own large and successful catering business. Known as the “Prince of Caterers,” on July 4, 1865, he catered a Boston City Council dinner for more than 1000 people. Smith combined antislavery activism and entrepreneurship by employing self-liberated men in his business.

**Chloe Spear (1767-1815)**
*Boarding House & Laundry Owner*

Kidnapped in Africa in 1779, Chloe Spear traveled to Boston and was emancipated in 1783. She became a laundress, saving her earnings enabling the family to purchase a home for $700 in 1798. Chloe and her husband operated a boarding house and Chloe expanded her
business into a laundry. Recognized as a “highly respected” colored woman, Chloe Spear amassed a considerable estate.

**Lewis Temple** (1800-1854)

*Inventor*

Lewis Temple, a blacksmith moved from his native Richmond, Virginia to New Bedford, Massachusetts in 1829. By 1836, Temple opened his own whalecraft shop on the waterfront where he is said to have made over 58,000 harpoons over thirty years. In 1848, he invented a pivoting harpoon head, the “Temple Toggle.” The two-piece device was so successful in securing whales that it revolutionized the whaling industry and was used throughout the American whaling industry.

**Phillis Wheatley** (1753-1784)

*Poet*

Phillis Wheatley, who was kidnapped from the Gambia River region in Africa when she was approximately seven years of age, became the first African American woman to publish a book. Phillis began publishing her neoclassical poetry in 1767, and in 1773 published her first book, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*. In 1775, at the beginning of the Revolutionary War, she wrote a poem to honor General George Washington who invited her to visit him in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

**Domingo Williams** (1765-1832)

*Caterer & Event Planner*

Domingo Williams began his career as a servant to Benjamin Joy and became a prosperous Boston caterer and event planner. Noted in his obituary as the “Attendant General” for many a public or private fashionable affair, Williams was called upon for expert advice in planning special events and dinners as well as organizing and making arrangements for all matters and occasions. An ardent abolitionist, Williams’ family lived in and ran his business from the ground floor apartment of the African Meeting House.

**Harriet E. Wilson** (1825-1900)

*Inventor, Author, & Medium*

Harriet E. Wilson is celebrated as the first African American woman novelist. The publication of *Our Nig* in 1859 represents only one chapter in her history as a resourceful entrepreneur. Wilson’s entrepreneurial ingenuity enabled her to develop and market various products as a New England itinerant peddler. First she sold hair products and later marketed her book from her Milford, NH home. Finally she became a renowned trance reader and lecturer based in Boston.
LOCATIONS
Federal Reserve Bank of Boston
600 Atlantic Avenue, Boston, MA
March 2009 – February 2010
www.bos.frb.org

Museum of African American History
46 Joy Street, Boston, MA
May 2009 – September 2009
www.maah.org

EXHIBITION TEAM
Federal Reserve Bank of Boston
Richard C. Walker III, Vice President and Community Affairs Officer
George Guild, Director of Economic Education
Melita Podesta, Project Coordinator
Heidi Furse, Art Director
Dedalus Wainwright, Exhibit Designer
Ben Gramann, Exhibit Designer
Marie McGinley, Sr. Graphic Designer

Museum of African American History
Beverly A. Morgan-Welch, Executive Director
Chandra Harrington, Sr. Director of Collections and Interpretation
L’Merchie Frazier, Director of Education
Amber Moore, Collections Manager
Dr. Marion Kilson, Scholar
Dr. Lois A. Brown, Scholar
Dr. Juliet E. K. Walker, Scholar
Brandon Bird, Exhibit Designer

CONTRIBUTING ORGANIZATIONS
American Antiquarian Society
Boston Public Library Music Department
Boston Public Library Rare Books and Manuscripts
Colonial Williamsburg
Connecticut Historical Society
Fern Cunningham
Dover Public Library
Drexel University College of Medicine
First Church of Christ Congregational, Lynn, Massachusetts
P. Gabrielle Foreman
Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine
Houghton Library, Harvard University
Kenkeleba House
Lewis H. Latimer Society
League of Women for Community Service
Library of Congress
Lynn Museum and Historical Society
Massachusetts Historical Society
Museum of African American History
Museum of Fine Arts
Mystic Seaport
Nantucket Historical Association
Mr. and Mrs. Daniel R. Mechnig
New Bedford Whaling Museum
Paul Cuffe School
Peabody Essex Museum
Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association
Providence Art Club
Rhode Island Black Heritage Society
Social Law Library
Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Tufts Library, Wayland
Wellesley College, Margaret Clapp Library, Special Collections
Westport Quaker Meeting

Below photo credits from pages 4 and 5.
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Museum of African American History and the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston will present several supplementary resources. These include: exhibits on both the Bank’s New England Economic Adventure web site and on the web-based virtual world SECOND LIFE; a curriculum guide for teachers; a Teacher Summer Institute; and a dramatic program—“Meet the Entrepreneurs.”

IN ADDITION

Visitors interested in learning more about the careers of individual entrepreneurs may wish to consult various databases and books:

Accessible Archives http://www.accessible.com/accessible/preLog


FEDERAL RESERVE BANK OF BOSTON™

Federal Reserve Bank of Boston
600 Atlantic Avenue
Boston, Massachusetts
March 2009 – February 2010
http://www.bos.frb.org

Museum of African American History

Museum of African American History
Boston and Nantucket
46 Joy Street
Boston, Massachusetts
May - September 2009
http://www.maah.org