



*A Gathering Place for Freedom*

## Bicentennial Celebration

### Boston Celebrates the Bicentennial of a National Historic Landmark

The Museum of African American History celebrates the 200th Anniversary of the nation's oldest African Meeting House

December 6, 2006 through December 6, 2007

On **December 6, 1806** members of the black community of Beacon Hill united to dedicate a building behind whose walls events that would change the face of the nation took place. Within this solid brick structure, families of freedom and communities of liberation ignited a movement in whose passion, courage and tenacity would lead to the abolition of slavery, the empowerment of a people and access of public education.

This building is the African Meeting House.

Today, the African Meeting House, the oldest African Meeting House in the country is now a National Historic Landmark. Part of four historic sites located on the campus of the Museum of African American History, it is the pinnacle last stop on the Museum's Black Heritage Trail®, and an enduring beacon of freedom for visitors from around the world.

On **December 6, 2006**, a festive evening gala and view a new exhibit. Both will launch **A Gathering Place for Freedom**, a year-long celebration of the bicentennial of this magnificent historic building. With a series of lectures, concerts and educational programs, this celebration will highlight the activism, bravery and tenacity of ordinary people who accomplished the extraordinary.

The public is invited to attend the evening celebration, beginning at **7:00 PM** at the historic Tremont Temple on 88 Tremont Street, Downtown Boston. Among the guest speakers participating will be Mayor Thomas Menino, and Rev. Dr. Michael Haynes of the historic Twelfth Baptist Church, a descending congregation and many others. Musical performances by Vivien Cooley-Collier of Black Nativity and special readings by the descendants of this 19th century community will highlight the evening.

Displayed at the Museum galleries on 46 Joy Street, the exhibit will feature original artist drawings of some of Boston's most ardent abolitionists, artifacts recovered from the 2005 archaeological excavation of the African Meeting House and many publications and other historic pieces. Museum Galleries are located at 46 Joy Street on Boston's historic Beacon Hill.

The day will unfold as follows:

- 10:00 AM – 6:00 PM Special early exhibit viewing for museum members Museum Galleries, 46 (refreshments served all day)
- 11:00 AM—12:00 N Press preview of exhibit and African Meeting House under restoration (coffee and refreshments)
- 5:30—6:30 VIP reception (100 people expected) Tremont Temple Reception Hall—88 Tremont Street African Coffees and pastries, sponsored by Starbucks
- 7:00—9:00 A Gathering Place for Freedom Evening Celebration



Museum of African American History

Executive Offices:  
14 Beacon Street  
Suite 719  
Boston, MA 02108

Phone: 617-725-0022  
Fax: 555-555-5555  
E-mail:  
history@afroammuseum.org



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### **About the African Meeting House**

Built in 1806, the African Meeting House is a designated National Historic Landmark. It is the *oldest* African Meeting House still standing in the country, and the *first* black church building *built* in Boston, a true showcase of black community organization and an enduring testimony to black craftsmanship. This church, school and meeting house, was the site for many legendary gatherings that led to the termination of the heinous institution of slavery. It was in this sacred building that in 1863 Frederick Douglass recruited troops for the 54th and 55th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry the first all black regiment to fight in the Civil War as depicted in the movie "**Glory**" starring Denzel Washington and Morgan Freeman. The African Meeting House is currently being restored to its 1855 restoration. By 1855 the country was ramping up to the Civil War, the Abolitionist Movement was in full gear and the activities of the organized black community of Boston played a major role in bringing slavery to an end in the United States.

### **About the Museum of African American History**

Founded in 1966, The Museum of African American History is New England's premiere African American history museum with four national historic sites and two Black Heritage Trails®. Drawing over 225,000 tourists annually and with 3,000 items in its permanent collection, it is one of the most vital historic properties in the nation. In partnership with the Boston African American National historic Site of the National Park Service the Museum also reaches a national and international audience that visits the Black Heritage Trail, the largest concentration of antebellum African American historical sites in the country.

The Museum's four landmark buildings are considered gems among the historic community.

### **The African Meeting House in Boston**

The oldest existing black church built by free African Americans in the nation. The museum acquired this National Historic Landmark in 1972 and opened it to the public in 1986. .

Sitting next to the Meeting House is the **Abiel Smith School**, erected in 1835, the first building constructed for the sole purpose of housing a black public school. The Museum site includes a Museum store and two floors of exhibits. The building that was at the center of the quest for access to equal public education chronicles a community's heroic effort to secure rights for equal education and marks the 150<sup>th</sup> occasion of the desegregation of Boston Public Schools in 1855 when the school closed.

The **African Meeting House on Nantucket** was built in the 1820's and is pristinely restored with a coved ceiling reflecting its maritime heritage. It is located in an area formerly known as New Guinea, home to Nantucket's African American community and is a National Historic Landmark.

The **Florence Higginbotham House**, considered the gem of the collection, was erected in 1774 by Seneca Boston, a weaver and father of famed whaling captain Absalom Boston. This house is possibly the oldest home built by a formerly enslaved African American in the country. It was also the home of an early 20<sup>th</sup> century black domestic who also owned the African Meeting House immediately adjacent to this home.

**For more information call Tracy Gibbs, 617-725-0022 ext. 21 or e-mail, [tgibbs@afroammuseum.org](mailto:tgibbs@afroammuseum.org), or visit our website: [www.afroammuseum.org](http://www.afroammuseum.org)**

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