

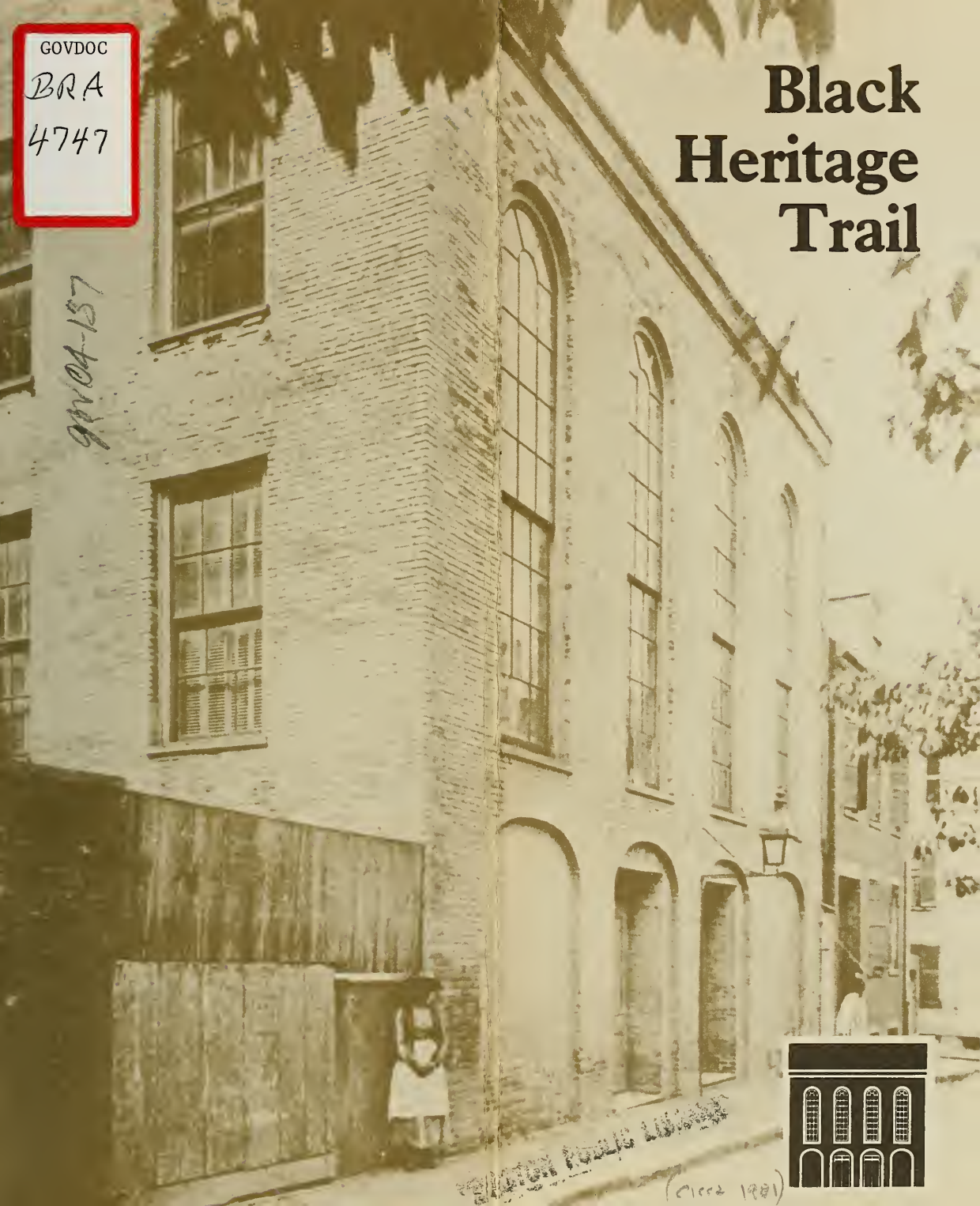
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# Black Heritage Trail

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(1901)

# Black Heritage Trail



African Meeting House ca. 1860s



The Black Heritage Trail is a walking tour that explores the history of Boston's 19th century black community.

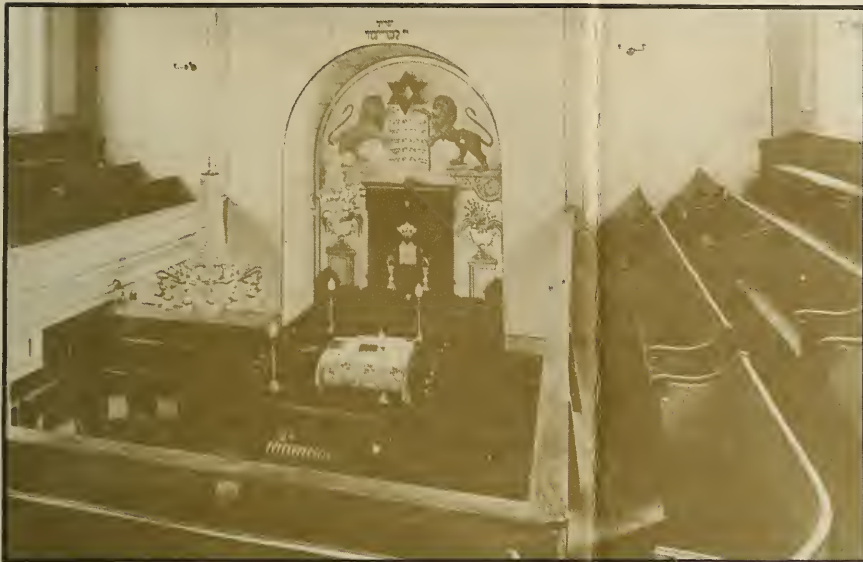
Between 1800 and 1900, most of the Afro-Americans who lived in the city lived in the West End, between Pinckney and Cambridge streets, and between Joy and Charles streets — a neighborhood now called the north slope of Beacon Hill.

The first Africans arrived in Boston in February of 1638 — eight years after the city was founded. They were brought as slaves — purchased in Providence Isle, a Puritan colony off the coast of Central America. By 1705, there were over 400 slaves in Boston and also the beginnings of a free black community. That 18th century free black community settled in the North End. Prince Hall, the founder of the African Lodge of Masons, was a member of that community.

The American Revolution was a turning point in the status of Africans in Massachusetts: at the end of the conflict, there were more free black people than slaves. When the first Federal census of 1790 was enumerated, Massachusetts was the only state in the Union that recorded no slaves. The all-free black community in Boston was concerned with finding decent housing, establishing independent supportive institutions, educating their children and ending slavery in the rest of the Nation. All of these concerns were played out in this Beacon Hill neighborhood.

Black Population in 19th Century

Year	Number	Percentage Of Total City
1820	1,690	3.90%
1830	1,875	3.05%
1840	2,427	2.60%
1850	1,999	1.46%
1860	2,261	1.27%
1870	3,496	1.40%
1880	5,873	1.62%
1890	8,125	1.81%



African Meeting House  
interior as synagogue,  
ca. 1930

## African Meeting House

8 Smith Court

1



The African Meeting House is the oldest black church building still standing in the United States. Before 1805, although black Bostonians could attend white churches, they generally faced discrimination. They were assigned seats only in the galleries and were not given voting privileges. Thomas Paul, a black preacher from New Hampshire, led worship meetings for some black people at Faneuil Hall. Paul, with twenty members, officially formed the First African Baptist Church on August 8, 1805. The same year, land was purchased for a building in the West End and the African Meeting House, as it was commonly called, was completed the next year. The building was dedicated on December 6, 1806, and the public invited and, on that occasion, the seats on the floor were reserved for all those "benevolently disposed to the Africans," and the black members sat in the gallery of their new meeting house.

The African Meeting House was constructed almost entirely with black labor. Funds for the project were raised in both the white and black communities. Cato Gardner, a native of Africa, was responsible for raising more than \$1500 toward the \$7,700 cost to complete the Meeting House; a commemorative plaque above the front doors reads: "To Cato Gardner, first promoter of this building."

The facade of the Meeting House is an adaptation of a design for a townhouse published by the Boston architect Asher Benjamin. The school for colored children moved into the basement of the Meeting House in 1808. In addition to its religious and educational activities, the Meeting House became a place for celebrations and political and anti-slavery meetings. On January 6, 1832, William Lloyd Garrison founded the New England Anti-Slavery Society here. In the larger community, this building was referred to as the Abolition Church and as the Black Faneuil Hall.

The Meeting House was remodeled by the black congregation in the 1850s. At the end of the 19th century, when the black community began to migrate from the West End to the South End and to Roxbury, the building was sold to a Jewish congregation and remained a synagogue until it was purchased by the Museum of Afro-American History.

# Smith Court Residences

## Beacon Hill

2-6



The five residential structures on Smith Court are typical of the homes occupied by black Bostonians throughout the 19th century.

Number 3 was built in 1799 by two white bricklayers. It was a double house with a common entryway. Black families began renting here between 1825 and 1830; in 1865 it was purchased by a black clothing dealer, James Scott. William C. Nell boarded here from 1851 to 1856. Nell was America's first published black historian, a community activist and leader in the struggle to integrate Boston's public schools before the Civil War.

Number 5 was built as income property by a lawyer between 1815 and 1828. George Washington, a laborer and deacon in the African Meeting House, purchased it in 1849. He lived in the upper part of the house with his wife and nine children; the first floor was rented out.

Number 7 was built some time between 1802 and 1811. Number 7A, to the rear of Number 7, sits on Holmes Alley. The Alley, throughout the 19th century, contained several houses similar to 7A. They stood where there are backyards today. Such housing development in the middle of blocks, with an elaborate system of pedestrian alleys, was typical when Afro-Americans lived in the West End. Number 7A was built as a double house in 1799 and sold the next year to Richard Johnson, a mariner, and David Bartlett, a hairdresser. In the 1860s, Joseph Scarlett bought both 7 and 7A for rental property.

Number 10, next to the African Meeting House, was built in 1853 for a black chimney sweep and entrepreneur, Joseph Scarlett. Originally it had two brick stories with another story of dormer windows and a pitched roof. Scarlett lived on Bunker Hill Street in Charlestown. At the time of his death in 1898, he owned 15 pieces of real estate; he left bequests to the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, then on North Bennett Street, and to the Home for Aged Colored Women, then on Myrtle Street.

The brick apartment houses, at the west end of the Court and on the corner of Joy Street, are typical of the tenements which developers began to build in this neighborhood between 1885 and 1915. They were built to satisfy the need for inexpensive, dense housing units for the waves of post-1880 European immigrants to Boston. Usually wooden houses were torn down to make way for these four and five story brick "walk-ups."

Smith Court — 1890:  
Abiel Smith School  
African Meeting House and  
Smith Court Residences



# Abiel Smith School

46 Joy Street corner of Smith Court

7



In 1787, Prince Hall petitioned the Massachusetts legislature for black access to the public school system, but was denied. Eleven years later, after petitions by the black parents for separate schools were also denied, black parents organized a community school in the home of Primus Hall at the corner of West Cedar and Revere streets on Beacon Hill. In 1808, the school operating out of the Hall home was moved to the African Meeting House basement. This school was a grammar school; the City established two primary schools for black children in the 1820s.

The Abiel Smith School was constructed in 1834; dedicated in 1835. Smith, a white businessman, had left a legacy to the City of Boston for the education of black children. The Smith School — a grammar and primary school — replaced the Meeting House School and served black children from all over the city.

Between 1839 and 1855, the City of Boston witnessed a public school racial controversy. William C. Nell, who had attended the school in the Meeting House as a child, initiated a movement for “the day when color of skin would be no barrier to equal school rights.” Nell’s Equal School Association called a boycott of the Smith School. In 1848, Benjamin Roberts had attempted to enroll his daughter, Sarah, in each of the five public schools that stood between their home and the Smith School. When Sarah was denied entrance to all of them, Roberts sued the city under an 1845 statute providing recovery of damages for any child unlawfully denied public school instruction. The abolitionists joined the case in 1849. Charles Sumner represented Sarah, and black attorney Robert Morris acted as co-counsel. The case was argued before Chief Justice Lemuel Shaw of the Supreme Judicial Court, one of the most influential state jurists in the country. On April 8, 1850, Shaw ruled that Sumner and Roberts had not shown that the Smith School was inferior or that it offered instruction inferior to that in other Boston schools. Nell and the Equal School Association removed their cause to the halls of the state house. A bill to end segregation in public schools failed in 1851, but a similar measure was passed by the state legislature in 1855 and was signed by the governor in April. It outlawed segregation in the state’s public schools, although the only segregated system by now was in Boston.

In the fall of 1855, the Smith School was closed, and black children were permitted to attend the public schools closest to their homes. Between 1855 and 1887, this building was used by the City to store school furniture. In 1887 it became the headquarters for the organization of black Civil War veterans.





## George Middleton House

5-7 Pinckney Street

8



Built in 1797, this is the oldest extant home built by a black person on Beacon Hill. Its original owners were two black men, George Middleton, a jockey and horsebreaker, and Lewis Glapion, a hairdresser and barber.

George Middleton was a veteran of the American Revolution. A colonel, he led an all-black company called the "Bucks of America." John Hancock, in front of his house on Beacon Street, presented the Company with a special, silk flag bearing Hancock's and Middleton's initials, the figures of a buck and a pine tree, and the words, "The Bucks of America." During the Civil War, William C. Nell donated the banner to the Massachusetts Historical Society, where it is preserved today.

Lydia Maria Child has left us this description of Middleton in his old age on Pinckney Street:

*It became a frolic with the white boys to deride them on this day (the anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade, celebrated in June) and finally . . . to drive them . . . from the Common. The colored people became greatly incensed by this mockery of their festival, and rumor reached us . . . that they were determined to resist the whites, and were going armed with this intention . . . Soon, terrified children and women ran down Belknap street (now Joy Street) pursued by white boys, who enjoyed their fright. The sounds of battle approached; clubs and brickbats were flying in (all) directions. At this crisis, Col. Middleton opened his door, armed with a loaded musket, and, in a loud voice, shrieked death to the first white who should approach. Hundreds of human beings, white and black, were pouring down the street . . . Col. Middleton's voice could be heard above every other, urging his party to turn and resist to the last. His appearance was terrific, his musket was levelled, ready to sacrifice the first white man that came within its range. The colored party, shamed by his reproaches, and fired by his example, rallied . . .*

## Robert Gould Shaw and 54th Regiment Memorial

Beacon and Park Streets, Boston Common



The Lincoln administration did not allow black soldiers into the Union armed forces until 1863. Then, after pressure from white and black abolitionists, the first black regiment in the North was recruited in Massachusetts. Robert Gould Shaw, a young white officer from a prominent Boston family, volunteered for its command. The regiment trained in Readville (in the present-day Hyde Park neighborhood of Boston). The regiment distinguished itself at Fort Wagner, South Carolina, in July, 1863. In the hard-fought battle, however, Shaw and many members of the company were killed. Sergeant William Carney of New Bedford saved the American flag from Confederate capture by wrapping it around his body. Carney's bravery earned him the Congressional Medal of Honor. That flag is on display across the street in the State House's Hall of Flags.

For two full years of service, the members of the 54th Regiment refused to accept their pay because their salaries did not equal those of white front-line soldiers (\$13 per month), but only those of common laborers (\$10 per month). Ultimately, Congress relented and increased their pay retroactively.

This memorial was erected from a fund initiated in 1865 by Joshua B. Smith. Smith, a fugitive from North Carolina in 1847, was a caterer, former employee of the Shaw household, and a state representative from a Cambridge district in 1873 and 1874. The bas relief is by Augustus Saint-Gaudens and the architectural setting is by McKim, Mead and White. The Monument was dedicated on May 31, 1897, in ceremonies that included Carney, veterans of the 54th and 55th Regiments and the 5th Cavalry, and several speakers, including Booker T. Washington. The inscription on the reverse side of the monument was written by Charles W. Eliot, then president of Harvard.





The Phillips School

## The Phillips School

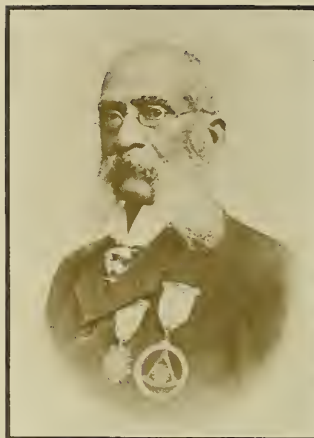
Anderson and Pinckney Streets

10



This architecture is typical of 19th century Boston schoolhouses. Built in 1824, this school was open only to white children until 1855; it housed English High School until 1844 and the Phillips Grammar School until 1861. That school was then moved to a larger building at the corner of Anderson and Phillips Streets and renamed the Wendell Phillips School.

Before 1855 black children who lived on nearby streets had to attend the school in the basement of the African Meeting House or, after 1834, the Smith School. When separate schools were abolished by an act of the legislature, the Phillips School became one of Boston's first schools with an interracial student body.



John J. Smith

## John J. Smith House

86 Pinckney Street

11



Born free in Richmond, Virginia, on November 2, 1820, John J. Smith moved to Boston twenty-eight years later.

During the 1849 California Gold Rush, Smith went west to make his fortune, but returned to Boston no richer than when he left. He established himself as a barber (hairdresser). His shop at the corner of Howard and Bulfinch Streets was a center for black abolitionist activity and a rendezvous for fugitive slaves. It was said that when Charles Sumner, the radical abolitionist United States Senator from Massachusetts, could not be found at his home or office, he could usually be located at Smith's shop. During the Civil War, Smith was stationed in Washington, D.C. and worked as a recruiting officer for the all-black 5th cavalry.

After the war, Smith was elected to the Massachusetts House of Representatives in 1868, 1869 and 1872. In 1878, the year he moved to this house, he was appointed to the Boston Common Council.

John J. Smith lived at 86 Pinckney Street from 1878 to 1893. He died on November 4, 1906.



Other 19th century black members of the Boston Common Council were:

George L. Ruffin, 1876-77  
James W. Pope, 1881  
William O. Armstrong, 1885-86  
Andrew B. Leattimore, 1887-88  
Charles E. Harris, 1889-90  
Nelson Gaskins, 1891  
Walden Banks, 1892-93  
Stanley Ruffin, 1894-95  
(son of George Ruffin)  
J. Henderson Allston, 1894-95  
Charles H. Hall, 1895

## Charles Street Meeting House

Mt. Vernon and Charles Streets

12



This Meeting House was built in 1807 to house the activities of the white Third Baptist Church of Boston. Subsequently, the question arose as to whether this name was not strictly the property of the African church on Smith Court, and the name was changed to Charles Street Baptist Church. The segregationist tradition of New England church seating patterns prevailed here. In the mid-1830's, they were challenged by one of the church's abolitionist members, Timothy Gilbert, who brought some black friends into his pew one Sunday to test the rule. Gilbert was expelled. He soon joined with other white abolitionist Baptists to found the First Baptist Free Church, which became Tremont Temple, "the first integrated church in America."

After the Civil War, the black population of Boston increased considerably and the largest of its churches purchased this building in 1876. The African Methodist Episcopal Church (A.M.E.) remained here until 1939. It was the last black institution to leave Beacon Hill. Today the Charles Street A.M.E. is located on Elm Hill Avenue and Warren Street in Roxbury.

Charles Street Meeting House



# Lewis and Harriet Hayden House

66 Phillips Street

13



Lewis Hayden was born a slave in Lexington, Kentucky in 1816. After escaping on the Underground Railroad to Detroit, he moved to Boston with his wife Harriet, and soon became a leader in the abolitionist movement. In Boston, Hayden's political activities were based in the store he operated on Cambridge Street, and in his Phillips Street (then Southac Street) home.

This house was built in 1833; Hayden moved here as a tenant around 1849; Francis Jackson, treasurer of the Committee of Vigilance, a radical abolitionist organization, purchased the building in 1853, possibly to assure that Hayden would not be harassed in his underground activities. (Jackson's estate sold the house to Harriet Hayden in 1865).

When the fugitive Slave Law was passed in 1850 and Southern owners were given Federal legal sanction to retrieve their runaway slaves, Boston ceased to be a haven for escaped slaves. Hayden and his wife, Harriet, used their home as a station on the Underground Railroad. William and Ellen Craft, a famous couple who escaped by masquerading as master and slave, lived here when they arrived in Boston, as well as numerous other fugitive slaves.

The Haydens reputedly kept two kegs of gunpowder in their basement, saying that they would rather blow up the house than surrender the ex-slaves they hid.

Austin Bease gives this account of Harriet Stowe's visit to Hayden's house:

*When, in 1853, Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe came to the Liberator Office, 21 Cornhill, to get facts for her "Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin," she was taken by Mr. R. F. Wallcut and myself over to Lewis Hayden's house in Southac Street, where thirteen newly-escaped slaves of all colors and sizes were brought in into one room for her to see. Though Mrs. Stowe had written her wonderful "Uncle Tom" at the request of Dr. Bailey, of Washington, for The National Era, expressly to show up the workings of the Fugitive-Slave Law, yet she had never seen such a company of "fugitives" together before.*

During the Civil War, Hayden served as a recruiting agent for the 54th Regiment; Hayden's only son died serving in the Union Navy. After the War, he was elected to the State legislature in 1873. From 1859 until his death in 1889, he held the position of Messenger to the Secretary of State. Other 19th century black state representatives were:

Edwin G. Walker (son of David Walker, elected from Charlestown), 1866

Charles L. Mitchell, 1866

John J. Smith, 1868, 1869, 1872

George L. Ruffin, 1870, 1871

Joshua B. Smith, 1873, 1874

George W. Lowther, 1878, 1879

Julius B. Chappelle, 1883-86

William O. Armstrong, 1887, 1888

Andrew B. Leattimore, 1889, 1890

Charles E. Harris, 1892, 1893

Robert T. Teamoh, 1894, 1895

William L. Reed, 1896, 1897

Harriet Hayden survived her husband. In her will she established a scholarship fund for "needy and worthy colored students in the Harvard Medical School."



Lewis Hayden

# Coburn's Gaming House

Phillips and Irving Streets

14



John P. Coburn was born about 1811 in Massachusetts. He was a clothing dealer. In 1835 he purchased a small brick house in the middle of the block bounded by Anderson, Phillips and Garden Streets. Around 1843 he purchased land on this corner (then Southac and Botolph Streets) and hired Boston architect Asher Benjamin to design this house, built 1843-44. Coburn, his wife Emmeline, and their adopted son Wendell lived here. Coburn also established a gaming house here with his brother-in-law, Ira Gray. It was described as a "private place" that was "the resort of the upper ten who had acquired a taste for gambling." Emmeline died in 1872, John in 1873. He left the bulk of his estate to his adopted son. It included \$18,500 in real estate and \$2,000 in cash.

## Credits



The Black Heritage Trail concept was devised by Sue Bailey Thurman. The Trail was refined by J. Marcus and Gaunzetta L. Mitchell. This brochure was researched and written by Byron Rushing and the staff of the Museum of Afro-American History; designed and printed by the Boston National Historical Park, National Park Service. The research was supported by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities.

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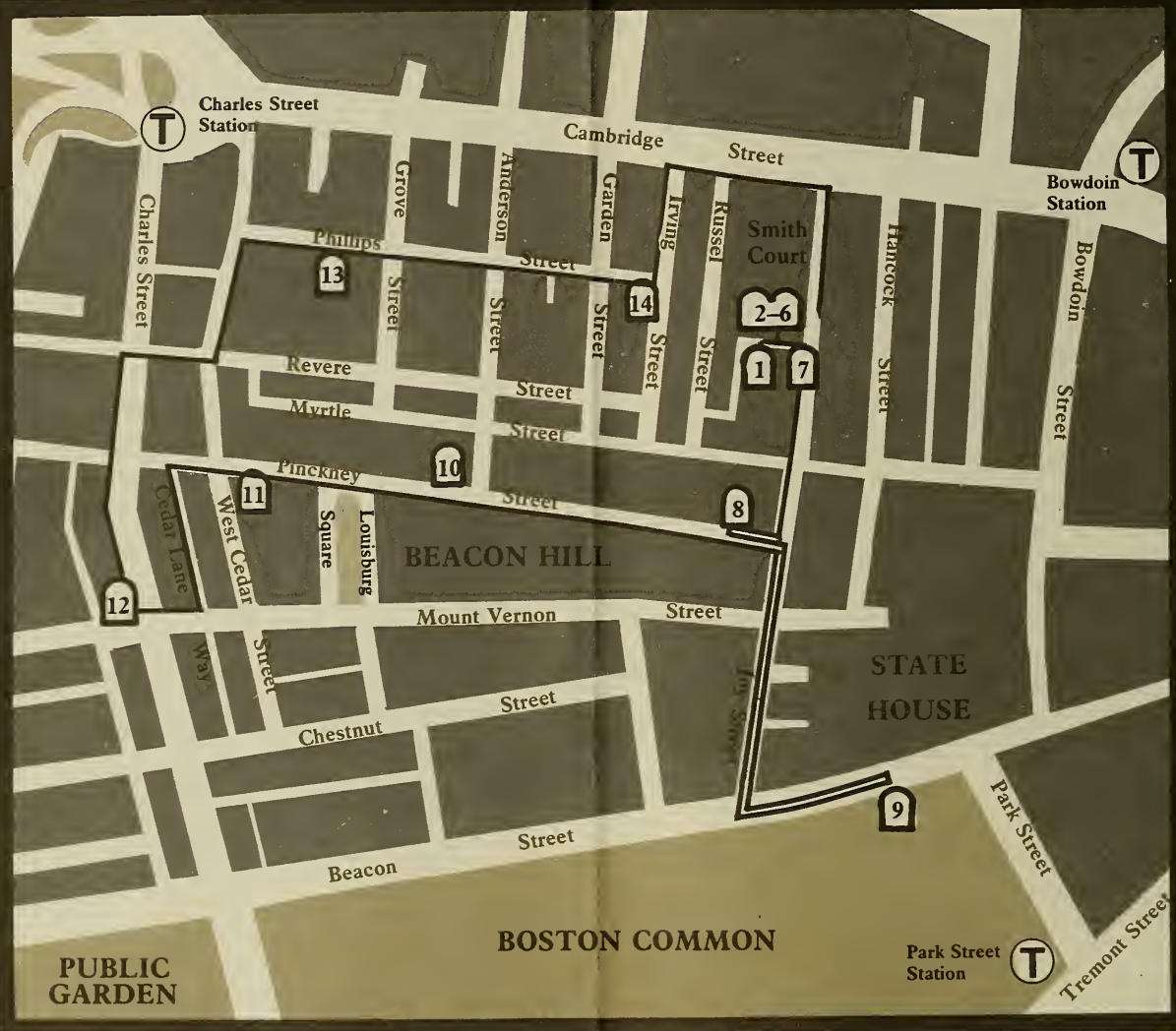
The staff of the Museum of Afro-American History offers guided tours of the Trail. For information, call (617) 742-1854 or write The Museum of Afro American History, Abiel Smith School, 46 Joy Street, Boston, Massachusetts 02114.



**Museum of  
Afro American History  
African Meeting House**



SPNEA



# Black Heritage Trail

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. African Meeting House</li> <li>2-6. Smith Court Residences</li> <li>7. Abiel Smith School</li> <li>8. George Middleton House</li> <li>9. Robert Gould Shaw and 54th Regiment Memorial</li> <li>10. Phillips School</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>11. John J. Smith House</li> <li>12. Charles Street Meeting House</li> <li>13. Lewis Hayden House</li> <li>14. Coburn's Gaming House</li> </ul> <p><b>Boston African American National Historic Site</b><br/>National Park Service<br/>U.S. Department of the Interior</p> |
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