



Distance: 23.5 Miles
Difficulty: Medium (urban traffic)
Not suitable for children
Time: Allow at least half a day

Route Highlights

- Boston Common
- Afro-American History Museum™ & Boston African American NHS
- Harvard Square
- Charles River Esplanade
- Jackson Homestead
- William Lloyd Garrison Home



the Underground Railroad

In 1854, the “Cradle of Liberty” is no refuge for thousands of African-Americans who call it home. A very different city than the Boston you will see, it is crowded on the small peninsula of Beacon Hill and surrounded by wharfs and tidal flats. Even as a center of the abolitionist movement, the emancipation of slaves is still unpopular with most, and few consider the black man equal to the white. Kidnappers roam the streets with impunity due to the Fugitive Slave Laws...

Safe havens were few for the fugitive slave. The Underground Railroad is the collective term for the active assistance given to escaped slaves. The busy harbor and large black community was a first stop for many stowaways in Boston.



Fifty thousand people in 1854 lined the streets of Boston to see escaped slave Anthony Burns returned to Virginia, under guard of the Federal military upholding the Fugitive Slave Laws.

A daring prison break by African American abolitionists, a marshal's murder, riots—the Burns case captivated the country and helped sway public opinion toward the abolitionists.

This bicycle route explores the registered sites in National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom in the Boston area. In addition to the oldest surviving black church, school, and homes of many of Boston's preeminent African Americans of the 19th Century, this ride goes through three cities to find four homes used as hiding places on the Underground Railroad, as well as the last home of William Lloyd Garrison.



The ride begins on the corner of Commonwealth and Massachusetts Avenues at Back Bay Bicycles. Lined with brownstones, Commonwealth is one of the most scenic turn-of-the-century streets in Boston.

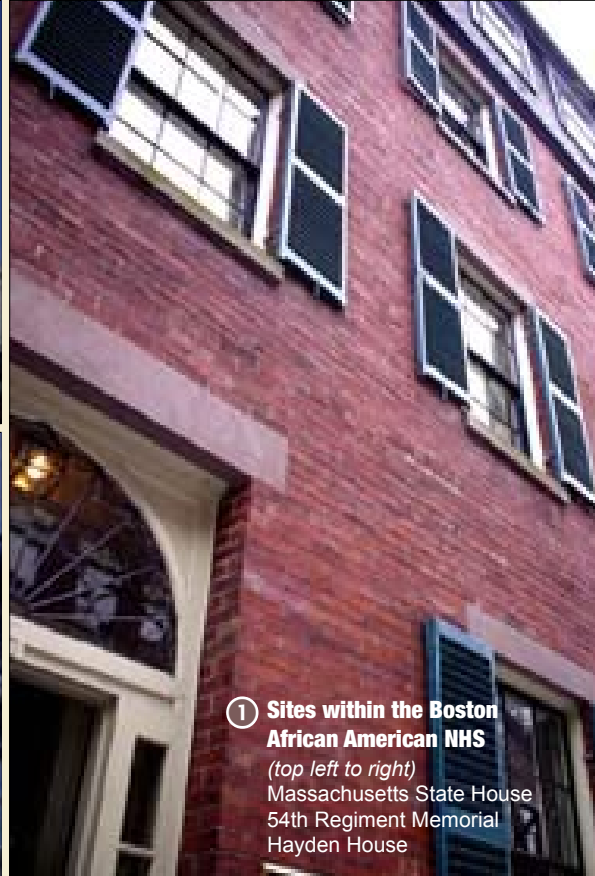
The route starts with some of the trickiest directions and heaviest traffic in a thicket of narrow, one-way streets. As detailed, it lets you stay on the bike, but this part of the trip is best for people comfortable with urban cycling. Boston drivers are (in)famously aggressive. Take a whole lane if you need it and signal your intentions to drivers around you. Luckily, this part of the route is the shortest and is enjoyable to walk with your bike; you'll probably be tempted by the lively Common anyhow!



Hub on Wheels is a program of the Boston Digital Bridge Foundation and the Boston Bicycle Festival, both 501c3 non-profits that work to empower low-income young people and families.

Through Hub On Wheels, we seek to bring people together from city and suburbs to celebrate the pleasures of cycling and share Boston's parks, neighborhoods, diversity, and architectural beauty.

Bicycling improves public health, transportation, and Boston's attractiveness as a place to live and work.



① **Sites within the Boston African American NHS**
(top left to right)
Massachusetts State House
54th Regiment Memorial
Hayden House

*You charge me with disobeying the laws of men.
I utterly deny that those things which outrage all rights
as laws. To be real laws, they must be founded in equity.*

—Anthony Burns to the Baptist Church

Turn right on Arlington at the Public Garden. Walk across or merge toward the left lanes of this busy street, making the tight left on Boylston. Take a forced left on Charles and merge right, riding between the Public Garden and the Common. Turn right on Beacon, you'll ride to the gold-domed State House. Across the street, you will find the **54th Regiment Monument** by Augustus St. Gaudens. (1.8 miles)

The 54th Regiment, led by Colonel Robert Gould Shaw, was the first all-black military Northern military unit. Recruited by Frederick Douglass at the African Meeting House, the 54th Regiment saw its most intense action in the attack on Ft. Wagner, SC, on July 18, 1863. Shaw and more than 270 men were killed in the failed attack. The 54th refused pay for 18 months until they received salaries equal to white soldiers'.

You now bike several short blocks around the State House. Make the left on Bowdoin, left on Derne, left on Hancock and then a right on Mt. Vernon. Take on right on Joy St. and drop down the hill to the **Abiel Smith School** and **Afro-American History Museum™**. (2.27 miles)

① The Abiel Smith School was built in 1835 and served as the Black Public School of Boston, until integration was legally required in 1855. Here you will find National Park rangers, a short movie on African American life in 19th century Boston, and a small bookstore. Next door is the **African Meeting House**, the oldest extant African-American church in America (1806). The Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society was founded here. This is the heart of the 1.6 mile Black Heritage Trail and Boston's first African American neighborhood. At one time, it was close to the wharfs and more expensive homes on the top of the hill, making it easier to find work— African Americans worked as sailors, carpenters, longshoremen and servants. The only registered Underground Railroad home on Beacon Hill is the **Hayden House**. Lewis Hayden was a prominent member of the African American community, hid over 100 escaped slaves, and most famously fended off a mob with kegs of gunpowder at his door. Beacon Hill is short, steep, narrow, and often cobble-stoned. Lock your bikes and take the opportunity to explore one of the unique neighborhoods in America, being sure to have a cup of coffee or a bite to eat on Charles Street.

1 Boston African American NHS & Afro-American History Museum™

Park headquarters
14 Beacon St. #503
Boston, MA
617-742-5415
www.nps.gov/boaf

54th Regiment Memorial

Park and Beacon Street
Across from State House

George Middleton House

5-7 Pinckney Street

Lewis and Harriet Hayden House

66 Philips Street

Park rangers are located at:

Abiel Smith School

46 Joy Street
617-742-5415
www.afroammuseum.org

African Meeting House

8 Smith Court

Additional sites on Black Heritage Trail

This trail has its own numbering system, which does not correlate to this route and is not bikeable in order, due to one-way streets.

From the Abiel Smith School, continue down Joy St. to Cambridge Ave. Walk your bike across the busy street and head left toward the Longfellow Bridge. Stay toward the left through the busy intersection, crossing to Cambridge. You are now Main, which turns to Broadway, which has a bike lane. Take a left on Columbia and a right on Worcester. A left at the end onto Norfolk leads to the **Joshua Bowen Smith House**. (4.55 miles)

2 Joshua Smith was a mulatto abolitionist, holding positions in all of Boston's vigilance committees and hiding many fugitive slaves here. Working as a waiter, he was a confidant to Senator Charles Sumner (famous for being attacked in the Senate Chamber by a South Carolina Congressman). He became a state legislator in 1873.

Continue straight to Mass Ave. Watch for car doors in the bike lane on this busy street into **Harvard Square**. (5.8 miles) Walk your bike across the "Square" T (subway) station to avoid another confusing thicket of one-way streets. Go left on Elliot and then right on J.F.K. Take the right onto the Charles River Trail immediately after crossing the bridge. You will stay on the trail all the way to Newton. (10.75 miles) This should give you ample time to relax after the busy Boston traffic.

When you reach the Newton/Watertown bridge, continue straight toward the gas station, veering left at the "Y" onto Watertown Ave. Take a left past the old school house onto Morse, and a quick right on Jackson. This ends at Washington St. and **The Jackson Homestead**. (12 miles)

3 A stop on the Underground Railroad on the way to Canada, it is now the Newton History Museum. The current exhibit, *Seeking Freedom in Nineteenth-Century America*, includes gifts to Massachusetts abolitionists made by an African chief for assistance in helping his son escape slavery, as well as letters between the Jacksons and other local abolitionists, such as William Bowditch and the Tappans.

Route Overview

In addition to the written description, the Rubel's Boston Bicycling Map is helpful. Maps available at all cycling and better bookstores for \$4.95, waterproof maps for \$11.95.



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One night between twelve and one o'clock, I well remember father was awakened by pebbles thrown against his chamber window. He rose and asked what was wanted. Bowditch replied it was he with a runaway slave...

—Ellen Jackson memoirs



2 Joshua Bowen Smith House

79 Norfolk St.
Cambridge, MA

3 Newton History Museum at the Jackson Homestead

527 Washington St.
Newton, MA
617-796-1450
www.ci.newton.ma.us/jackson

4 William Ingersoll Bowditch House

9 Toxteth St.
Brookline, MA

5 Samuel Philbrick House

182 Walnut St.
Brookline, MA

6 William Lloyd Garrison House

125 Highland St.
Roxbury, MA

Leave the museum heading left on Washington, using the crosswalk for this wide, busy street. Take the first right on Church St. above the MA Turnpike. Bike through a residential neighborhood as you head to Boston College. Take a right on Park St. at Kennick Park, then left on to Mandaly, right on Waverly, and left on Ward. Take the left on Commonwealth. (T stop at BC 15.5 miles)

Continue on Commonwealth Ave, taking the right on Chestnut Hill. At the busy intersection, take a left on Beacon Street. The next neighborhood will be Washington Square, where you take a right onto Washington. Enjoy the slight downhill into Brookline. Turn left onto Cypress at the Public Library, crossing Harvard. Cypress becomes Aspinwall. Take a right on Toxteth. A small park in front of you means you have reached the **William Bowditch Home**. (18.5 miles)

4 William Bowditch bought this home in 1845 and was active in Brookline politics, then a more conservative town than Boston. He refused to vote in federal elections. The fugitive slaves William and Ellen Craft hid here during their daring escape. John Brown's son also found refuge here after his father's execution for the raid on Harper's Ferry.

Take the right on Linden Place, turn left on Harvard. Stay on Harvard through narrow Brookline Village, crossing the T bridge and Route 9. Cross straight onto High Street, taking the first right onto Walnut. A few blocks on your left is the **Samuel Philbrick House**. (19.2 miles)

5 Built in 1822 for the Tappan brothers, Samuel Philbrick purchased the home in 1829. A noted abolitionist, he quit the First Parish Church of Brookline when it did not allow a black child he was hiding to sit in the family pew. The Crafts are known to have hid here and the first abolition meeting in Brookline was held here. The original owner, Lewis Tappan became nationally famous as a lawyer on the *Amistad* case.

Donnet to Liberty.

They tell me, Liberty! that, in thy name,
I have not bleed for all the human race;
I have not borne to bondage and disgrace,

William Lloyd Garrison was the leader of a new breed of fiery abolitionists that gained notoriety in Boston and the rest of the country after the 1830's.



Ft. Hill Monument



6

Backtrack to Rte. 9 /Boylston Ave. Stay steady through a few busy intersections, head under the bridge, veering right onto South Huntington, following the T tracks. At the top of a short hill, turn left on to Heath (T station) and continuing until crossing Columbus. Turn left on Centre,

right on Cedar and then right on Highline, up a short hill. The potholes are terrible in this neighborhood. You will find the **William Lloyd Garrison Home** on your right. (21 miles)

6 William Lloyd Garrison was one of the most famous abolitionists for his early and fiery demands for equality and immediate emancipation. Well-known as the publisher of *The Liberator* and for his oratory, Garrison's beliefs included the equal participation of women in the abolitionist movement. He split with Frederick Douglass during the 1850's, believing that the US Constitution was irretrievably flawed. This was his last and only surviving home.

Before leaving Roxbury, take a look at the Fort Hill monument and the view of Jamaica Plain. Continuing right on Highland, veer left back to Heath Street. Follow the separated bike path back into central Boston along Columbus Ave, past New England Conservatory and ending at Dartmouth Street and the Back Bay Train Station. Turn left on Dartmouth, pass Copley Square and its famed Trinity Church, and continue to Commonwealth. You are few blocks to the east of where you started. Take a left on Commonwealth and return to Mass Ave. (23.5 miles)

In addition to the Underground Railroad sites in Boston, it is a pleasant ride out on Minute Man trail to Lexington and then approximately 10 miles further to Louisa May Alcott's Concord home, *The Wayside*. Other options for exploring Massachusetts Underground Railroad history by bike include using the MassTransit commuter rail (MBTA) to get further afield to see the many old farms and homesteads; many sites are listed with the Network to Freedom. The most notable concentration of sites is the once-busy whaling town of New Bedford, second only to Boston in importance for the abolitionist movement in New England.

Online Resources

National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom
www.cr.nps.gov/ugrr

National Underground Railroad Freedom Center
www.freedomcenter.org

Library of Congress Collection
www.loc.gov/exhibits/african/intro.html

"Africans In America" Guide
www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia

About the Author: Knox Gardner recently moved to Boston from Seattle. He is an regular bike commuter, long distance bike tourer, and history buff. For more ideas on local rides go to www.bikenerd.blogspot.com.

Credits: All photos by Knox Gardner/Victor Chudnovsky; illustrations from the Library of Congress. Sources include the National Park Service, Museum of Afro-American History™ and WGBH/PBS, and Brookline Underground Railroad Committee.