

**AFRICAN MEETING HOUSE**

8 Smith Court, Boston

**ABIEL SMITH SCHOOL**

46 Joy Street, Boston

**AFRICAN MEETING HOUSE**

29 York Street, Nantucket

BLACK HERITAGE TRAIL®

Boston and Nantucket

HOURS**Nantucket***July & August*

Tue-Sat 11 - 3

Sunday 1 - 3

September-June

By appointment

Boston*Memorial Day-Labor Day*

Mon-Sun 10 - 4

Labor Day-Memorial Day

Mon - Sat 10 - 4

Museum of Afro-American History*Administrative Offices*

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Nantucket, Massachusetts

Prepared by the Friends of the African Meeting House on Nantucket and the Museum of Afro-American History

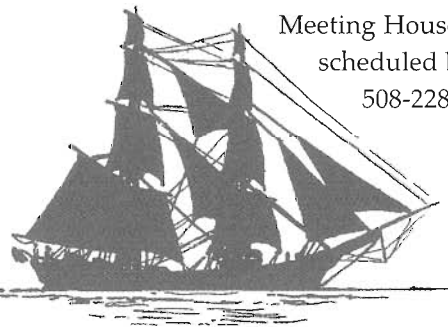
**Black Heritage Trail®**

Nantucket

The Black Heritage Trail® on Nantucket is operated by the Museum of Afro-American History and the Friends of the African Meeting House on Nantucket. Located in Nantucket and Boston, the Museum of Afro-American History is New England's largest African American history museum with three national historic sites dating back to the early 1800s and Black Heritage Trails® which attract visitors from around the world. The Friends of the African Meeting House on Nantucket is a volunteer organization that provided powerful support for the restoration of the African Meeting House, and continues to organize events and fundraisers, greet visitors and conduct tours of the Black Heritage Trail®.

There are several sites that reveal the heritage of African Americans living on Nantucket, especially in the nineteenth century. The Black Heritage Trail® on Nantucket is divided into two segments, Downtown and New Guinea. New Guinea is the section of Nantucket where blacks lived in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Guided tours leave from the Whaling Museum and end at the African Meeting House and may be scheduled by calling 508-228-9833.



1600s - Enslaved Africans arrive with the first white settlers.

1764 - First official record of the black population counts 44 persons.

1773 - Nantucket abolishes slavery.

African Americans work as tradespeople, laborers, sheep and livestock raisers, and later as whalers and mariners.

1783 - Massachusetts abolishes slavery.

1820 - Official record of the black population counts 274 persons.

1840 - Official record reports 571 "free people of color" (6% of total population).

1800-1850 - Black community grows as the whaling industry thrives.

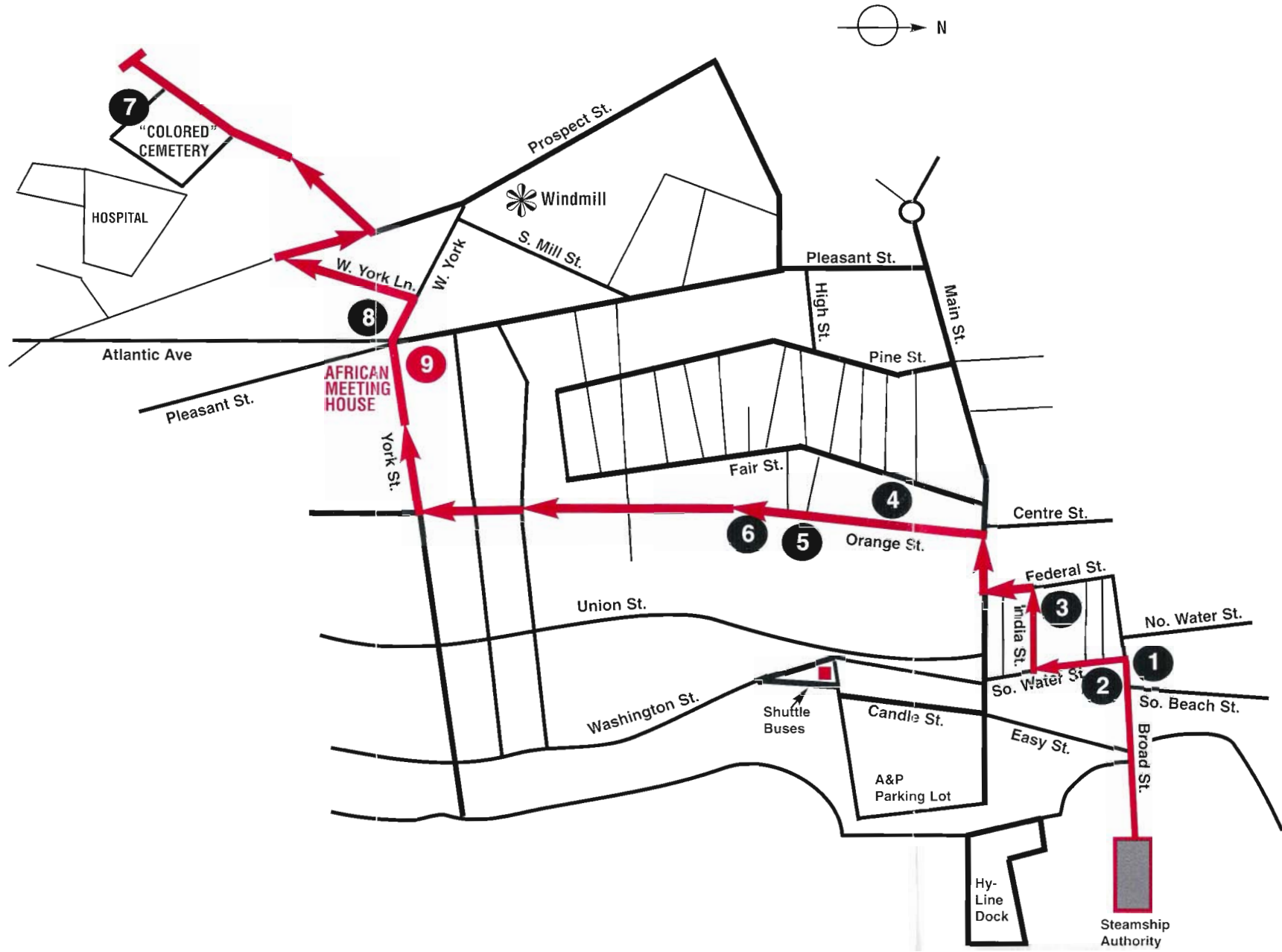
Early 1820s - The African Meeting House is established as a school, church and crucial center in the black community.

1840s - School integration is highly debated. Schools are desegregated in 1847.

1850-1900 - Whaling industry declines, many people leave Nantucket.

1911 - The African Meeting House closes.

1999 - The Museum of Afro-American History completes historic restoration and reopens the African Meeting House to the public.



BLACK HERITAGE SITES, Downtown

1. Whaling Museum and Peter Foulger Museum

Nantucket Historical Association (NHA)
Broad Street at South Beach Street

2. Dreamland Theater

17 South Water Street

3. Atheneum

Corner of Federal and India Streets

4. Unitarian Church (South Church)

11 Orange Street

5. Sherburne House

30 Orange Street
Privately owned, not open to the public

6. Anna Gardner's Home

40 Orange Street
Privately owned, not open to the public

BLACK HERITAGE SITES, New Guinea

7. "Colored" Cemetery

Off Prospect Street near the hospital

8. Five Corners

Atlantic Avenue, York Street, and Pleasant Street

9. African Meeting House

The Museum of Afro-American History
29 York Street (Five Corners)

1 WHALING MUSEUM AND PETER FOULGER MUSEUM, *Nantucket Historical Association (NHA)*

Broad Street at South Beach Street



Step to the galleries of the Whaling Museum, to find the formal portrait of Captain Absalom Boston (1785-1855), Nantucket's only known black whaling captain. In 1822, Captain Boston took an all-black crew on the schooner *Industry* on

a six-month whaling voyage returning with all hands and seventy barrels of oil. The Boston family members were leaders in the free black community on Nantucket. A third-generation, life-long Nantucketer whose grandparents and parents had been born into slavery, Absalom Boston prospered, bought land, ran a store, and helped establish a school and church. The portrait attests to his prominence.

In the extensive collection of whaling implements at the Whaling Museum are examples of the Temple Toggle harpoon, which sports a swiveling barb that would fix the harpoon in the whale's body and prevent the whale's escape. It was invented in 1848 by Lewis Temple, an African American blacksmith in New Bedford, who,

unfortunately, never obtained a patent for it. The Temple Toggle is considered an important technological improvement in the tools of the whaling industry.

Exhibits in the Foulger Museum change from year to year, illustrating many facets of Nantucket's history.

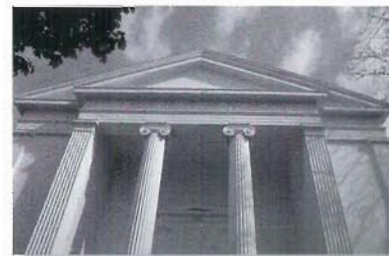
2 DREAMLAND THEATER *17 South Water Street*

The Dreamland Theater was originally built as the Hicksite Quaker Meeting House on Main Street near Ray's Court in 1831. The building hosted abolitionist Lucretia Coffin Mott, born on Nantucket, and black abolitionists including Charles Lenox Remond as speakers between 1835 and 1845. Sold sometime after 1850 it was used briefly as a straw hat factory and skating rink. It was moved in 1883 to Brant Point to become part of the Nantucket Hotel and was floated to its present location in 1905. It is now the island's largest movie house, operating only in the summer.

3 ATHENEUM *Corner of Federal and India Streets*

The Atheneum is Nantucket's public library, established during the 1820's and situated in 1834 in a remodeled building that had been the Universalist Church.

The Atheneum was the site of lectures by prominent cultural and political leaders of the

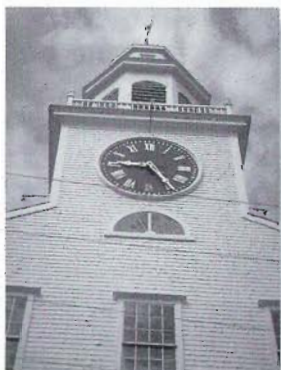


day and the site of abolitionist meetings and conventions. On August 11, 1841, young Frederick Douglass (c.1817-1895), a former slave who had come by steamer to Nantucket from New Bedford for the island's first anti-slavery convention, was moved to make his first public speech before a mixed-race audience. A year later, another anti-slavery convention degenerated into riot. The convention was evicted from the Atheneum and was refused use of several other locations. It wound up at the Big Shop, a large building on the edge of town where whaleboats were built. Douglass also spoke at the 1843 convention.

The Atheneum building and its contents were totally destroyed in the Great Fire of 1846. A new library was completed within six months. Renovations in 1995-96, preparing the library for twenty-first-century service, accomplished the most extensive changes to the building since that time. Douglass spoke in the Great Hall of the 1847 building in 1850 and 1885.

4 UNITARIAN CHURCH (SOUTH CHURCH) 11 Orange Street

This Unitarian Church was built in 1809. Captain Absalom Boston was married here in 1814, and his name appears on the register. Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington (1856-1915) both spoke in this church, Douglass in 1885 and Washington in 1904.



5 SHERBURNE HOUSE 30 Orange Street. *Privately owned, not open to the public*

During Frederick Douglass's last visit to Nantucket in August 1885, when he spoke at the Unitarian Church and the Atheneum, he and his wife stayed here when it was a guest house. Now a private residence, it has been moved back from the street.



6 ANNA GARDNER'S HOME 40 Orange Street. *Privately owned, not open to the public*

Anna Gardner, as secretary of the local women's anti-slavery society, was instrumental in calling the island's first Anti-Slavery Convention in 1841 (see Site 3). Her Quaker abolitionist family lived in this house. In 1822, her parents Oliver and Hannah Gardner sheltered escaped slave Arthur Cooper (see Site 7) and his pregnant wife. Anna taught at the African School (see Site 9) from 1836 until 1840 and was a teacher of Eunice Ross (1823-1895) (see Site 7). Anna went South in 1863 to teach black youngsters in Union-occupied North Carolina. During Reconstruction, she taught in Virginia schools established by the Freedmen's Bureau. She later became a leader in the national women's suffrage movement.



In the 18th century, a number of free blacks bought lots in the West Monomy shares, near the Old Mill. Once known as Newtown, the area around Five Corners (see Site 8) became known by 1820 as New Guinea, indicating the African roots of the property owners. (The label "New Guinea" was used in numerous cities and towns to designate the section in which people of color resided.)

In 1994, Preservation Institute: Nantucket established the rough modern geographic boundaries for New Guinea to be Silver and Orange Streets, Williams Lane, and Prospect and Angola Streets, although in the nineteenth century the area probably extended farther west to include the cemetery. An 1834 map names Atlantic Avenue as New Guinea.

During the nineteenth century, New Guinea was a separate community conscious of its own identity and needs. There were two churches, inns, shops, and social organizations.

7 "COLORED" CEMETERY Off Prospect Street near the hospital

Graves of Boston family members, Civil War veterans Sampson Pompey (1830-1909) and



Hiram Reed (1830-1911), ministers Arthur Cooper (d. 1853) and James Crawford (d. 1888) and their families, and numerous other leaders and ordinary citizens may be found here. Mr. Cooper, an escaped slave, was the minister of Zion Church, an African Methodist Episcopal congregation established in 1835. Mr. Crawford was minister of the Pleasant Street Baptist

Church for over forty years; an escaped slave, he gave lectures to raise funds to purchase freedom for his sister-in-law and her daughter, enslaved in South Carolina.

Also buried in this cemetery is Eunice Ross (1824-1895), who was denied admission to Nantucket High School by action of a town meeting in 1840. In 1847, at the age of twenty-four, Eunice and other African American children were finally admitted after legal action, community boycotts of the schools, and many political struggles. Eunice Ross spent the rest of her life on the island. Her story is the subject of the 1998 Museum of Afro-American History / WGBH video documentary *Rock of Changes: Race, Faith, and Freedom on Nantucket* and the book, *The African School and the Integration of Nantucket Public Schools 1840-1848*, by Barbara L. White (Boston University Press).

The oldest grave markers date back to the early nineteenth century. A chart of the headstones is available in the Nantucket Historical Association's Research Library at 7 Fair Street.

8 FIVE CORNERS Atlantic Avenue, York Street, and Pleasant Street

Sampson Pompey once owned 3 Atlantic Avenue. The original design of this house was very similar to the original design of 47 Pleasant Street. Both homes have since been totally reconstructed, but most likely had the same builder. The house of Seneca Boston (b. 1744), a weaver and Captain Boston's father, is at 5 Atlantic Avenue. All three houses are privately owned and not open to the public.

After his 1822 voyage, Captain Absalom Boston used his talents as a leader and builder of his community. An innkeeper, he opened a store in the area. He received votes for public office and

initiated legal action when his daughter Phebe Ann Boston (1828-1849) was denied admission to the public high school. When he died, Captain Boston was probably the wealthiest African American on the island.

Up the hill, at the southeast corner of West York Lane and York Street, is the site of the Zion Church, founded in 1835, where Arthur Cooper (see Site 7) served.

9 *AFRICAN MEETING HOUSE* *Museum of Afro-American History,* *29 York Street (Five Corners)*

The African Meeting House on Nantucket is the island's most vivid reminder of a thriving nineteenth-century African American community.

Erected in the 1820s by the African Baptist Society (of which Captain Absalom Boston was a trustee), it is the only public building still in existence that was constructed and

occupied by the island's African Americans during the nineteenth century. It is also one of the oldest African American church buildings still standing in the nation. Built as a school and a church, it also served as a meeting house for the Black Anti-Slavery Society and as a social center for the black community.



Frederick Baylies, a white itinerant preacher, is recorded as the first teacher in the African School; the first full-time teacher was a Miss Thomson. By 1829, there were forty pupils of all ages. The Rev. Jacob Perry was the first black teacher, but could not afford to stay on the island on

schoolmaster's pay. He was succeeded by Eliza Bailey and, two years later, by Anna Gardner (1816-1901) (see Site 6).

After the schools were integrated in 1847, the building housed the Pleasant Street Baptist Church, whose minister, the Rev. James Crawford (see Site 7) served for forty years- the longest island ministry before or since.

By the time it was acquired by the Museum of Afro-American History in 1989, the building was in danger of collapse. A 1990 survey by the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities found that the building retained "a high degree of historic integrity and significance." The facade had undergone considerable change during the twentieth century, but nearly three quarters of the material in the African Meeting House was original, although deteriorating. Ten years after acquiring the building, thanks to matching grants from the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC), and donations from businesses, individuals, and foundations, the museum completed a meticulous restoration, with a grand reopening on August 28, 1999. Today, the Museum of Afro-American History presents cultural programs and interpretive exhibits on the history of African Americans on Nantucket, and makes the African Meeting House available for ceremonies and special events.