

GOVERNOR DEVAL PATRICK TAKES A WALK THROUGH THE AFRICAN MEETING HOUSE IN BOSTON

Governor Deval L. Patrick visited the Museum of African American History on Beacon Hill on September 19, 2011 to view the final stages of the restoration of the African Meeting House. The Museum is indebted to Governor Patrick and Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar who worked together to secure an award of \$4 million from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and the National Park Service. With these funds, almost 175 jobs will have been created during this historic restoration.

“The African Meeting House is a treasure, a monument to freedom for all people,” said Governor Patrick. “It has served diverse communities through history and today as a haven for discussion and learning.” The Museum is completing the restoration of this National Historic Landmark to its appearance at the height of the antislavery movement in America.

“This is a superb restoration and there are so many people to thank,” said Beverly Morgan-Welch, Executive Director of the Museum of African American History. “First and foremost is the Governor for his efforts to help the Museum secure stimulus funding through the National Park Service. I also want to thank Cassius Cash, Superintendent of Boston African American National Historic Site, for shepherding this award through a rigorous and competitive process. The National Park Service and the Museum have a partnership that spans more than 30 years.”

In recognition of the historical significance of this important structure and the complexity of this construction project, the Museum carefully chose leading experts in historic restoration for the African Meeting House. Morgan-Welch stated, “John G. Waite and Associates, our architects, have done a phenomenal job. Our contractors, Shawmut Design and Construction, and all the trades displayed extraordinary skill and dedication. The finished product is simply divine!”

The African Meeting House will be restored to its 1855 appearance. “Working shoulder to shoulder with the Museum to complete this phase of the restoration and see the Meeting House restored to its glory has been a phenomenal experience for me and for my staff,” said Cassius Cash. “If William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass were to come back to the

Meeting House today they would be right at home and Park Rangers will be able to bring that history to life."

The Meeting House will provide ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) access to the building by means of a new external elevator and stair tower for handicap access to the sanctuary. Other modern upgrades include replacement of the building's electrical, heating and cooling systems.

All pews, wall finishes, cast-iron posts, lighting, and early 19th-century building features were completely restored or replicated. Jack Waite, of John G. Waite Associates, the firm that prepared the historic structures report and served as architects for the restoration, said, "The African Meeting House has an incredible history and its evolution over two centuries is very significant in the history of the Nation. We are pleased to have been part of the effort to restore it to the period of its greatest cultural significance so that future generations will not forget the important history that happened here."

The 5,400 square-foot Meeting House, built and opened in 1806, is the oldest extant African American church building in the nation constructed primarily by free black artisans. "This exciting project has incorporated experts from all areas of the historic preservation and restorative fields," said Carl Jay, Director of Historic Preservation for Shawmut Design and Construction. "Our team has worked diligently and thoroughly in a challenging condensed space to revive and update this important piece of American history, and we believe the public will be thrilled when it re-opens to the public in the coming months."

Over more than two hundred years, the African Meeting House has served the diverse communities in the neighborhood, as a church, school, and vital meeting place for Boston's African American community in the 1800s, and a synagogue for the Jewish community during the twentieth century. Acquired by the Museum in 1972, it is the crown jewel in the Museum's collection of historic sites.

The Museum will hold a Rededication Ceremony of the African Meeting House in Boston on December 6, 2011, the 205th anniversary of this historic site. The Meeting House will be open to the public thereafter.

The Museum also received major grants from the 1772 Foundation, American Express, Bank of America, EMC, Liberty Mutual, National Grid, State Street Bank, Walmart, the

National Trust for Historic Preservation, and the Mabel Louise Riley and Webster Foundations, as well as Mayor Menino's Office and the Massachusetts Cultural Facilities Fund. This support provided the foundation and the momentum to secure ARRA funding for the restoration.