



**William Francis Galvin**  
Secretary of the Commonwealth

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**SECRETARY GALVIN TO PRESENT 2012 HISTORIC PRESERVATION AWARD TO  
AFRICAN MEETING HOUSE, BOSTON**

Secretary of the Commonwealth William Francis Galvin, Chairman of the Massachusetts Historical Commission, announces the selection of the African Meeting House in Boston (Beacon Hill), to receive a 2012 Massachusetts Historical Commission Historic Preservation Award.

“The Massachusetts Historical Commission is proud to recognize the extraordinary accomplishments of this year’s awardees,” said Secretary Galvin. “The projects the Commission is recognizing this year are particularly diverse and represent the many creative ways that significant historic resources are being preserved across the Commonwealth. The restoration of the African Meeting House ensures its continued use as a place of public assembly and exhibition, and the archaeological component of the project has expanded the building’s rich educational value.”

Located in the heart of Boston’s 19<sup>th</sup>-century African American community on Beacon Hill, the African Meeting House was constructed in 1806 as the First Independent Baptist Church, and in 1808 housed the city’s first school for black children. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the flourishing congregation set the stage for many nationally significant events. William Lloyd Garrison founded the New England Anti-Slavery Society here in 1832. Frederick Douglass and other famous activists visited and spoke at the building, and during the Civil War, the first black regiments were raised here. The black community began to leave Beacon Hill in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the building was sold to a Jewish congregation for use as a synagogue. The Museum of African American History acquired the building in 1972. After a fire destroyed the roof in 1973, the museum reconstructed it, rehabilitated the second-floor sanctuary, and provided contemporary exhibit space and visitor amenities on the ground floor. Beginning in 2004, and aided by federal stimulus funds, the meetinghouse underwent a painstaking seven-year rehabilitation and restoration, which included masonry repair and restoration of original historic fabric, curved pews re-created based on remnants of the 1855 pews and scribe marks on the floor, and a new, period-appropriate raised platform and lectern. New fire stairs and an elevator were constructed outside the building envelope. Before installing new HVAC, electrical, plumbing, and fire protection systems in an underground vault, the Fiske Center at UMass Boston conducted excavations of the building’s rear yard. The study uncovered more than 38,000 artifacts, revealing much about free blacks’ lives on Beacon Hill in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. One artifact in particular, a light fixture fragment, served as the basis for reproduction chandeliers for the building. Today, the African Meeting House is the centerpiece of the Museum’s programs, and is designated a National Historic Landmark, a contributing resource of the Beacon Hill National Historic District, and a component of the Boston African American National Historic Site.

This is the 34<sup>th</sup> year of MHC’s Preservation Awards program. Projects are considered annually for awards in the categories of Rehabilitation and Restoration, Adaptive Reuse, Education and Outreach, Archaeology, Stewardship, and Landscape Preservation. Individuals are considered in the categories of Individual Lifetime Achievement and Local Preservationist. Secretary Galvin serves as the chair of the 17-member Massachusetts Historical Commission.

State House, Room 337, Boston, Massachusetts 02133

Secretary Galvin will present the awards at an afternoon ceremony on May 30, 2012, at the Massachusetts Archives Building at 220 Morrissey Blvd., Dorchester. The African Meeting House restoration project is one of 12 projects, individuals, and organizations to be honored.

The Massachusetts Historical Commission is the office of the State Historic Preservation Officer and the State Archaeologist. It was established in 1963 to identify, evaluate, and protect important historical and archaeological assets of the Commonwealth. Visit our website to learn more about the Commission's programs ([www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc](http://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc)).

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