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AFRICAN-AMERICAN HISTORY FROM ITS BEGINNINGS IN PHILADELPHIA'S HISTORIC DISTRICT

Untold Stories Of Black Lives & Achievements Told Throughout America's Most Historic Square Mile

PHILADELPHIA, July 2, 2018 – Philadelphia's Historic District, the site of the original city and often called America's most historic square mile, reveals early chapters in the nation's history, including the challenges, injustices, accomplishments and contributions of Africans and African-Americans.

The district is home to the 200+-year-old founding church of the two-million-strong African Methodist Episcopal church, **Mother Bethel A.M.E.**, and **The African American Museum in Philadelphia**, the country's first museum dedicated solely to African-American history. Philadelphia's Historic District is the place to discover African-American religious, cultural and social traditions, historical landmarks and exhibitions and more:

Museums & Historic Sites:

- **The African American Museum in Philadelphia**, founded in 1976, is the first institution built by a major U.S. city to preserve, interpret and exhibit the heritage and culture of African-Americans. The museum takes a fresh and bold look at the stories of African-Americans and their role in the founding of the nation through the core exhibit *Audacious Freedom*. Other exhibitions and programs reveal the history, stories and cultures of those of African descent throughout the African diaspora. 701 Arch Street, (215) 574-0380, aampmuseum.org
- **Independence Seaport Museum's** permanent exhibition, *Tides of Freedom: African Presence on the Delaware River* uses the city's eastern river—where the museum resides—to uncover the African experience in Philadelphia. First-person accounts and artifacts from the museum's collection recount 300 years from enslavement, emancipation, Jim Crow through the Civil Rights movement. Penn's Landing, 211 S. Columbus Boulevard, (215) 413-8655, phillyseaport.org
- The **Liberty Bell Center** encourages visitors to uncover the connection between the bell and African-American history. Videos and interactive displays explain how the abolitionist movement adopted the object as a symbol of freedom based on the inscribed quote from Leviticus, "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof." Beginning in the late 1800s, the Liberty Bell traveled around the country to expositions to help heal the divisions of the Civil War. It reminded Americans of earlier days when they worked together for independence. 5th & Market Streets, (215) 965-2305, nps.gov/inde

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- The **Museum of the American Revolution** explores the personal stories of African-Americans, including that of William Lee, the valet whom George Washington enslaved and lived alongside throughout the war. The museum lets visitors climb aboard a privateer ship like the one on which James Forten, a 14-year-old free African-American, volunteered, and view a signed 1773 volume of *Poems on Various Subjects* by Phillis Wheatley, America's first published Black female poet. In addition, the museum offers historical tableaux that reimagine historical moments, such as a 1781 conversation between enslaved Virginians and a Black Loyalist soldier, that were never captured with an artist's brush. 101 S. 3rd Street, (215) 253-6731, amrevmuseum.org
- The **National Constitution Center (NCC)** uses hands-on activities to illustrate the contributions of notable African-Americans; delves into pivotal Supreme Court cases, such as *Dred Scott v. Sanford* and *Brown v. Board of Education*; and explores the amendments that established rights for all citizens. The NCC displays an extremely rare copy of the Emancipation Proclamation signed by President Abraham Lincoln in the Civil War alcove. A more modern highlight: the original, signed copy of Barack Obama's "A More Perfect Union" speech, which he delivered in 2008 at the National Constitution Center. 525 Arch Street, (215) 409-6700, constitutioncenter.org
- The **National Liberty Museum** presents the enduring story of liberty, both in history and today. The *Heroes From Around the World* gallery spotlights notable people from all walks of life and time periods who protected and advanced freedom, including well-known figures such as Nelson Mandela and everyday heroes such as Gail Gibson, a New Orleans nurse whose bravery helped save lives during Hurricane Katrina. The *Live Like A Hero* gallery showcases teachers, students, police officers, firefighters and other ordinary citizens who use their voices and talents to advocate for positive change. 321 Chestnut Street, (215) 925-2800, libertymuseum.org
- **The President's House: Freedom and Slavery in the Making of a New Nation** marks the structural fragments of the residences of Presidents Washington and Adams. This is the site where the country's first president enslaved nine Africans, including Oney "Ona" Judge, who escaped to freedom, despite Washington's efforts to capture her. The open-air Independence National Historical Park site, on the same block as the Liberty Bell Center, invites visitors to learn about the events that transpired through illustrated glass panels and video re-enactments, and then partake in silent reflection. 6th & Market Streets, (215) 965-2305, nps.gov/inde
- **Washington Square**, one of city planner William Penn's five original parks, was once known as Congo Square. A wayside in the city-block park describes activities of three centuries ago, when free and enslaved Africans gathered at the then potter's field during holidays and fairs to celebrate traditions of their homelands. 6th Street between Walnut & Locust Streets, nsp.gov/inde

Churches:

- **Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church**, founded by Bishop Richard Allen in 1794, sits on the oldest parcel of land continuously owned by African-Americans, and is the mother church of the nation's first Black denomination. Today, Mother Bethel is a church, museum and archive. The congregation worships weekly. The museum houses the tomb of Bishop Richard Allen and artifacts dating to the 1600s, tracing the history of the AME Church. Reservations required for daily museum tour. 419 S. 6th Street, (215) 925-0616, motherbethel.org
- **St. George's United Methodist Church** welcomed Black worshippers and licensed Richard Allen and Absalom Jones as its first African-American Methodist lay preachers before other local African-American churches formed. In 1787, a dispute over segregated seating policies led to a walkout and the creation of African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas and Mother Bethel AME Church. St. George's now works on amends for previous racial injustices. Portraits, items of worship, manuscripts and other artifacts are on display in the original building, open Tuesday through Friday. 235 N. 4th Street, (215) 925-7788, historicstgeorges.org

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Historical Markers & Stories:

- **Historical Markers** capture the stories of people, places and events that shaped the country throughout the Historic District—and the entire city and state. The blue signs act as mini-history lessons about notables. There are markers for the **Free African Society** (6th & Lombard Streets), an organization that fostered identity, leadership and unity among Black people; **James Forten** (336 Lombard Street), a wealthy sailmaker who employed multi-racial craftsmen and championed reform causes; **The Pennsylvania Slave Trade** (211 S. Columbus Boulevard, outside Independence Seaport Museum), site where African people, first enslaved by Dutch and Swedes, later purchased and enslaved by William Penn, other Quakers and merchants, landed in Philadelphia; **London Coffee House** (Front & Market Streets), a circa 1754 shop where carriages, food, horses—and enslaved African-Americans—were bought and sold over coffee; **Joseph and Amy Cassey** (4th Street between Chestnut & Market Streets), a prominent African-American couple that founded intellectual and benevolent societies for Black people; **Pennsylvania Abolition Society** (Front Street between Walnut & Chestnut Streets), the first American abolition society; **Pennsylvania Hall** (6th Street between Race & Arch Streets), a meeting place for abolitionists that was burned to the ground three days after it first opened; and **Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society** (5th & Arch Streets), organized by Quaker abolitionist Lucretia Mott. Of special note is a marker located in the heart of a neighborhood once known as the Seventh Ward, home to Philadelphia's largest and oldest African-American community. Here, scholar, activist and NAACP co-founder **W. E. B. Du Bois** lived while collecting data for his seminal 1899 study, *The Philadelphia Negro* (6th & Rodman Streets). pahistoricalmarkers.com
- **Once Upon A Nation's Storytelling Benches** at 13 locations around Philadelphia's Historic District offer people of all ages a free perch and professionally told story. Engaging storytellers regale their audiences with tales of the well-known and not-so-well-known people who shaped America's history. Among the real-life characters are Ona Judge, an enslaved woman who escaped from George Washington's Philadelphia home to find freedom in New Hampshire; iconic reformer, author, statesman and abolitionist Frederick Douglass; James Forten, who heard the *Declaration of Independence* read aloud for the first time when he was nine and went on to become a leader in his African-American community; and Caroline LeCount, who, nearly 100 years before Rosa Parks, successfully won the right for all people to ride in Philadelphia's street cars. Benches are open from Memorial Day through Labor Day. Maps of the bench locations are available at the Independence Visitor Center. 6th & Market Streets, (215) 629-4026, historicphiladelphia.org

Philadelphia's Historic District campaign, from VISIT PHILADELPHIA®, showcases the city's incomparable place in early American history and the still vibrant neighborhoods of Old City, Society Hill and the Delaware River Waterfront. The campaign celebrates America's most historic square mile in the country's first World Heritage City, as designated by the Organization of World Heritage Cities. Funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Department of Community and Economic Development and H.F. (Gerry) Lenfest, the initiative runs through September 2018.

Between Memorial Day and Labor Day weekends, visitors can engage with costumed history makers, hear stories of the real people of independence and take part in colonial reenactments. And every day of the year, they can tour, shop, dine and drink in the area just like the founding fathers and mothers once did. For more information about all there is to see and do in Philadelphia's Historic District, go to visitphilly.com and uwishunu.com.

Note to Editors: For high-resolution photos and high-definition B-roll of the Historic District, visit the Photos & Video section of visitphilly.com/mediacenter

