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AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORIC ATTRACTIONS IN PHILADELPHIA
The Unique, Compelling Story Of Early African Americans, As Told Throughout Philadelphia

PHILADELPHIA, January 17, 2020 – Just as U.S. history is African American history, Philadelphia history is African American history. The nation's birthplace is home to the founding church of the African Methodist Episcopal denomination (226-year-old **Mother Bethel A.M.E.**) and the country's first major museum devoted to Black American history (**African American Museum in Philadelphia**).

Landmarks from Philadelphia's Historic District to Historic Germantown tell of the successes, struggles and contributions of African Americans through the centuries.

Here are museums, landmarks, churches and more Philadelphia sites rich in African American history:

Museums:

- **ACES Museum** – Historic Parker Hall, a restored World War II USO site for African American soldiers and their families in Germantown, honors military veterans. Although artifacts and memorabilia backdrop the museum, ACES' mission is to support, educate, serve and celebrate. Open weekday afternoons. 5801-3 Germantown Avenue, (215) 842-3742, acesmuseum.online
- **The African American Museum in Philadelphia** – Founded in 1976, the museum 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, bold look at the roles of African Americans in the founding of the nation through the core exhibit *Audacious Freedom*. Visiting exhibitions and frequent programs reveal the history, stories and cultures of those of African descent throughout the African diaspora. 701 Arch Street, (215) 574-0380, aampmuseum.org
- **Colored Girls Museum** – In the heart of residential Germantown, a three-story Victorian twin serves as a memoir museum inspired by and dedicated to the history of and original art by Black women and girls. Open by appointment. 4613 Newhall Street, (267) 630-4438, thecoloredgirlsmuseum.com
- **Independence Seaport Museum** – Guest curated by the University of Pennsylvania professor Dr. Tukufo Zuberi, the exhibit *Tides of Freedom: African Presence on the Delaware River* uses the city's eastern river to uncover the African experience in Philadelphia. The 300-year-old story tells of Middle Passage, enslavement, emancipation, Jim Crow and Civil Rights through artifacts from the museum's collection and compelling first-person accounts. 211 S. Columbus Boulevard, (215) 413-8655, phillyseaport.org

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- **Museum of the American Revolution** – Telling the story of the Revolutionary War through personal stories, this venue highlights the African American experience during this tumultuous time. Subjects include Black Loyalist soldiers, Africans enslaved in Virginia, William Lee, the valet George Washington enslaved, James Forten, a 14-year-old who volunteered aboard a privateer ship, and Phillis Wheatley, America's first published Black female poet. 101 S. 3rd Street, (215) 253-6731, amrevmuseum.org
- **National Constitution Center** – The only museum dedicated to the *U.S. Constitution* delves into pivotal Supreme Court cases such as *Dred Scott v. Sandford* and *Brown v. Board of Education* and explores the genesis and development of the Reconstruction Amendments in the permanent exhibition *Civil War and Reconstruction: The Battle for Freedom and Equality*. The Center's Civil War alcove displays an extremely rare copy of the *Emancipation Proclamation* signed by President Abraham Lincoln. A more modern highlight: the signed final draft of Barack Obama's *A More Perfect Union* speech, delivered onsite during the 2008 presidential campaign. 525 Arch Street, (215) 409-6600, constitutioncenter.org
- **National Liberty Museum** – This Old City 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 Nelson Mandela and 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

Historic Sites & Attractions:

- **Belmont Mansion** – The home of the abolitionist Judge Richard Peters, opponent to the Fugitive Slave Act and precedent-setting decision-maker who enabled 134 enslaved Africans to become free, has been preserved and transformed into the Underground Railroad Museum at Belmont Mansion. Visitors can take a self-guided or docent-led tour to view historical artifacts and hear narratives about the site's history, including that of Cornelia Wells, a free African American woman who lived there. 2000 Belmont Mansion Drive, (215) 878-8844, belmontmansion.org
- **Historic Fair Hill** – Surrounding this 1703 Quaker burial ground, the final resting place of Lucretia Mott, Robert Purvis and other abolitionists, six dramatic murals depict Philadelphia's Black and social history. Today, Fair Hill's grounds also serve as an environmental education center for the North Philadelphia neighborhood. 2901 Germantown Avenue, historicfairhill.com
- **Historical Markers** – Throughout Philadelphia — and the entire state — Pennsylvania's Historical Markers program displays the stories of people, places and events that shaped the United States. The blue signs act as mini history lessons, including: First Protest Against Slavery (5109 Germantown Avenue), where a group of German Quakers wrote a protest against slavery in 1688; Free African Society (6th & Lombard streets), a circa 1787 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; Octavius V. Catto (812 South Street), (see below); Pennsylvania Abolition Society (Front Street between Walnut & Chestnut streets), the first American abolition society; the 1833 Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society (5th & Arch streets), organized by Quaker abolitionist Lucretia Mott; W. E. B. Du Bois (6th & Rodman streets), an activist, author and co-founder of the NAACP; and William Still (244 S. 12th Street), an Underground Railroad agent and author. phmc.pa.gov/preservation/historical-markers

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- **Johnson House Historic Site** – A crucial part of the Colonial Germantown Historic District, this site attained National Historic Landmark designation for its role in the Underground Railroad. Tours offer visitors an opportunity to learn about the injustices of slavery and the 19th-century resident Johnson family, who participated in the Underground Railroad by offering refuge to freedom seekers. Among the history-makers who stayed here: William Still and, according to family lore, Harriet Tubman. 6306 Germantown Avenue, (215) 438-1768, johnsonhouse.org
- **Liberty Bell Center** – Inside the expansive, light-filled center, visitors learn the connection between the Liberty Bell and African American history. Videos and interactive displays explain how the abolitionist movement, inspired by the bell's inscribed quote from Leviticus — “Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof” — adopted the bell as an icon of freedom. Beginning in the late 1800s, the Bell traveled around the country to expositions to help heal the divisions of the Civil War, reminding Americans of earlier days when they worked together for independence. 6th & Market streets, (215) 965-2305, nps.gov/inde
- **The National Marian Anderson Museum** – A modest, historic façade houses the three-story home of opera singer, humanitarian and civil rights icon Marian Anderson. The museum, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, reveals the life and work of the contralto, the first African American to perform at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. Anderson is most remembered for her 1939 concert at the Lincoln Memorial, but she honed her talents before the parishioners of Union Baptist Church, just across the street. Tours available Monday through Saturday, advanced reservations required. 762 S. Martin Street, (215) 779-4219, marianandersonhistoricalsociety.weebly.com
- **Paul Robeson House** – West Philadelphia's Paul Robeson House served as the residence for the esteemed human rights activist, scholar, attorney, actor, athlete and singer during the last decade of his life. Tours (by appointment only) give visitors a chance to hear songs he recorded, learn about Robeson's politics and discover his life of accomplishments — including his family's 18th-century roots in Philadelphia. 4951 Walnut Street, (215) 747-4675, paulrobesonhouse.org
- **Philadelphia Museum of Art and Free Library of Philadelphia Parkway Branch** – Julian Abele, the first African American architect to design a major museum in the United States and first African American graduate of the University of Pennsylvania School of Architecture, laid plans for these two iconic buildings. Museum, 2600 Benjamin Franklin Parkway, (215) 763-8100, philamuseum.org; library, 1901 Vine Street, (215) 686-5322, freelibrary.org
- **The President's House: Freedom and Slavery in the Making of a New Nation** – At this open-air site, visitors view structural fragments of the home where Presidents Washington and Adams lived during their terms — the same home where the first president confined nine enslaved Africans, including Ona Judge, who escaped to freedom, despite Washington's attempts to recapture her. The open-air Independence National Historical Park site, just steps from the Liberty Bell Center, invites people to learn about the events that transpired through illustrated glass panels and video re-enactments, and partake in silent reflection. 6th & Market streets, (215) 965-2305, nps.gov/inde
- **Washington Square** – One of the city's original parks was known three centuries ago as Congo Square, where enslaved and free Africans gathered during holidays and fairs to celebrate traditions of their homelands. A wayside in the park describes these activities. 6th Street between Walnut & Locust streets, nps.gov/inde

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Churches:

- **African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas** – In 1792, Bishop Absalom Jones founded the United States' first Black Episcopal church, with congregation members from the Free African Society, near what is now Washington Square. Today, the church's traditions of outreach and spirited worship continue in West Philadelphia's Overbrook Farms neighborhood. 3631 Lancaster Avenue, (215) 473-3065, aecst.org
- **Christ Church** – This vaunted, circa 1744 house of worship — Franklin, Rush and five more signers of the *Declaration of Independence* were congregants — ordained Absalom Jones as the country's first African American priest (Episcopalian), baptized 25% of the free and enslaved African Americans in Philadelphia over a 20-year period, and helped establish a school to educate enslaved people. Tours of the National Park Service-affiliated church, a National Historic Landmark, occur throughout the day. 20 N. American Street, (215) 922-1695, christchurchphila.org
- **George W. South Memorial Church of the Advocate** – This 134-year-old North Philadelphia parish has long promoted social justice. During the Civil Rights era, the church hosted the National Conference of Black Power (1968) and Black Panther Conference (1970). It was also the first Episcopal Church to ordain women (1974). Today, the house of worship also serves as campus ministry to nearby Temple University, soup kitchen and social service center. 1801 W. Diamond Street, (215) 978-8000, churchoftheadvocate.org
- **Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church** – Founded in 1787 by Bishop Richard Allen (with the first church building dedicated in 1794), this church 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 comprises three institutions under one roof: church, museum and archive. The congregation worships weekly. The museum houses the tomb of Bishop Richard Allen and artifacts dating back to the 1600s. Reservations encouraged for the daily museum tour. 419 S. 6th Street, motherbethel.org/church.php
- **St. George's United Methodist Church** – Before the establishment of local African American churches, this church welcomed Black worshippers and licensed Richard Allen and Absalom Jones as the first African American Methodist lay preachers. During a dispute over segregated seating, Allen and Jones led a walkout — and went on to create African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas and Mother Bethel A.M.E. (see above). St. George's now works for social justice by providing low-cost legal services to immigrants and refugees. The original building is open Tuesday through Friday, with Saturday tours by appointment and 10 a.m. Sunday services. 235 N. 4th Street, (215) 925-7788, historicstgeorges.org
- **Tindley Temple** – This historic and vibrant South Broad Street church is considered the birthplace of gospel music. In 1901, United Methodist preacher Charles Albert Tindley made history by writing the lyrics to hymn-turned-anthem, *We Shall Overcome*. In the 1920s, he founded this temple, which still houses its original, 6,000-pipe organ. 750-762 S. Broad Street, (215) 735-0442, tindleytemple.net

Art & Theater:

- **African American Iconic Images Collection Trolley Tour** – Mural Arts Philadelphia has this tour in its repertoire, available for private bookings. During the two-hour experience, visitors discover the African American Philadelphians and their stories depicted on the larger-than-life artworks that adorn the city's buildings and walls. (215) 925-3633, muralarts.org

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- **Clef Club** – Founded in 1935 through the efforts of Philadelphia’s African American musicians’ union, Union Local No. 274 of the American Federation of Musicians, the Clef counted among its members John Coltrane and Dizzy Gillespie and played a significant role in the advancement of jazz in Philadelphia and the world. In 1978, it expanded its mission to include jazz performance, instruction and preservation, becoming the nation’s first facility constructed specifically as a jazz institution. Today, the Club hosts classes for jazz up-and-comers and concerts in its 240-seat performance space. 736 S. Broad Street, (215) 893-9912, clefclubofjazz.org
- **Mapping Courage** – W. E. B. Du Bois’ *The Philadelphia Negro* serves as sociological survey of the African Americans living in the city’s Seventh Ward. This mural, painted on a firehouse in the old Seventh Ward, memorializes Du Bois’ work, the neighborhood and the 1871-founded Engine #11 Fire Station, which served as the city’s unofficial African American firehouse until the fire department officially desegregated in 1952. 601 South Street, muralarts.org
- **New Freedom Theatre** – One of the nation’s most honored Black professional theater companies, having staged productions from James Baldwin, Ossie Davis, Charles Fuller, Ntozake Shange, August Wilson and Leroi Jones, has also been instrumental in the theatrical formation of hundreds of young Black Philadelphians — Leslie Odom Jr., for example. In 2018, a flood forced the theater to close for repair; productions relocated to the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. New Freedom continues to offer summer programs and standup comedy classes while raising money for repairs. 1346 N. Broad Street, (888) 802-8998, freedomtheatre.org
- **Walk of Fame** – The sidewalks along the Avenue of the Arts (Broad Street) tell the story of Philadelphia’s music history. The Philadelphia Music Alliance uses bronze plaques to honor African American industry pioneers such as The Sound of Philadelphia’s Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff, Pearl Bailey, John Coltrane, Patti LaBelle, Harold Melvin & The Blue Notes, Teddy Pendergrass, Jill Scott, Bessie Smith, McCoy Tyner, Ethel Walters, Andre Watts and more. S. Broad Street between Walnut & Spruce streets, (215) 717-0554, philadelphiamusicalalliance.org

Monuments:

- **All Wars Memorial to Colored Soldiers and Sailors** – In 1927, African American Pennsylvania legislator Samuel Beecher Hart proposed a memorial for the Benjamin Franklin Parkway that became *All Wars Memorial to Colored Soldiers and Sailors*. Sculptor J. Otto Schweizer depicted African American officers and enlisted men surrounded by American eagles and the allegorical figure of Justice, clutching symbols of Honor and Reward. Initially installed in a remote area of West Fairmount Park, in 1994, it found its home near Logan Circle on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway. 20th Street & Benjamin Franklin Parkway, associationforpublicart.org
- **Octavius V. Catto Memorial** – In a city of more than 1,500 public statues, this monument to a 19th-century civil rights crusader is Center City’s first statue of a specific African American. Catto, South Carolinian by birth and Philadelphian by choice, led efforts to desegregate the city’s streetcars, fought for equal voting rights, worked as an intellectual and teacher. On October 10, 1872, the first Election Day African Americans could vote in Pennsylvania, he was shot and killed on South Street. Sculptor Branly Cadet created the 12-foot-tall bronze memorial, which features Catto in a powerful stance, walking toward a granite representation of a mid-19th-century ballot box. 2 E. Penn Square, ovcattomemorial.org

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- **Smokin' Joe Frazier** – Sculptor Stephen Layne spent eight months creating the clay model for the bronze statue depicting Philadelphia's most famous real-life boxer, in the moment when Frazier dropped Muhammed Ali with a left hook in 15th round of 1971's "The Fight of the Century." The 11-foot-tall, 1,800-pound sculpture stands in the heart of South Philadelphia's sports area outside XFINIY Live! 1100 Pattison Avenue, associationforpublicart.org

Centers For Historical Research & Reading:

- **Charles L. Blockson Afro-American Collection at Temple University** – This world-renowned library of African American history is a destination for scholars of all ages and levels, with narratives by Sojourner Truth and Frederick Douglass, first-edition works by Phillis Wheatley and W.E.B. Du Bois, correspondence by Haitian revolutionaries, more than 500,000 photos by John Mosely featuring entertainers, Negro Baseball League players and more. Sullivan Hall, 1300 W. Berks Street, library.temple.edu/collections/blockson
- **The Historical Society of Pennsylvania** – This repository of 600,000 printed items and more than 21 million manuscripts and graphic items specializes in family histories and ethnic studies. Visitors can view manumission papers, Clarence Major's dictionary of African American slang, the papers of groundbreaking 20th-century children's author Nellie Rathbone Bright, and, upon request, Underground Railroad agent William Still's journal documenting the experiences of enslaved Africans who passed through Philadelphia. 1300 Locust Street, (215) 732-6200, hsp.org
- **National Archives at Philadelphia** – This Northeast Philadelphia site, part of the National Archives Federal Records Center, welcomes the public to examine microfiche, digital and paper versions of texts documenting military service, Freedmen's Bureau, courtroom transcripts and family search websites of residents of Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia and West Virginia — dating from 1789. 14700 Townsend Road, (215) 305-2044, archives.gov/philadelphia
- **The Library Company of Philadelphia** – Benjamin Franklin founded this independent research library in 1731. Today, the Company's African Americana Collection contains one of the most comprehensive collections by and about African Americans, with an estimated 13,500 titles and 1,500 graphics and illustrations. Books, pamphlets, newspapers and periodicals ranging from the mid-16th to early 20th centuries provide in-depth documentation of African American life in the country over the course of 400 years. 1314 Locust Street, (215) 546-3181, librarycompany.org

Underground Railroad Sites Beyond Philadelphia:

- **Chester County Historical Society** – Unique artifacts and manuscripts convey the region's role in the history of abolition and the Underground Railroad in this small museum. In summer 2020, new gallery installations will expand the current exhibit. 225 N. High Street, West Chester, chestercohistorical.org
- **Kennett Underground Railroad Center** – From Kennett Square, visitors can arrange to take guided bus tours of key Underground Railroad sites in Chester County. 120 N. Union Street, Kennett Square, kennettundergroundrr.org
- **Bucks County Underground Railroad Trail** – A miles-long, drive-able trail spans taverns, churches, private residences and a waterfront memorial to Harriet Tubman (150 Basin Park, Bristol) to trace escaped Africans' possible paths as they sought refuge to the north. visitbuckscounty.com

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