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"The Rock of Offense": Visiting the *Liberator*'s Imposing Stone at the Museum of African American History in Boston

Selvin Backert 00:00

So, we can actually head over into the meeting house now. Welcome, welcome upstairs everybody here into the sanctuary of the African Meeting House. This is easily the most beautiful place in the entire museum, and also one place where you have a lot of the original aspects of the building, which is part of what makes our museum and specifically this place so special. As you guys walk in, you get the very familiar feeling we get within all historic sites in Boston, incredibly uneven and creaky floorboards, and that's because we have the original floorboards here in the lower level of the African Meeting House, which of course, means we're literally stepping on the same place as all of these powerful abolitionist figures here.

Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai 00:43

[Intro music fades in] This is Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai.

Cassie Cloutier 00:51

This is Cassie Cloutier, and this is The Object of History, the podcast of the Massachusetts Historical Society. Since 1791, the MHS has sought to collect, preserve and communicate the building blocks of history. Each episode examines an object, document or set of items from the society's millions of manuscript pieces and artifacts. We take you on a behind the scenes tour of our stacks to explore the incredible stories held within our collections.

Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai 01:21

On this episode, instead of looking at the collections of an organization that is housed at the Massachusetts Historical Society, we are visiting a site that has an MHS object on display. The Museum of African American History Boston and Nantucket is New England's largest such institution dedicated to preserving and sharing the experiences of African Americans in the region. The museum operates two African meeting houses. We visited the historic Beacon Hill headquarters of the Museum to meet with and learn from their staff. Before we did that, however, we asked Curator of Art and Artifacts, Emerita Anne Bentley, to tell us about the object that the MHS has loaned to the museum.

Anne Bentley 02:09

It is a very crude, mammoth piece of furniture because it was built for one specific purpose, and that was to serve as an imposing stone for typesetting printing, which is what *The Liberator* was, a typeset newspaper. And so being something that is going to be in heavy usage and have heavy things kind of slammed down on it now and then, it needed to be something that would not wear out easily, would not wear down as wood tends to with use. You've seen old staircases where the steps are worn down through the heavy, heavy use of feet over the years. This thing had to be sturdy and withstand that kind of usage. So, it is essentially a very thick sheet of slate that is set into an oak frame. And we're not talking a little dainty frame, we're talking pretty good two by four frame that is then set on top of a massive pine table. The pine is, if you think of the what are they, four by fours that you would use for heavy duty, utilitarian pine fence. Those are the four legs of this table, and they go straight from the imposing stone itself down to the floor, solid and then there is, it's a frame that is stabilized by a lower shelf, and the lower shelf is about two thirds of the way down from the top, or a quarter of the way up from the bottom, so that gives it its stability. And under the top part of the frame there is one single drawer, and that is a two-way drawer. It pulls from either side. There is a an iron, a wrought iron pull on each side, and they're in there pretty solidly because probably what that held were the type pieces. In order to print something like, like a newspaper, you would need 1000s and 1000s because you don't have just one letter of the alphabet if you've got multiples. And it's possible that these were in wooden rack boxes where you would keep all of the various letters of the alphabet individually. And it was the printer's devil's job to at the end of the day, when people had dropped things, pick them up and put them back where they belonged. And typically, capital letters were put in upper cases, and minuscule letters were put in lower cases. So that's how we use uppercase and lowercase in designating the type of letter we're using from the printers of long ago. I suspect you know, we don't know exactly how he set it up, but I don't think that the drawer big as it is, I mean this, this is almost 40 inches high, which is a little over 100 centimeters. And it is almost 30 inches wide, which is 74 centimeters rounding off, and it is 19 and a quarter inches deep. So that's 99.7 centimeters. So, it had to be big enough to hold a framed set of pages, so that they could all be set up and screwed in. So that then it could be taken over to the press, inked a single sheet of paper put on them, and then the pressure applied to transfer that ink to the page. And *The Liberator*, like most newspapers of the day, was a single folio sheet. If you take a piece of paper and you fold it in half, on its short dimension, you wind up with a rectangle that is one folio sheet. That's four pages, page 1-2-3, and four. So the imposition, the imposing stone is in printer's term, imposition is the art of laying out your pages so that when you print them, you can fold the sheet and have page one and four on one side of the paper and two and three on the inside of the paper, and you fold it and you get your newsprint. It's done to this day using modern machinery, using digital they still set up pages the same way. So, the imposition is

why this is called an imposing stone. The imposer was the person who had to make sure that he had his or she there were women printers that they had their pages in the right order. In books this was especially important because books were usually folded again in half, so that you'd have eight pages and there all the pagination goes screwy. So, you better know which page is where, and which page gets prints printed upside down, so that when you do fold it over, it's right side up. Very, very complex. You had to pay attention to what you were doing. And in terms of the type caster, the person who took the pieces of type you would have in newspaper. The early colonial newspapers were probably done with wooden type, but those wore out very, very easily, very quickly. So, they would then start to use metal type, lead and other harder type metals came into being when [William Lloyd] Garrison started *The Liberator* in 1831 he was using letterpress, and by the time he finished in 1865 the linotype machine was invented, and it was in use. But he would never have had those kinds of funds to invest in something like that and this is what he grew up doing, and this is what he knew. So, he stuck to letterpress for the entire run of *The Liberator*.

Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai 08:38
So, this is in use until 1865 with the passage of the 13th Amendment. So, this is the end of this technology?

Anne Bentley 08:45
No, it's not the end of this technology because then he sold his equipment, including the imposing stone to a fellow abolitionist, who also used it for 20 years. So, letterpress came back into fashion as a an artistic means of expression, and new typefaces were designed for letterpress, and it was a just a return to elegant printing. It became high end, and you could do a lot of very artistic things that you couldn't do with until it became a lot easier with digital. I was just looking at them. The smallest ones at the beginning were roughly 15 by 15 inches high by 10 and a half inches wide, all folded and you know to read, which is 39 by 21 centimeters. And that was the first year that was the smallest. And they gradually got bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger until the bulk of them were 34 inches wide by 24 inches high, which just fits on the stone. The size of his paper was dictated by the size of his stone. It's a completely utilitarian piece of furniture, and it was made for one job and it did the job and then some, because after 20 years, the printer that bought it was gave it back to the Garrison family, who gave it to us in 1911 and when we got the statue of Abraham Lincoln, the scale cast of Lincoln that's at the Lincoln Memorial by Daniel Chester French. We used the imposing stone as the pedestal for the statue in our front lobby for decades. It was there in 1973 when I came here and stayed there for a long, long time.

Anne Bentley 10:40

It's a wonderful piece, and it's it just linked so tightly to Garrison and his cause and his personality. It's like the banners that he used in his anti-slavery events, just something that is important to us, historically, to the nation historically, and something that things like this make us pause and reflect that that's their purpose. It's not just that they're relics, it's that they are mementos and signals to us from the past that we should remember.

Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai 11:22

[Sounds of MBTA Trains] On a beautiful winter's day, the MHS podcast team traveled to the historic Beacon Hill neighborhood of Boston to visit the Museum of African American History.

Selvin Backert 11:43

My name is Selvin Backert. I work as an education specialist here at the Museum of African American History. So, dealing with how we interpret the site, giving general tours, and how you present this amazing history to the public. Museum of African American History we have two sites here in Boston, and then two sites down in Nantucket. So, four buildings making up our entire museum. Where we're currently standing is the Abiel Smith School built in 1835. This is the first public school for African American children here in the city of Boston. Our oldest site here in Boston is the African Meeting House built in 1806. Initially built to be a place of worship for the African Baptist church, but as we talk about here at the museum, it became a building of so much more a place of abolition, free speech, and just not to repeat what the building's called, but to be a real meeting place for the African American community here for incredibly serious things with abolitionists like Frederick Douglas, William Lloyd Garrison, speaking there, but also just to be a place where the African American community can come together, whether it's something as simple as having meetings about state politics, local politics, or just what's happening within the community during that time period as a place for people to come together and have those conversations and be one. We also have the Black Heritage Trail, which goes throughout the neighborhood. It was created by the early members of our museum and is now run by the National Park Service. And we also have our two sites in Nantucket, which I think need a lot more love. So, I take the chance to talk about Nantucket briefly whenever I can even though we're here in Boston. We have the African meeting house built in 1824, serving a similar purpose to the free black community in Nantucket that existed primarily during the 1800s and we also have the Seneca Boston-Florence Higginbotham House that's actually the oldest site in that the museum has built in 1774. It was home to Seneca Boston, a formerly enslaved black man and his wife Thankful Micha and they're the

beginning of the free black community that lived in Nantucket and is a really cool site. It's been a black owned piece of property since it was built on in 1774. So technically, it's been a black owned piece of property longer this country has existed by about two years. So pretty fun fact there. So that's a kind of brief overview of our entire museum and the four sites that make up the Museum of African American History. So, we can actually head over into the meeting house now. [Sounds of footsteps]

Selvin Backert 14:09

Welcome. Welcome upstairs everybody here into the sanctuary of the African Meeting House. This is easily the most beautiful place in the entire museum, and also one of the place where we have a lot of the original aspects of the building, which is part of what makes our museum and specifically this place so special. As you guys walk in, you get the very familiar feeling we get within all historic sites in Boston, incredibly uneven and creaky floorboards, and that's because we have the original floorboards here in the lower level of the African Meeting House, which of course, means we're literally stepping on the same place as all of these powerful abolitionist figures here. As you guys look throughout the pews, the majority of the pews within this space are replicas, with the exception of the two in the back right. So back row, right hand side, those are some of the remaining original pews that we have left here in the sanctuary. So literally, being able to sit in the exact same place people sat during church service every single Sunday. As you direct your eyes all the way to the back of the building, we have some of the original layers of wallpaper plaster all the way down to the original brick we've left exposed for people to see that's underneath our most recent restoration project. And of course, we have our own modern updates to the space, as we do still have modern programming here, but this is where church service was had every single Sunday with the African Baptist Church. As I mentioned, this is where a lot of powerful abolitionists came to speak. We also have some more local names that spoke here, thinking of people like William Cooper Nell and Mariah Stewart. And whenever we have visitors in here, and this is normally where we end our general admission tours, I always have them kind of take a second to kind of recognize how amazing it is to be within this space. I know in a city like Boston, every building you enter seems to be at least 200, 250 years old, coming out to that age. But when we talk about African American history, I make people think about in this places where they've learned African American history is that the original place where that history happened? Do they get to actually stand in the same place, sit in the same seats, be able to go up into a pulpit where these powerful abolitionist figures literally spoke, and being able to possibly say their own words or how they're feeling in the same place where these amazing people stood 200 plus years ago and got to express their opinions? So that's something we really like to focus on as we do our interpretation here, being in the original spaces where this happened,

and specifically being in the original space where African Americans got to have their voice heard and have this amazing place of free speech.

Cassie Cloutier 16:29
Did it transition from a church to a meeting house or was it one in the same from the start?

Selvin Backert 16:33
One in the same. Church service is mostly held up here. The room we were briefly in downstairs that's now called the Susan Paul room, that was more of that general meeting space for the African American community. So, when I talked about some more of the basic things that we don't necessarily mention as often in history books, whether it's like, you know, dinners, parties, concerts, all of that would have happened downstairs in that more open space. It really was a multi-purpose space for the African American community. Before we get the Abiel Smith School, the building we were just in that was the home of the African school, a community led school that predated the formal public school. So that's actually one of my favorite rooms here in the meeting house because of so much history happened there. We think about a lot of the more prominent abolitionist groups that met here in Boston, thinking of groups like Massachusetts General Color Association, the New England Anti-Slavery Society, had meetings in the bottom floor of this building. So, they were one in the same just kind of splitting up between the two floors. Some of the different activities that happened here within this building.

Cassie Cloutier 17:29
How is this space used now? Is it just for education or?

Selvin Backert 17:32
It is used for a lot? So, the museum, we host our own programming here, things like different author talks book talks. The largest event we host here is the Milestone Book Awards, one of the largest and in my opinion, best awards for African American historical writing. Completely no bias that I work here, but that event's pretty amazing one, because we get to award some of the best scholars in the field of African American History. But also that event is completely free to the public, so we get a good mix of friends of the awardees, professors from Harvard, some of the top schools in the nation, but also just people who came in to visit the museum that day, come back and get to actually talk and interact and learn different parts of African American history that they didn't know before, that we don't necessarily talk about here at

the museum. We also do facility rentals. Different nonprofit groups can come here. We've had people like the governor's cabinet was here. Some people from the mayor's office from the city of Boston, different nonprofit groups have had different receptions and events here, and then that ties into any educational programming we do as well, things like the Writing Boston's Future program that the museum has, we'll probably talk a little bit about as we go up onto the third floor exhibit here within the museum as well. So, we're in our main exhibit space. We're on, technically the first floor of the Abiel Smith School, but this is our main exhibit space, Emancipation Proclamation and Pragmatic Compromise, starting over here from the right side for our right side the exhibit, we kind of take you through some of the history of the community here, starting with beginning of slavery in Massachusetts in 1638, with the arrival of the slave ship, The Desire, kind of giving people that introduction, that, yes, there is slavery in Massachusetts, it did exist. That's how we get the beginnings of a black community, and just making sure that is something that's recognized because it is something we need to go over, especially within a lot of our general admission, making sure people have that in their mind when we talk about African American history here. Then we go into the beginnings of the African American community here. Some early discourse delivered at the African meeting house, July 14, 1808, going into some of the more prominent figures in the community, looking at people like Lewis Hayden, Frederick Douglass, of course, speaking here, as you guys are here to view, we have some mass heads from *The Liberator* and the imposing stone behind us and going into the early days, until we get to midcentury. We start to talk about the Emancipation Proclamation and Jubilee celebrations. So, we have some excerpts from our documentary Jubilee, Juneteenth and the 13th playing here and here, we try and make people rethink some of the reasoning behind the Emancipation Proclamation. I know, for a lot of people, or even when I was taught in public schools, that Lincoln is this great liberator and emancipator, and when he writes this, and that's he was this great abolitionist. He wanted to free all African Americans, but we challenged people to look at that a little bit differently, showing him as more of a politician. He was a pragmatist, and his goal really was to unite the union that was a part of his goal, and having the Emancipation Proclamation fit into those goals. And that's how we get things like the Emancipation, then later, 13th, 14th and 15th amendments. So that's what we talk about in this portion of the exhibit. And as we go over to the right, we talk about Jubilee celebrations, with Juneteenth becoming a federal holiday in 2021 I believe. It's very new to people specifically within the Northeast, and we know it's more regional holiday, but we want to show within this part of the exhibit that celebrations of the Emancipation Proclamation or the end of slavery isn't actually new to this part of the country, and most certainly not new to Boston or this community. So, we have a list of names and some photographs of people who attended Jubilee celebrations that were mentioned in *The Liberator* and kind of some of the

different abolitionist figures, speakers who spoke there as well. Now let's go over to the right side. We switched to talking about the Civil War, and specifically the Massachusetts 54th regiment. First all-black regiments come out of the state of Massachusetts. We have different artifacts of photos of members of the regiment and different kind of art pieces talking about the 54th and some of the most amazing parts this exhibit are pieces of Robert Gould Shaw leader of the regiment, his uniform so his hat, his spurs, his jackets, all here getting to talk about his legacy and the legacy of the men who were here. Where we were briefly downstairs in the meeting house, the Susan Paul room that was also recruitment hub for the Massachusetts 54th, so that's how it also ties into the buildings that we have here. And then an amazing piece of our collection, which I'm sure Angela might talk about more, is the bust of Robert Gould Shaw which was done by Mary Edmonia Lewis as well. So, a really nice piece in our collection that we have here, and we also get to actually see what the man looks like outside of the very tall monument we have across from the State House. I like the nice to see up close and personal as well.

Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai 22:14

After Selvin's introduction to the museum, we spoke with several other staff members as well, Angela Tate, the Museum's Chief Curator and Director of Collections, Cara Liasson, the Collections Manager and Registrar and Sage Morgan-Hubbard, the Director of Learning and Engagement.

Angela Tate 22:33

I'm Angela Tate. I am the Chief Curator and Director of Collections, which are actually two brand new roles for this museum in its entire history. These are two monumental roles that are essentially part of this new era of really, really honing in on the interpretive content of this museum. Well, both museum sites on Boston and Nantucket, as well as stewarding these amazing collections in a more explicitly, I guess, black-centered way. So, I'm also very brand new to the New England region in general. Was raised in California and in the DC area, and I was excited for this position because of the opportunity to tell a more specific story and a more specific story that I was never told, and when I moved here, finally in September, because I was still kind of working remotely in DC while I transitioned here, and realizing like this is not only an amazing opportunity to tell history and to learn history, but amazing opportunity to kind of reshape and rethink how people are taught about slavery and emancipation in the United States, and there are also African diaspora connections between Boston and the Caribbean and the wider Atlantic world in the 18th and 19th century that I'm also starting to dig into.

Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai 23:54

Angela, can you tell us a little bit about what this neighborhood was like in the 19th century and when it was a gathering place for African Americans as well as abolitionist allies?

Angela Tate 24:04

This is the best question to ask me, what this neighborhood was like when it was actively a black neighborhood, because I am working on an exhibition that will open in June that essentially asks and demands, this was a black neighborhood. This was a black neighborhood. And so, when you take the Black Heritage Trail, which, by the way, was also created by Sue Bailey Thurman and her daughter, when she started organizing this into a museum, she was thinking about the landscape of Beacon Hill being so different from how it appeared in the early 19th century. And so, over the course of my doing this research for this exhibition, which will be never ending, despite the fact that we have a hard stop in June. I have also just been thinking about like, what does this site sound like when it was a black neighborhood. When I first started to shared an Excel spreadsheet of the inhabitants that we do know who lived here, some of their professions, some of their connections to other people around them. And just thinking about they were laborers. They were owning a tavern. They were hair stylists and barbers. They were caterers, which also is an interesting profession. Philadelphia has excavated this history more, but like a lot of black wealth in the early 19th century was built off of catering to prominent white families, and so just hearing thinking about the hustle and bustle of so many black people moving around in this neighborhood, going to work for white families in the rest of Boston, but then also retaining this sense of community here and helping each other out. I also like to think about during the abolitionist period, I know a historian would probably ding me for that, and they're like, this is not how we categorize this time period. But I like to think about the abolitionist period as this moment of black advocacy, black activism around the black community, not so much while we're going to prove ourselves as respectable to show that this is why slavery should be abolished, but like they were actively thinking about themselves in the context of the abolitionist movement, which is why I also think it's very interesting to kind of break some of the ideas that we have about, you know, like I said, an interracial, multiracial coalition of abolition. There was a lot of tension around, well are you being a little paternalistic towards me? I can advocate for my own freedom, and thinking about Boston as well as, like, when you're asking about the community Boston and the Beacon Hill community being an abolitionist node because there was an abolitionist network across the Atlantic world, where people would come to freedom, and then they would just kind of go across New England, go to England, a little bit of France, which I'm starting to learn about, little bit of Caribbean. And also, just really thinking about those networks of

communication, that it wasn't just a singular space, a singular story. One of my previous positions, a short-term gig, was with the American Antiquarian Society, where I was the DEI encoder for *The Pine and Palm*, which was another abolitionist newspaper in the early 19th century that was black edited. And I thought it was so exciting to think about how they're having these debates around, well, if they're telling us that we're not allowed to be here in America, where are we going to go? Let's look at Jamaica. Let's look at Haiti. And it wasn't so much this idea of we don't belong in America, but like, where is black utopia? And so, I like to think these are the currents that were happening in this neighborhood during this early 19th century period. And that is kind of what the African American community was thinking about. They weren't just thinking about abolition. Some might have said, I'm an American. I'm going to stay here. I don't think I want anything to do with emancipation efforts to take us out of this country. There could be people that were living here that were incredibly radical, that said, nothing can ever change in America I'm leaving. And then also, like learning as well about after, you know, the Revolutionary War period black migrants in Nova Scotia, because they chose to take up Lord Dunmore's offer of saying, fight for us we'll give you freedom. And then just thinking about the complexities of well, they said freedom, but then we're being extracted from our country that we've only known. Go to Nova Scotia or go back to West Africa, which then created a little bit more problems. And then some people came back to Boston. They came back to Beacon Hill. So, what was their experience of saying, I was in Canada, I was in Africa, I was in the Caribbean, and then I came back to the United States. So, like these are so many of the ideas and questions and thoughts that I'm excavating and researching and thinking about as I developed this exhibition.

Cassie Cloutier 28:52

We then asked Angela to tell us about any new projects the museum is working on.

Angela Tate 28:58

In February for Black History Month, we'll be debuting Frederick Douglass Artificial Intelligence exhibition. So, we are working with TimeLooper, which is a New York based digital immersive exhibitions and other museum technology firm, and we are thinking about, how do we tell these stories and experience people that we don't often see, that we might see as a bus in our exhibition or a painting or a photograph. How do we essentially make people come to life? And so TimeLooper took all of Frederick Douglass's autobiographies, all of his speeches, ran it through a machine learning process. And so, you can ask Frederick Douglass essentially questions. It is always, like I said, text based, based on primary resource documents. There is no extra interpretation to say you know, let's add our own thoughts and ideas about

these questions that people may ask. It's also trained to respond to different age groups. So, there are preloaded questions, but they're also programmed Frederick Douglass to know that this is a 10-year-old asking a question versus a 45-year-old and responding according to their own understanding because you can't really talk about really, really complex history to a 10-year-old who's just like, who are you? When were you born? Where were you born? So that's kind of the technology that we're really engaging with and so, this is also something that we are working on with TimeLooper for the Black Voices of Revolution because of the fact that the problem that I'm running into right now as I'm doing the research, what are the black voices? Who are the black voices? How do you find these black voices in this early period of history. There aren't going to be autobiographies. There aren't going to be diaries. There aren't going to be long newspaper op-eds and so, my challenge has been, how do we find these different black voices? And that's why I said, like, the central question and argument is, this was a black neighborhood, and this was a black neighborhood, and so just really taking it from there and using this digitally immersive technology to essentially recreate what it might have sounded like, not maybe not so much what it looked like, because we are historic sites, so people can kind of extrapolate what it might have looked like, but what might have felt like, what might have had sounded like, what did they think when they were moving through these spaces? I particularly enjoy when I first started, I was sent on the Black Heritage Trail, and so there is a very small passageway linking the rest of Beacon Hill to this site. And I just started thinking about gossip and whispering. How was the news of the Revolution and liberty and these ideas passed along through the black community if they were not supposed to be participating in that, like, what are these passageways and just thinking about privacy being an issue? I mean, even though slavery was a very different context here than in the south, there was still ideas around you are not allowed to have a private life. So where were these opportunities for black people in Beacon Hill to find their own moments of privacy to pass along information that they were hearing or that they were reading or that they were even discussing with other people, who we think are the leaders of the American Revolution.

Cara Liasson 32:20

I'm Cara Liasson. I'm the collections manager and Registrar for the Museum of African American History Boston and Nantucket. The museum has over 3000 objects in its collections between Boston and Nantucket. I would say our collections are primarily paper based. We have a lot of books, newspapers and ephemera from primarily the 19th century, related to African American history some things earlier in colonial history, as well as into the 20th century. We also have, I would say, a small but strong fine art collection by 19th and 20th century African American artists as well. And that's, I would say, again, primarily

with Boston. We do also have an archeology collection, if you will, that's currently mostly being housed at the city of Boston archeology lab. We've had a number of archeological digs happen at both our Boston campus and our Nantucket campus in the last 40, 50 plus years, I would say. And then as far as our collections on Nantucket, it's a lot of the personal belongings and furnishings and furniture that came out of the [Seneca] Boston-[Florence] Higginbotham House, our historic home on the island, and a lot of that came from Florence Higginbotham and her family as she owned the home for the majority the early to, like late 20th century. We actually bought the house, or the museum bought the house, rather, from her son and daughter-in-law in the early 2000s.

Cassie Cloutier 33:46

Are there a lot of objects in your collection related to like the imposing stone and *The Liberator*? What's that look like?

Cara Liasson 33:51

I've been at the museum since 2011 and I know over the course of the years, we've borrowed on and off the imposing stone from the Massachusetts Historical Society. So, I think as far as I've been here, we primarily initially borrowed it for an exhibit that opened in 2013 which was called Freedom Rising. And that exhibit was commemorating the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation and the raising of the Massachusetts 54th regiment. So, it's pretty much been on a long-term loan here, as we at least describe it in the field for this these 10 plus years now, to the point we now are now past the 160th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation. So having it in our space has really just helped illustrate, I would say, the significance of *The Liberator* newspaper, which was founded by William Lloyd Garrison, and it ran from 1831 to 1865 and so again, printed locally here. It was the most significant and longest running American anti-slavery newspaper in the country. And so, the imposing stone here is where the actual text for the newspaper was laid out by William Lloyd Garrison as it was essentially being published and printed. So, it definitely is a very early form, you could say, of that kind of technology in the 19th century of as far as circulation for this kind of information in the news, then how was this being put together? And so as far as other objects in our collections that connect to *The Liberator* on view right now, we do have examples of the mast heads from *The Liberator* which changed over the course of the publication of it. So, and all have really striking visuals of different I guess you could say facets of the institution of slavery and of people being enslaved, and those are really the only graphics or illustrations that were in the newspaper. So, the masthead, I think, has always been very striking, even as its look evolved and changed over the course of its

publication. We do also have this picture of Wendell Phillips, which my understanding was made by William Cooper Nell, who Selvin had previously been talking about. William Cooper Nell was an agent I know for *The Liberator* newspaper, and my understanding is like those images of Wendell Phillips and also William Lloyd Garrison were sold to essentially fundraise in tandem with the publication of the newspaper. So, we also then have a bust William Lloyd Garrison as well on view, which is sort of behind the imposing stone in the space but then is also opposite a reproduction of William Cooper Nell, which, of course, is an image also owned by the Massachusetts Historical Society, and is the only known image of Nell from his lifetime.

Sage Morgan-Hubbard 36:29
My name is Sage Morgan-Hubbard, and I'm the Director of Learning & Engagement here at the Museum of African American History for Boston and Nantucket.

Cassie Cloutier 36:37
What's your relationship with the community, or what's the education look like?

Sage Morgan-Hubbard 36:42
So, our education program is really shifting and really moving from a formal, more education standpoint to learning and engagement and looking at every single age range. So, we're working with early childhood through elderly folks, and we really want to have a lot of these objects and the buildings really come alive for folks. And so, we're working with new team members and looking at Gen Z population and how can we make the meeting house really be a meeting house again? So, what kind of programs could be there and populate there. We're having the 54th regimen come in to start off and kick off Black History Month. We also have an AI Frederick Douglass that's starting off the month, and we're really thinking about new technology. And our next exhibition will also be incorporating a lot of new technology. So yes, we have a lot of historic items, and most of our items are our paper. But what other ways can we tell stories and can we interact with this history? So that's our next trend, and working with young people, we want more hands-on engagements and scavenger hunts and other types of elements so that they can feel like, oh, it's not just things on the wall, but I can be talking and engaging with this history in new ways.

Cassie Cloutier 38:09

Do you find that different generations gravitate toward different collections, or is there a difference in what you showcase?

Sage Morgan-Hubbard 38:17

Everyone likes to hear a good story, and so that we're finding that what works, if anything, that's more showing instead of just telling, then people are going to be engaged no matter what. We tend to have an older audience, but we want to bring in more young people, especially at third grade and fifth grade and eighth grade, where it ties into their curriculum. So that's starting to shift, and we're looking at other things around the neighborhood that can help us tell that story because it's so different. And that's what we love about the trails as well the Black Heritage Trails is that it's different than just the regular Freedom Trail, but that you get to see that all the black folks that have been here for centuries, and when you're actually walking that you experience and memorize it in a different way than if you were just hearing about it. So that's also once they get to the we're the last two sites, and we want them to continue that learning, and continue to walk around the space and be like, oh, okay, on the first level, that's where how could there have been 200 students in this building? There were kids on the first level of our building. Then this level was another classroom, and then the third level was the high school age classrooms. And it must have been really noisy. It must have been really crowded. I could see how segregation wasn't the best way so that they come up with those conclusions. And we're not just saying it to them, but they're like, oh, I would not want to go to school here, even though it's a nice old building, I could see how the system might not have worked, and then they learn more about how it was really systematically disenfranchised.

Cassie Cloutier 39:54

Do you have a favorite item?

Sage Morgan-Hubbard 39:56

Of course, I love the buildings. I was actually just thinking about this. I really love how you enter our museum, and there's an electronic display that shows our logo, which is our wonderful windows, but it shows all the like images throughout our collection, from the very first images to now Black Lives Matter, and how we're interconnected throughout the centuries, and that's the kind of story we want to tell, the arc of black history, and that we're still here, and we want to hear about the like we may not be living in Beacon Hill, but we can come and see these sites, and that's why we're the Museum of African American History. We may focus on 19th century, but there's a lot more to us, and that's why we want you to continually come

to our museum. You may have come when you were a young person, or you may have heard about it and never stepped in our doors. We don't want to just be that little space that is a curiosity. We really want you to satiate your curiosity. Come here, experience our tours, experience our education and engagement programs, and you might learn something different. We're even doing some wellness programs and yoga because people were holistic people. They weren't just doing the activism. They had to be whole people, so that we were thinking, and we're on Joy Street, so we want to talk about Black joy, because that's a big part of the black experience.

Cassie Cloutier 40:01
So, you mentioned some of the engagement projects working on. Is there anything that you'd like to highlight?

Sage Morgan-Hubbard 41:27
Definitely the AI Frederick Douglass is coming. We're hoping that you can come for Black History Month and know that black history happens all throughout the year, so please come beyond February. February tends to be very busy for us, and that then in June, we'll have this Black Voices of American Revolution and it will be really exciting to hear voices that no other place around Boston is going to be telling those stories in the same way, and especially with this 250th year, it's a it's a great time to think about all the stories of the Revolution and all the stories in our history, and that we don't want to be just marginalized and left out.

Cassie Cloutier 42:29
[Outro music fades in] To look at the items discussed in today's episode, visit our show website at www.masshist.org/podcast. The Object of History was produced by the research department at the Massachusetts Historical Society. We would like to thank Angela Tate, Selvin Backert, Cara Liasson and Sage Morgan-Hubbard at the Museum of African American History Boston and Nantucket and Anne Bentley, Curator of Art and Artifacts, Emerita at the MHS and Sam Hurwitz, Podcast Producer at the MHS. Music in this episode is by Ketsa Music and Chad Crouch. See our show notes for details. Thank you for listening, and please rate, review and subscribe to both the MHS produced shows wherever you listen to podcasts.