

THE ABYSSINIAN MEETING HOUSE IN PORTLAND, MAINE IS THE CITY'S ONLY HISTORIC BUILDING DEDICATED TO THE QUEST FOR PERSONAL FREEDOM, CIVIL RIGHTS AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL.

## *New Hope for the Abyssinian*

## *A Legacy for the Future*

### *Our Place in History*

1828. The Abyssinian Meeting House was constructed by free blacks who came together to seek opportunity and refuge. The Meeting House became the cultural center of the community. Meetings, church services, concerts, a segregated public school, dinners and entertainment made the Abyssinian the center of political and social life which united the community throughout the 19th century. Its members and preachers included former enslaved people, leaders of the Underground Railroad movement and outspoken advocates for the abolition of slavery in the United States. The Meeting House closed in 1917 and was remodeled in 1924 as tenement apartments. Eventually the City of Portland seized the building for unpaid taxes. The building sat vacant and deteriorating, nearly forgotten, until



King post truss



Group looking at truss

community leaders founded the Committee to Restore the Abyssinian and purchased the building in 1998 from the City.

*"The craftsmanship of the timber frame is superb. The king post truss is a work of art."*  
-Arron Sturgiss, Preservation Timber Framers

RESTORING PORTLAND'S ABYSSINIAN MEETING HOUSE will celebrate the cultural heritage of African Americans in Maine. Through meticulous research, historic archaeology, education and public programs, the Abyssinian Meeting House will be restored as a new gathering place for reflection and discovery of Maine's history.

Far from being a static museum, the Abyssinian will explore and celebrate the density and diversity that are the very lifeblood of the community. Among the stories it will tell:

- **PERSONAL HISTORIES** – Maine's black family's roots date to the 18th century as mariners, longshoremen, artisans, merchants, professionals, seamstresses and domestics
- **PUBLIC PROTESTS** – The reaction against slavery and discrimination and the emergence of separate black religious congregations in the early years of American independence
- **CULTURAL IDENTITY** – Reflecting their shared heritage free black residents,



Members of the Committee to Restore the Abyssinian Meeting House

*"Patience, persistence and perseverance define our commitment to this restoration project."*  
-Leonard W. Cummings, Sr., Chair

many born in New England, maritime Canada, or the Caribbean colonies, adopted the Abyssinian (African) designation for their new Meeting House



Planning for Tomorrow

*"We really need you to accomplish our plan!"*



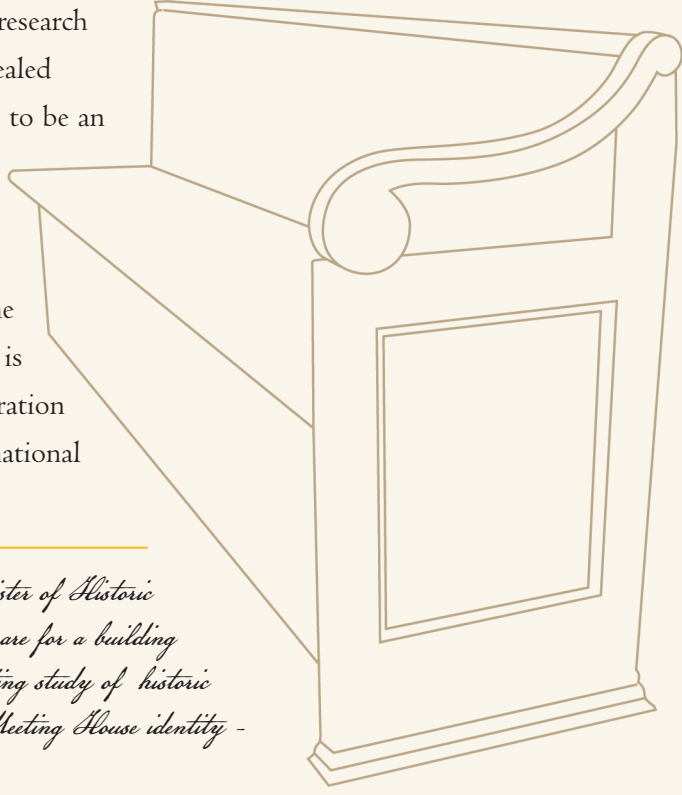
# Restoration Begins for a Landmark at Risk

1997 began a decade of organizing, planning, research and stabilization thanks to the Committee to Restore the Abyssinian Meeting House.

Collaborative partners include the Maine Historic Preservation Commission, the City of Portland, Greater Portland Landmarks, Maine Preservation, the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the National Park Service.

The Abyssinian Meeting House is a designated City of Portland historic landmark. In 2006 it achieved listing in the National Register of Historic Places and in 2007 the Abyssinian Meeting House was recognized by the National Park Service National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom as the first site listed in Maine.

Extensive research and documentation has revealed that the structure continues to be an important source of data for investigating African American cultural and religious history in Maine. The Abyssinian Meeting House is poised to be a pivotal restoration project of local, state and national significance.



*"Listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion D is rare for a building of this type. This is a fascinating study of historic archaeology to reveal its true Meeting House identity - its place in history."*

-Greg Farmer, Historic Preservation Specialist



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NETWORK TO FREEDOM

## Mission Statement

The Mission of the Committee to Restore the Abyssinian includes historic preservation and maintenance of the historic building known as the Abyssinian Meeting House, in the city of Portland, State of Maine; and the preservation and promotion of the cultural heritage of African-Americans in Maine.

P.O. Box 11064  
Portland, ME 04104

ABYSSINIAN  
MEETING HOUSE



ABYSSINIAN  
MEETING HOUSE

*Still standing - Still moving ahead*

## THE RESTORATION OF THE 3RD OLDEST AFRICAN AMERICAN MEETING HOUSE



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MEETING HOUSE

