



OLD NORTH BRIDGE

TOWN OF CONCORD

TOWN HOUSE - P.O. BOX 535
CONCORD, MASSACHUSETTS 01742

To: Mark Howell, Chair, Concord Select Board

From: Mimi Graney, Economic Vitality Manager

Date: November 18, 2026–2025

Re: Project Approval Request – Black Heritage Historical Markers

Receipt of Grant of \$14,000 from Mass Office of Travel and Tourism

Provisional Approval for set of Historical Markers

Sponsors: Concord DEI Commission, The Robbins House, Economic Vitality & Tourism Divisions

Purpose:

- Educate and build awareness about the presence, variety and value of Concord’s historic and cultural resources.
- Build awareness for historical resources that are inadequately documented and recognized.
- Boost economic vitality by encouraging pedestrian movement within Concord.
- Support the Select Board goal: “Build a more welcoming community.”

Project Description: A set of 8 to 10 carved signs mounted on wooden posts will provide information about each site. The design style will complement existing signs in cultural landscapes of Concord.

Funding & Budget: Total cost is \$28,000. Grant of \$14,000 awarded by Mass Office of Travel and Tourism Destination Capital Grant. Matching funds of \$14,000 from ARPA approved by the Town Manager.

Design and Materials:

- Carved signs, comparable to informational signs in Concord Center burial grounds mounted on a single wooden post.
- Complementary style in a distinguishing color of “Concord red”.
- Finished dimensions to be determined.

Community for Input, Feedback:

- Select Board (final approval)
- Historic Districts Commission (Certificate of Historical Appropriateness)
- Public Works, Highway and Grounds Division
- Natural Resources
- Visitors Center staff, Tourism Manager
- The Robbins House, Concord’s Black History Museum
- Property Owners
- Exempt from sign ordinance as a town sponsored sign

Sites: - [interactive map](#)

| Ref # | Location | Address |
|-------|--|--------------------------|
| 1 | The Great Field, Historic Black and Native Neighborhood | 40R Bedford Street |
| 2 | First Parish Meeting House (Holy Family Church), Frederick Douglass Speaks at the Universalist Meeting House | 20 Lexington Road |
| 3 | Hill Burying Ground, John Jack's Grave | Old Hill Burial Ground |
| 4 | The Center School (Masonic Lodge) | 58 Monument Square |
| 5 | Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, graves of Fatima Robbins, John & Jack Garrison, Elsea Dugan, George Washington Dugan | Court Lane & Bedford St. |
| 6 | Francis and Ann Bigelow House | 19 Sudbury Road |
| 7 | John Garrison House | 78 Monument St |
| 8 | Brister and Fenda Freeman House Site | 55 A Walden St |
| 9 | Robertson James House | 70 Lexington Road |
| 10 | Thoreau Farm | 341 Virginia Road |
| 11 | The Wayside, Underground Railroad activity | 455 Lexington Road |
| 12 | Alcott's Orchard House | 399 Lexington Road |
| 15 | Trinitarian Congregational Church, Robbins family worshipped here, anti-slavery activism | 54 Walden St |
| 17 | Old Jail Site - Thoreau's <i>Civil Disobedience</i> | Monument Square |
| 19 | Concord Depot, Underground Railroad connection | 90 Thoreau St |

Other sites – Unmarked – for support materials

| | | |
|----|--|-----------------------|
| 13 | Concord Museum | 200 Lexington Road |
| 14 | Emerson House | 28 Cambridge Turnpike |
| 16 | Civil War Memorial | Monument Square |
| 18 | Concord Free Public Library | 129 Main Street |
| 20 | Robbins House | 320 Monument St |
| 21 | The Old Manse, John Brown spoke here, Frank Sanborn (“Secret Six” supporting Brown’s fight against slavery) lived here | 269 Monument St |

Terms & Maintenance:

To be determined.

Schedule/Timeline:

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| December '25: | Execute grant contract |
| January '26: | Engage Sign Maker and Historic Districts Commission in sign design. |
| February: | Finalize sign design. Draft sign text |
| March: | Discussions with property owners, community conversations. |
| April: | Complete review of sign text for historical accuracy and cultural appropriateness |
| May: | Secure final approvals from Historic Districts Commission, property owners, MOTT grant funder. |
| June: | Select Board final approval |
| July: | Fabrication of signs |
| August – September: | Installation of 8-10 permanent historical markers and a community launch event |

Context:

Communities across the country have been reclaiming and elevating their Black heritage through historic markers, interpretive signage, and designated districts, offering valuable models for Concord as we work to honor the full sweep of our own history.

Massachusetts Examples:

- New Bedford established the *Abolition Row Historic District*, which includes a Black Heritage Trail and the newly created *Abolition Row Park*. The initiative highlights the intertwined stories of Black and white abolitionists, preserves significant homes and landscapes, and provides accessible public interpretation through signage and guided tours.
- Boston's Black Heritage Trail, developed in partnership with the Museum of African American History and the National Park Service, uses interpretive signs and wayfinding to tell the story of the free Black community on Beacon Hill. The trail anchors a broader program of public history and preservation that has elevated sites such as the African Meeting House and the Abiel Smith School.
- Nantucket's African Meeting House and Black Heritage Trail, overseen by the Museum of African American History, include both site-based interpretation and a walking route that was developed through community partnerships and dedicated research.

National Examples:

- Charleston, South Carolina, through its *International African American Museum* and African American Historical Commission, installed interpretive signs across the city recognizing Gullah culture, the domestic slave trade, Reconstruction history, and free Black communities.
- Savannah, Georgia has a city-supported *Black Heritage Trail* with markers interpreting sites associated with the civil rights movement, early free Black neighborhoods, and African American leaders.
- Portsmouth, New Hampshire created the *African Burying Ground Memorial Park* that pairs a commemorative landscape with interpretive panels to publicly acknowledge and honor previously unmarked history.
- Richmond, Virginia’s “Slave Trail” uses wayfinding signs and interpretive markers to guide visitors along the historical path of the domestic slave trade, tying together research, archaeology, and public education.

With 22 documented sites in Concord that collectively illuminate the lives and contributions of Black and white residents — enslaved and free seeking emancipation for all — the installation of the first signs would be a meaningful, phased approach aligned with successful models across the country.

Approach:

The planning and implementation process for these signs will follow a model similar to the successful approach used for the 250th anniversary benches—an iterative, collaborative process that refines locations and design details with community and regulatory input.

To date, 22 potential Black Heritage sites have been documented through preliminary research. All 22 will be incorporated into accompanying materials, including digital content, printed guides, and educational resources, ensuring that the full scope of Concord’s Black history is represented regardless of sign placement.

Of these, 15 sites have been identified as appropriate candidates for interpretive signage. Working through outreach to property owners, community discussions, and formal review by relevant Town departments and committees—including a determination of appropriateness by the Historic Districts Commission—we will narrow this list to a final set of 8–10 sites for installation.

Interpretive text for each selected site will be developed with careful attention to historical accuracy, cultural sensitivity and appropriateness, and narrative clarity, and will undergo expert review before fabrication.