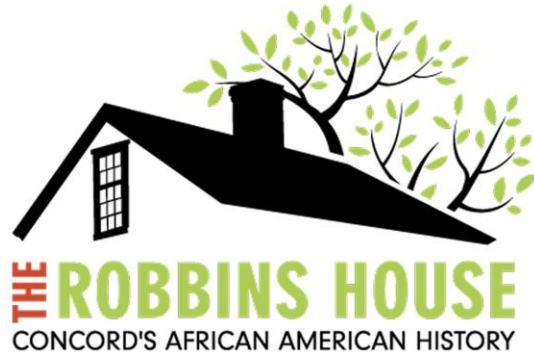


# Black Heritage Trail Markers Project

March 25, 2026



# Sponsors

The Robbins House  
Concord DEI Committee  
Concord Visitors Center  
Economic Vitality and Tourism  
Divisions  
Mass Office of Travel and Tourism

# Project Description

8 -10 trail markers

Centers Black heritage, including former Black residents and Concord's abolitionist history

Grounded in documented scholarship and community knowledge

Pilot-scale: modest, informative

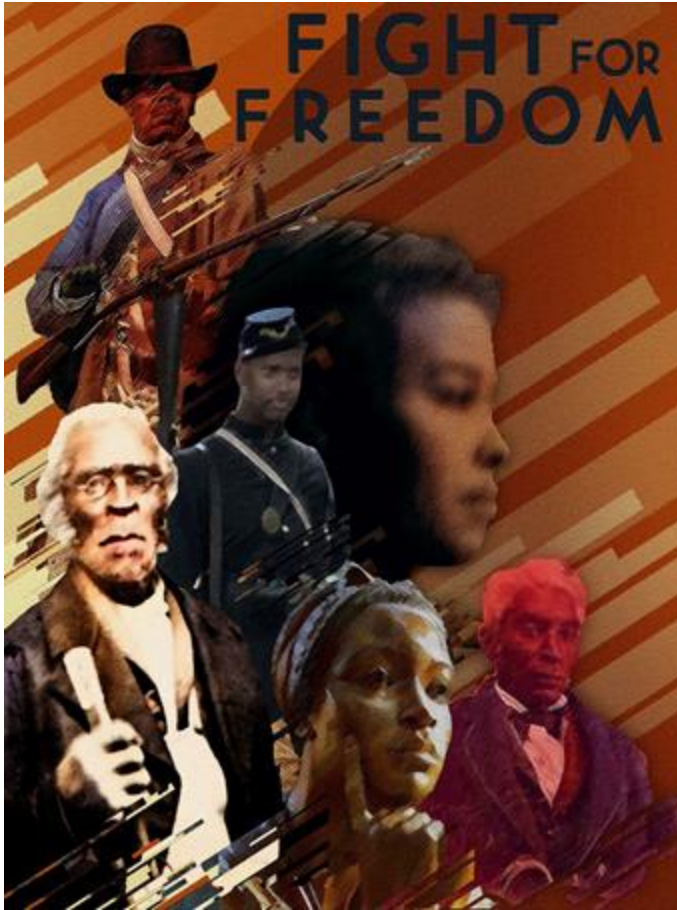
Designed as a coordinated set that work together

Functional trail markers, not historic or commemorative monuments

\$28K budget funded by MOTT, ARPA



# Why Black Heritage Visibility Matters



- Concord's celebrated history of liberty was shaped by Black and Native people — their story is largely invisible in our public landscape
- The stories we see determine who feels they belong
- Black history is not a footnote to Concord's story — it is foundational to it
- Visible history changes how residents and visitors understand this community
- The trail affirms Concord's commitment to being welcoming and honest about its past

# Selection of Locations

## Matrix to Assess Appropriateness

- Significance
- Agency
- Interpretative Power, Clarity
- Coherent Narrative
- Accessibility, Engagement



# Priority Locations

Site  
1



## The Great Field 40R Bedford St

In the 1700s and 1800s, the Great Field was home to a community of Black and Native Concordians living on the edge of town life. Families farmed small plots, harvested cranberries, and took on skilled work. In 1761, John Jack became Concord's first Black landowner. Caesar Robbins — a Patriot of Color — built a home here that became a refuge for others, including Jack Garrison Sr., a freedom seeker from New Jersey, who raised a family that left a lasting mark on Concord.

# Priority Locations

Site  
2



## Concord Town House 22 Monument Square

For thirty years, John Garrison Jr. was a familiar presence in and around this building. As Superintendent of the Town House beginning in 1862, he maintained Concord's government buildings — a position of real responsibility. John grew up in the Great Field neighborhood of Concord and the Garrison family lived in historic Robbins House, home to both the Robbins and Garrison families, whose histories are woven into Concord's story. John Jr's grandfather Caesar Robbins was a Revolutionary War veteran and Patriot of Color. John's wages here helped him build the cottage at 78 Monument St., still standing today.

# Priority Locations

Site  
3



## Universalist Meeting House 20 Lexington Road (Holy Family Church)

On October 12, 1841, Frederick Douglass—newly free and emerging as a powerful abolitionist voice—spoke at Concord's Universalist Meeting House during a Middlesex County Anti-Slavery Society meeting. He was invited by the Concord Female Anti-Slavery Society, led by Mary Merrick Brooks, Helen Thoreau, and Susan Garrison, the mother of John and Ellen Garrison. Though abolitionists were a minority in town, the event strengthened local and national anti-slavery efforts. Douglass would return to Concord to speak several more times.

# Priority Locations

Site  
4

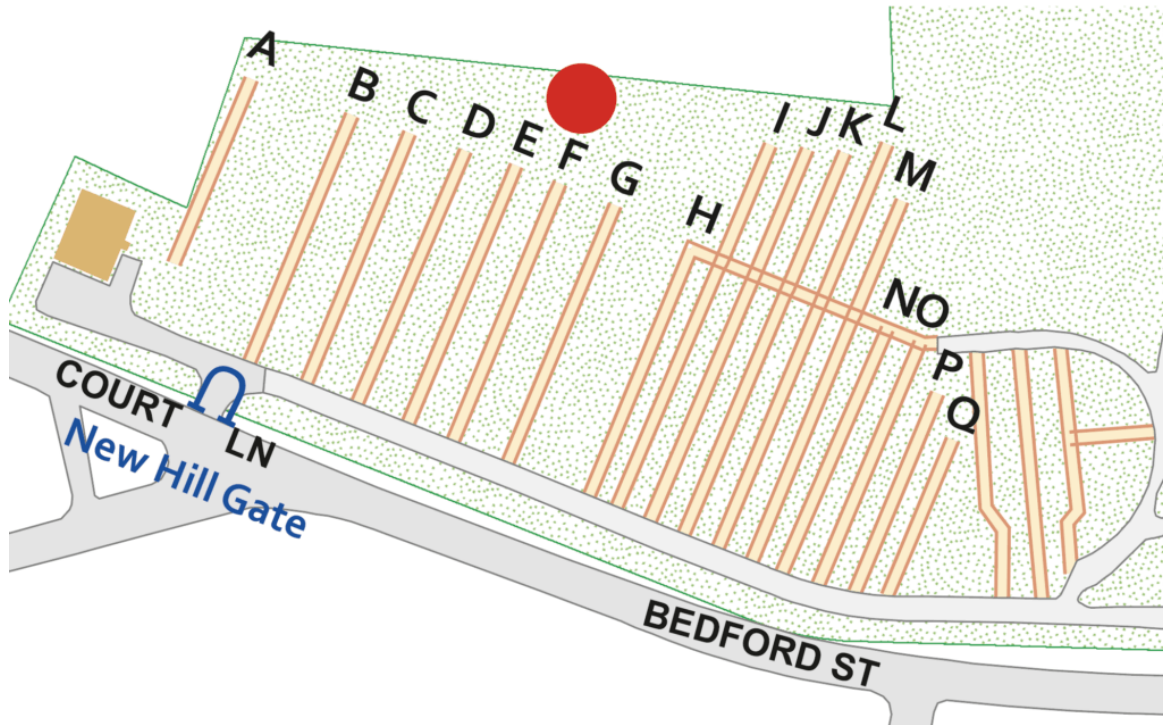


## Old Hill Burying Ground Monument Square

John Jack was born in Africa around 1706 and spent much of his life enslaved. He earned his freedom, bought land in Concord, and became the first formerly enslaved person to own land here. His gravestone features an epitaph written by Loyalist lawyer Daniel Bliss that highlights the contradiction between America's ideals of liberty and the reality of slavery. It is one of the few known pre-Revolutionary grave markers for a free Black man in North America.

# Priority Locations

Site  
5



## Sleepy Hollow Cemetery: Bedford Street

The Northeast Corner of this cemetery has the lot designated by Concord's Town Meeting in 1824 for the burial of Black residents. Families whose names appear throughout the Concord Black Heritage Trail — Garrison, Robbins, and others — were laid to rest here. For generations their graves went unmarked. Ongoing research, including recently rediscovered cemetery records, have begun to identify who is buried here and restore their names to Concord's history.

# Priority Locations

Site  
6



## The Center School 58 Monument Sq (Masonic Lodge)

Ellen Garrison and her brother John attended this public school. Their parents — Jack, a freedom seeker from New Jersey, and Susan, the child of formerly enslaved parents — had both been denied an education in their youth. They made sure their children had the opportunities they never did. Ellen was a student here and just 12 years old when she marched in a Concord parade hand-in-hand with her white schoolmate "beneath the gaze of curiosity, surprise, ridicule and admiration."

# Priority Locations

Site  
7



## Trinitarian Congregational Church 54 Walden Street

Just two years after this church was founded, Susan Robbins Garrison transferred her membership here from the African Baptist Church on Beacon Hill — choosing a congregation committed to antislavery activism and where Black and white children learned side by side. She enrolled her children, including Ellen, in the Sabbath School alongside six other Black children and their white peers. Ellen later credited her "good Common School and Sabbath School education" when she applied in 1865 to teach newly freed people in the South.

# Priority Locations

Site  
8



## Francis & Ann Bigelow House 19 Sudbury Road

In 1851, Shadrach Minkins became the first person rescued from federal custody under the Fugitive Slave Act. Boston's Black community organized his escape, and Minkins found refuge here at 19 Sudbury Road on his journey north to freedom in Canada. Just steps away lived Mary Merrick Brooks, leader of Concord's Female Anti-Slavery Society, and Franklin Sanborn, who helped fund John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry — neighbors united in the national fight against slavery.

# Priority Locations

Site  
9



## Col William Whiting House 169 Main Street

Harriet Tubman visited Concord three times. On her 1859 visit she stayed in this house as a guest of the Whiting family and spoke at a public meeting, bringing her firsthand experience of slavery and resistance directly to local audiences. The Whitings were deeply connected to the freedom network Tubman helped build — sheltering people escaping enslavement and linking Concord to the national fight for emancipation.

# Priority Locations

Site  
10



## Garrison Homestead 78 Monument Street

The Garrison family first settled on this hill in 1837, making their home in a derelict windmill before building this cottage — a multigenerational refuge for one of Concord's most prominent Black families. John Garrison Jr., grandson of Caesar Robbins, a Revolutionary War veteran and Patriot of Color, built the cottage using wages from his job maintaining Concord's Town House. His sister Ellen taught at Freedmen's Schools in the South. John died in 1872 and was buried without a headstone in the Northeast Corner of New Hill Burying Ground — the lot set aside by the town for Black residents.

# Priority Locations

Site  
11



## John Cuming, Brister Freeman House 998 Elm Street

Brister Freeman — enslaved here, given as a wedding gift to Dr. John Cuming — fought for American independence, proclaimed his own freedom, and went on to purchase land in Walden Woods, building a life so remarkable that Thoreau compared him to a great Roman general.

# Priority Locations

Site  
12



## Brister and Fenda Freeman House 55 A Walden St (Town Forest)

Brister Freeman — formerly enslaved, Revolutionary War veteran — purchased this land in Walden Woods in 1792 and built a home here with his wife Fenda, joining other Black families who created a small community in these woods.

# Priority Locations

Site  
13



## Dugan Neighborhood Jennie Dugan Brook on Bruce Freeman Rail Trail

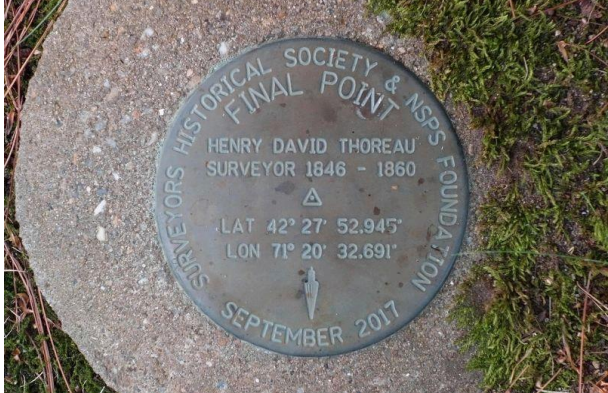
Thomas Dugan arrived in Concord around 1791, self-emancipated from Virginia, and built a life here as a landowner and skilled farmer respected by his neighbors — the brook still carries the name of his wife Jennie, and their son George gave his life with the 54th Massachusetts Regiment in 1863.

# Design Considerations

- ✓ Compatible with Concord's landscape
- ✓ Cohesive set of shared visual identity
- ✓ Appropriate for variety of settings
- ✓ Durable
- ✓ Installation standards for public realm



# Compatible with Existing Signage

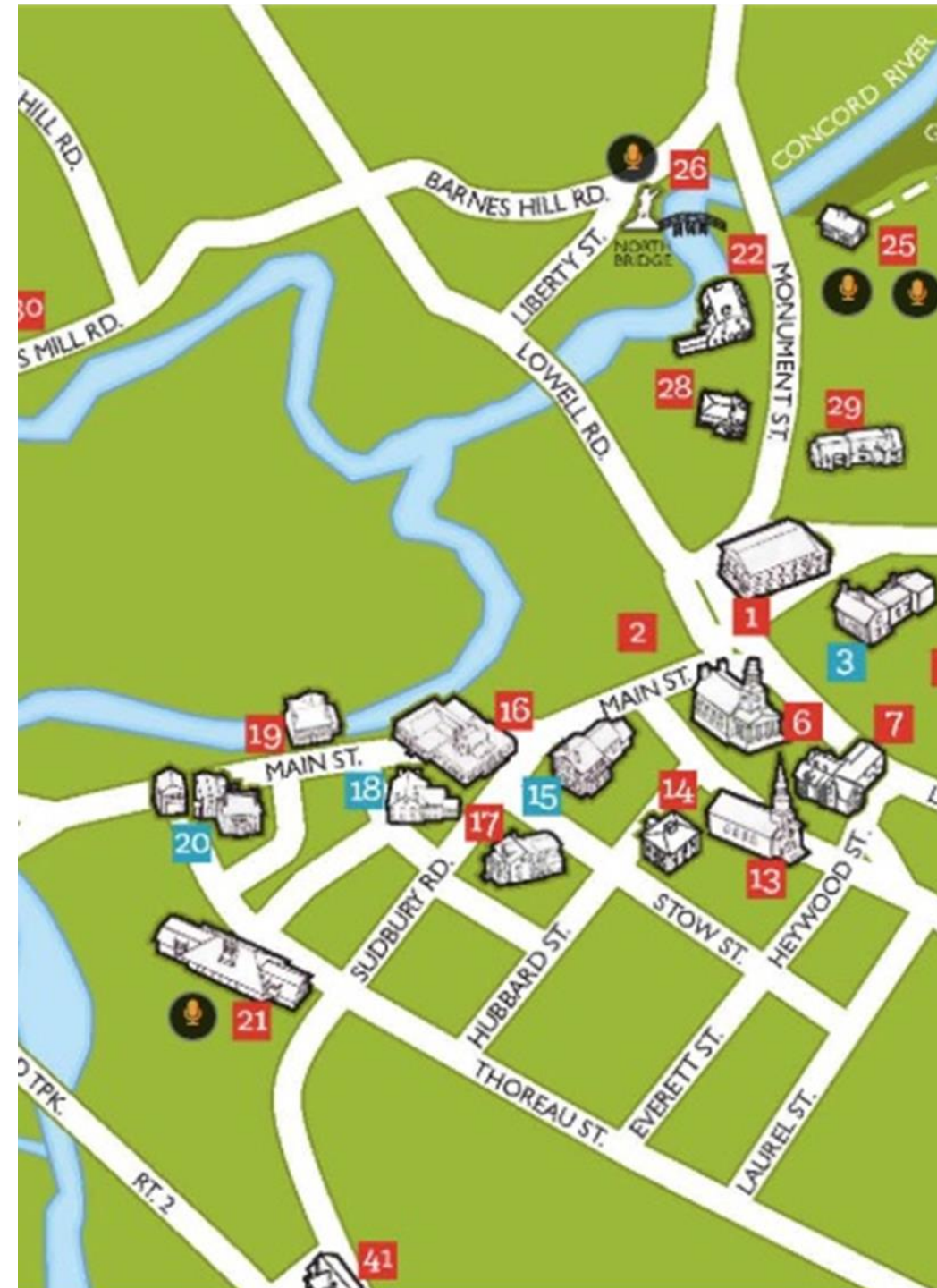


# Design Considerations

Relatively short term

- Replacement due to vandalism
- Living history with active scholarship requiring updated content

Communicate identity as a trail marker



# Design Vernacular for Trail Markers



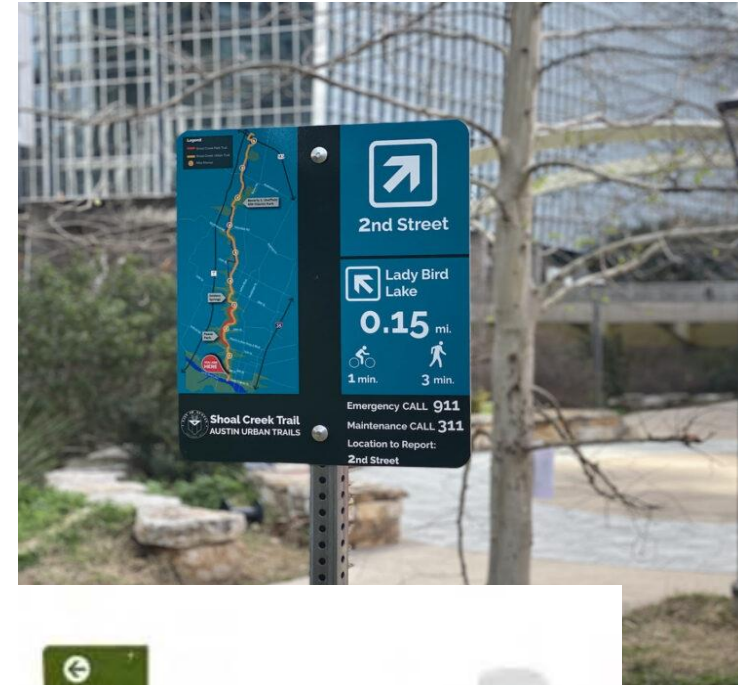
Flexibility/Updating/Shorter Term

# Aluminum Signs



# Approach for Graphics and Photos and QR codes

## Digital Printing





# Patriots Day Community Engagement

"Lawn signs" at select sites  
and tabling during Block  
Party event



Portrait, John Garrison, Jr.

# Questions and Reflection

What resonates?  
What excites you?  
What questions remain?