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**Old North Church & Historic Site Welcomes Chelsea Millsap as the 1st Female Sexton in 300 Years
National Landmark Begins Major Renovation and Restoration Project on Historic Crypt**



BOSTON, Mass. – For the first time in Old North Church’s 300-year history a woman will hold the position of Sexton. Chelsea Millsap, 32, will begin her tenure by managing a major renovation and restoration of the crypt underneath Boston’s oldest surviving and operational church to be completed by Halloween season.

The Old North Church Sexton works behind the scenes and underground to maintain the church and parish buildings on the campus of Old North Church & Historic Site. The pews must be cleaned for congregation members and visitors. Church equipment, like the 18th century Avery-Bennett Clock and the brass in the 75-piece chandeliers, must be cared for and official duties must be performed throughout the year, such as tolling a bell during special occasions and climbing the stairs of the famous steeple to light the lanterns to commemorate Old North’s role in igniting the American Revolution. But perhaps the most unique and most often asked about duty is the maintenance of the crypt.

Old North Church’s crypt is home to 37 tombs and is the final resting place for approximately 1,100 individuals. When constructed in 1723, the church didn’t have space for a graveyard, so nine years after Old North Church opened, a single tomb was excavated under the sanctuary and additional tombs were added over time. Burials in the crypt took place between 1732 and 1860, when the church began complying with a city ordinance that banned indoor burials. Notable people interred in the crypt include the Rev. Timothy Cutler, Old North’s first and longest-serving minister; Captain Samuel Nicholson, the first commander of the USS Constitution; and Major John Pitcairn, a British Major who died at the Battle of Bunker Hill. The renovation and restoration project will include repointing and replacing historic bricks, lowering the floor for accessibility, and replacing tomb doors.

"The Sexton is an incredibly important role at Old North, serving both the church and historic site and connecting a nearly 300-year lineage of caretakers," says Nikki Stewart, Old North Foundation Executive Director. "Chelsea is joining us at a time when several capital projects, such as the crypt renovation, are underway in preparation for the 300th anniversary of the church in 2023 and the 250th anniversary of the lantern signals in 2025. Chelsea’s passion for public history and historic preservation will ensure that Old North Church carries on for generations to come."

The Old North Foundation of Boston is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that is responsible for historic site operations and interpretative, educational, and preservation programs at the iconic Old North Historic Site. The foundation is independent of the church and congregation.



Millsap, a Detroit, Mich. native, is now living on Old North Church & Historic Site's campus in the 1715 Clough House, one of Boston's oldest surviving brick residences. She brings a decade of experience in fire prevention, security technology and project management. The daughter of a software engineer and stay-at-home mom, the self-identified middle child is proud to continue breaking barriers for women as she was the only female firefighter in her former department outside of Detroit. The Old North Church Sexton position marries her love for learning and American history with her drive to protect people and preserve property. A member of the Daughters of the American Revolution Paul Revere Chapter, the new Massachusetts resident occasionally visits her ancestor, Mary Chilton, the first female off of the Mayflower to land at Plymouth Rock at 12-years-old, who is buried at King's Chapel in Boston.

Built in 1723, the Old North Church's enduring fame began on the evening of April 18, 1775, when the church's sexton, Robert Newman, and vestryman Capt. John Pulling, Jr. climbed the steeple and held high two lanterns as a signal that the British troops were heading to Lexington and Concord by sea across the Charles River. The lantern signal was a message arranged by Paul Revere, who set off on his legendary ride that night--a night that helped launch the American Revolutionary War. In 1860, on the brink of the United States Civil War, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow penned "Paul Revere's Ride," citing the Old North Church, to appeal to Northern readers' patriotism and rally readers behind the abolitionist cause with the tale of a hero who bravely stepped forward to change the course of history. Once again, the Old North Church helped to inspire a nation.

"What an incredible opportunity to be able to sit in the very same pew as Robert Newman and in a world that is so divided to work in a place that welcomes all people from Bostonians to world dignitaries, like the Queen," says Millsap. "I could have been the one to hang the lanterns 247 years ago. It is such an honor to show women that they too can hold these sorts of jobs. I can't wait to see the transformation of the crypt and continue to dive into Old North's ties to enslavement and active citizenship during periods of division for our country."

This summer, Old North Church & Historic Site will be open to visitors Tuesday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and from 12:30 p.m. to 5 p.m. on Sunday. Holiday hours may vary. Tickets will be offered at \$5 per person. Self-guided tours give an in-depth view of the building that once served wealthy merchants, government officials, and skilled tradesmen. Visitors can walk through box pews, admire the 17th century angels flanking the church's 1759 organ, and learn about the experiences of free and enslaved Black congregants. Tours of the gallery will be an additional \$5. All visitors must adhere to all CDC health and safety guidelines. For more information or to purchase tickets in advance, visit: www.oldnorth.com.

About The Old North Foundation of Boston / Old North Church and Historic Site

Established in 1991, The Old North Foundation of Boston is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that is responsible for historic site operations and interpretative, educational, and preservation programs at the iconic Old North Church and Historic Site. A secular organization that is independent of Christ Church in the City of Boston, Old North Foundation welcomes approximately 500,000 visitors annually while overseeing the use and preservation of an enduring symbol of American independence. The Foundation serves a wide audience by creating meaningful experiences through educational outreach, site-specific programming, and historical analysis. Old North Foundation works collaboratively with the church congregation, the U.S National Park Service, the Freedom Trail Foundation, and other non-profits to foster educational and interpretive programs for students and visitors while engaging the public in Old North Church's history and its role in inspiring liberty and freedom. For more information, visit: www.oldnorth.com.

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