



Old North Church Celebrates 300th Anniversary with “Sparking Revolutions” New Exhibit Explores the Historic Site’s Role in American Revolution and Ties to Enslavement

BOSTON, Mass. – Known for Paul Revere’s “two if by sea” signal lanterns on the eve of the Battles of Lexington and Concord, Old North Church has witnessed the shifts and complex arcs over three centuries of American history. In celebration of the church’s 300th anniversary, Old North Illuminated, which operates Old North Church Historic Site, has opened “Sparking Revolutions: Lanterns, Leadership, and the Evolving Legacy of Old North Church” which presents Old North as a microcosm of America’s unfinished work; examining the church’s prominent role in the American Revolution alongside its deep ties to enslavement and colonialism.

“Sparking Revolutions” engages visitors through a series of panels, installed in Old North’s unique box pews, that weave together the story of the lantern signals, the church’s construction and architecture, historical context about life in colonial Boston, and biographies of notable congregants. The exhibit reveals how Old North and its congregation have changed and evolved against the backdrop of a growing city, a revolution that brought freedom to some and left others behind, and shifting conceptions of what it means to be an American. “Sparking Revolutions” incorporates accessible design elements to better serve visitors with differing abilities. The development of “Sparking Revolutions” was funded by the Yawkey Foundation.

The new permanent exhibit is a culmination of a year-long research project spearheaded by former Old North Illuminated Research Fellow Dr. Jaimie D. Crumley. She and a small team of interns pored over archival documents at the Massachusetts Historical Society, the Boston Athenaeum, and other libraries to learn about Black and Indigenous peoples’ experiences at Old North in 18th and 19th-century New England. “Sparking Revolutions” brings the stories of those often excluded in the church’s broader historical narrative to life.

“Like many historic sites in the Northeast, Old North Church sits at a paradoxical intersection of freedom and unfreedom,” says Nikki Stewart, Executive Director of Old North Illuminated. “To many, the steeple is an icon of American liberty and independence. Yet, the church was built in part with the proceeds of human trafficking and enslavement, which filled the coffers of early congregants who worshiped according to social hierarchy in a neighborhood where successive waves of immigrants have come to pursue the American dream. We feel a responsibility to educate and foster conversations about the complexity of our nation’s past and the ways in which our history contributes to persistent inequity today.”

“Sparking Revolutions” is one piece of a larger effort to tell Old North Church’s story more accurately. Dr. Crumley’s research into the lives of Black and Indigenous congregants at Old North has also been shared in an online video series, *Illuminating the Unseen*; incorporated into guided tours of the sanctuary’s balcony, where Black and Indigenous congregants were once restricted to segregated seating; and highlighted in new self-guided audio tours of the church’s sanctuary.

“Museums and historic sites have an obligation to fully explore the past, and to develop programming that reflects the stories, struggles, and hopes of all Americans,” says Stewart. This April, Old North Church & Historic Site was designated as a Site of Conscience by the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience (ICSC). Founded in 1999, the ICSC is the only global network of historic sites, museums, and memory initiatives that connects past struggles to today’s movements for human rights.

Old North Church Historic Site is open to visitors Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and from 11:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Sunday. Holiday hours may vary. Tickets are 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. An immersive audio tour is available in English or Spanish for an additional \$3. Guided tours of the bell ringing chamber; sanctuary gallery, where Black and Indigenous congregants once sat; and nearby Copp’s Hill Burying Ground are offered for an additional \$5 per tour. For more information or to purchase tickets in advance, visit: www.oldnorth.com.



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About Old North Illuminated / Old North Church Historic Site

Established in 1991 as the Old North Foundation, Old North Illuminated 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 Historic Site. A secular organization that is independent of Christ Church in the City of Boston, Old North Illuminated welcomes approximately 500,000 visitors annually while overseeing the preservation of an enduring symbol of American independence. Old North Illuminated serves a wide audience by creating meaningful experiences through educational outreach, site-specific programming, and historical analysis. ONI works collaboratively with the City of Boston, the U.S National Park Service, the Freedom Trail Foundation, and other partners 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 active citizenship. For more information, visit: www.oldnorth.com.

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