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Foundation for MetroWest Funds Lexington Slavery Interpretation

Discussing slavery in New England is challenging. Black New Englanders, both free and enslaved, were far more visible in the 18th century than many modern visitors to a town like Lexington might expect. Lexington Historical Society is committed to changing how Lexington's history is presented so visitors and residents alike can appreciate the rich diversity that has characterized this town since the 17th century.

The Foundation for MetroWest has generously and enthusiastically supported a grant application to expand the historical exhibit at the Hancock-Clarke House by incorporating the stories of enslaved individuals. Lexington Historical Society Executive Director Erica McAvoy says, "the Foundation's support means that an imperative project like this could get off the ground in a year of decreased revenue and financial austerity. We are grateful for their confidence in this project."

Other local history organizations like the [Royall House & Slave Quarters](#) and the [Robbins House](#) have been in the vanguard of interpreting the lives of enslaved and free Black people on their properties. Lexington Historical Society looks forward to following their lead and doing our part to uncover Black history in Lexington.

A working group has met about this project since the winter of 2019. It was vital to the Historical Society to reach outside our historical experience for this project and work with Black residents and historians to craft this essential interpretative change. This well-qualified group includes:

- [Dr. Robert Bellinger](#) - Project Scholar; Associate Professor of History; Director, Black Studies Program; Director, Clark Collection of African American Literature, Suffolk University
- [Anne Grady](#) – Former Chair of [Lexington Historical Commission](#); past member of the [Massachusetts Historical Commission](#); Fellow at [Massachusetts Historical Society](#)
- [Dr. Veronique Helenon](#) – Author of [French Caribbeans in Africa: Diasporic Connections and Colonial Administration, 1880-1939](#)
- Denise Moehring - Education Coordinator at the [Royall House & Slave Quarters](#)
- Interested local residents (Lexington and beyond)
- [Lexington Historical Society](#) staff, tour guides, Board members
- Representatives from:
 - [Association of Black Citizens of Lexington](#)
 - [Follen Community Church](#)



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Staff, volunteers, and expert consultants will update the Hancock-Clarke House tour, design new interpretive materials, and change the physical exhibits both in the house's orientation room and in the furnished part of the historic home. Tour guides and house greeters will receive comprehensive training in slavery interpretation and cultural sensitivity around these challenging histories.

Some work will also be done to update the tour at Buckman Tavern, but the bulk of the interpretive efforts will focus on the guided tour at Hancock-Clarke House. This was not only the home of Rev. John Hancock and Rev. Jonas Clarke, but also of Jack and Dinah, the enslaved people who worked for them. By introducing the stories of Jack and Dinah into the house where Patriot leaders gathered on the eve of the Battle of Lexington, we will encourage visitors to think about the meaning of freedom and liberty and how they were viewed by all people living in Lexington.

Jack and Dinah's stories will also serve as a window to the life of an enslaved person living in Lexington and the New England area. Dr. Bellinger's research in this area will build on previous studies and provide new resources for future scholarship. The COVID-19 pandemic has naturally slowed progress on the project, but we plan for the Slavery Interpretation Project to go public in spring 2022. Stay tuned for updates!

About Lexington Historical Society: Founded in 1886, Lexington Historical Society is an independent non-profit passionate about preserving Lexington's history and sharing it with the public. The mission of the Historical Society is to be a premier interpreter of the events of April 1775, and the faithful steward of all of the town's history through time. For more information, visit www.lexingtonhistory.org.

About Foundation for MetroWest: Established in 1995, the Foundation for MetroWest is the only community foundation serving the 33 cities and towns in the region. We promote philanthropy in the region, help donors maximize the impact of their local giving, serve as a resource for local nonprofits and enhance the quality of life for all our residents. Since inception, the Foundation has granted \$19 million to charitable organizations and currently stewards more than \$26 million in charitable assets for current needs and future impact. To learn more, please visit www.foundationmw.org.