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National Park Service Invests \$1.7 million into Old North Church & Historic Site to Fund Accessibility Upgrades and Capital Improvements in Advance of the Nation's Semiquincentennial Celebration in 2026

BOSTON – The nation's semiquincentennial – the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence in July 2026 - is rapidly approaching. In anticipation of the 250th anniversary of Old North Church's "two if by sea" lantern signal that famously ignited the American Revolution with Paul Revere's midnight ride, Old North Illuminated, which operates Old North Church & Historic Site, is making major accessibility upgrades thanks to funding totaling over \$1.7 million from the National Park Service.

Accessibility upgrades include:

- Installing an accessibility ramp to bypass the only stairs along the Freedom Trail, located on Old North's campus.
- Installing an entry ramp to the crypt, providing access to one of the church's most popular tours.
- Reconfiguring the ramp at the Old North Church entrance to meet code requirements.
- Repairing the staircases used to access the galleries in the church's sanctuary. The north gallery is one of the primary locations within the historic site for sharing the stories of Old North's 18th century Black and Indigenous community.
- Repairing and repointing masonry at the rear of Old North Church.
- Refurbishing the railings along the Third Lantern Garden and installing ADA compliant handrails.

Making Old North's campus more accessible to visitors is critical in ensuring that the history of Old North Church and its ongoing role in shaping America's past and present are shared for generations to come. Designated a Site of Conscience by the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience in 2023, the national landmark located in the heart of the North End is one of the most frequently visited attractions along Boston's famous Freedom Trail.

"We have 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," says Nikki Stewart, Old North Illuminated Executive Director. "For the semiquincentennial, visitors will come to Old North to learn the seminal story of Paul Revere's ride and the events leading up to the Battles of Lexington and Concord. They will also learn about Old North's early Black and Indigenous community, and the roles that enslavement and colonialism played in our nation's development. To prepare for this milestone, we are making significant investments in the accessibility of both our programming and our campus."

In 2023, Old North Illuminated launched "*Sparking Revolutions: Lanterns, Leadership, and the Evolving Legacy of Old North Church*," a new permanent exhibit in Old North Church's sanctuary. The exhibit incorporates accessible design elements, including high-contrast colors and easy-to-read font, to better serve visitors with differing abilities. Additionally, the text from the exhibit panels is available in large print binders for visitors who may have difficulty reading smaller text. The exhibit content can also be listened to as narration on the Bloomberg Connects app. The development of *Sparking Revolutions* was funded by the Yawkey Foundation.

Last year, Old North Illuminated also introduced new handheld audio guides to enhance the historic site's self-guided tours of the church's sanctuary. The guide contains 35 minutes of content in English or Spanish and is particularly useful for visitors who learn best by listening, or those who may have difficulty reading exhibit signage. The script for the audio guide is also available upon request. This project was funded by the Lynch Foundation and the Richard and Susan Smith Family Foundation.

OLD NORTH CHURCH & HISTORIC SITE



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Due to the historic nature of Old North Church, some spaces – such as the steeple and balconies – will always require climbing stairs. Thanks to a partnership with UMass Boston, a virtual reality tour is available to allow history fans to explore its unique spaces from the comfort of home: <https://www.oldnorth.com/virtual-360-tour/>.

The new accessibility upgrades are being supported in part by a \$97,260 Semiquincentennial grant from the Historic Preservation Fund administered by the National Park Service, Department of the Interior; with significant funding of \$1,619,128 provided by the National Park Service Recreation Fee Program, which supports projects that improve resource conditions so that visitors can enjoy safe and memorable experiences in their national parks. Federal funding for grants awarded from the Historic Preservation Fund is derived from Outer Continental Shelf oil and gas lease revenue, not tax dollars.

"As partners in stewardship of public spaces across this revolutionary city, National Parks of Boston is committed to providing meaningful experiences that invite all people to consider where we have been and feel empowered to envision and shape our future," said Superintendent Michael Creasey. "The upgrades to Old North Church will ensure that this storied place is more welcoming, comfortable, and engaging for all. This is a particularly important investment as we commemorate the 250th anniversaries of events leading up to and including the founding of the nation."

This fall, Old North Church & Historic Site will be open to visitors Monday 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. Visitors can explore Old North Church's beautiful sanctuary and new exhibit, the historic crypt where 1,100 souls were laid to rest, and the bell ringing chamber where Paul Revere rang bells as a teenager. For more information or to purchase tickets in advance, visit: www.oldnorth.com.

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 liberty and freedom. In 2023, Old North Church & Historic Site was designated as a Site of Conscience by the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience (ICSC), joining a global network of historic sites, museums, and memory initiatives that connect past struggles to today's movements for human rights. For more information, visit: www.oldnorth.com.

About National Parks of Boston, National Park Service

The National Parks of Boston is a collection of three National Park Service sites – Boston National Historical Park, Boston African American National Historic Site, and Boston Harbor Islands National and State Park. Established by individual legislation and for designated purposes, the three units have come together under a unified organizational umbrella to collaborate in ways that celebrate our cultural heritage, reconnect people to history and nature, and provide outdoor recreation opportunities on land and on the water. For more information on the National Parks of Boston, visit: www.nps.gov/bost, www.nps.gov/boaf, and www.bostonharborislands.org.

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