The Life & Library of Robert Morris, America's Second Black Lawyer
OUR VALUE PROPOSITION

AALL is dedicated to supporting the career development needs of law librarians through quality educational programming and events designed specifically for legal information professionals.

AALL embraces law librarians in all stages of their careers to provide exceptional experiences, tools for success and premier services to support professional growth.
Our Team

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and Curator of Rare Books,
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WITH THANKS TO
Mary Sarah Bilder
Nick Szydlowski
Stephanie Farne
Introduction

● Basic plan for the session
  ○ Intro to Robert Morris
  ○ The Morris Library
  ○ Why & How of a Digital Exhibit
  ○ Web tools
  ○ Impact
Contextualization

- Jesuit Catholic school
- Founded in 1863
- Student body: children of Irish immigrants
- Mission
- Broadening the narrative
Robert Morris
June 8, 1824/5–December 12, 1882

• Born in Salem, MA
• Apprenticed with Ellis Gray Loring
• Admitted to Mass Bar on Feb. 2, 1847
• Early antislavery & civil rights activism
• Married wife Catharine in 1846
• Robert Jr. (1848-1882) became a lawyer
A Community of Activists: Abolition & Beyond

Morris's Circle

- Catharine H. Mason Morris
- Robert Morris jr.
- Frederick Douglass
- William Lloyd Garrison
- Ellis Gray Loring
- Harriet Bell Hayden
- Lewis Hayden
- Benjamin Roberts
- Charles Sumner
- Richard Henry Dana Jr.
- William Cooper Nell
- Lydia Maria Child
- Edwin G. Walker
- Patrick A. Collins
- Emery T. Morris
Equal School Rights: 
Roberts v. City of Boston

- Filed one year after admission to bar
- Hired to represent 5-year-old Sarah Roberts
- Worked on school desegregation in Salem
- Hires Charles Sumner to help on appeal
- Loss at MA Supreme Judicial Court
- Connections to Plessy & Brown v. Board
- Eventual success with legislature

From the Roberts Writ, SJC Archives
The Rescue of Shadrach Minkins

- Fugitive Slave Act of 1850
- Fugitive from slavery in Virginia
- Arrested by Feb. 15, 1851
- Morris & others go to courthouse
- Escape followed by multiple indictments & trials
To the books!
Morris’s Library

- One of the only extant, antebellum African American-owned libraries
- Most law books not found (yet)
- Giving & receiving books
- Wide variety of topics
Contents

Walker's Appeal
Rights of Colored Americans to Equal Rights and Privileges Without Discrimination. This includes anti-slavery literature.

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave.
Written by himself.
Boston: Published at the Anti-Slavery Office, 1845.

DRED;
A TALE OF THE GREAT BOMBAY SWAMP.

Journal of a Voyage from Boston to the West Coast of Africa:
With a Full Description of the Manners of Trading with the Savages on the Coast.

The Federalist,
On the New Constitution, Published in the Year 1788.
By Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, with an Appendix.

Heroes and Poems of Phillis Wheatley,
A Native Citizen of Africa, and Poems by a Slave.

My dear Mr. Morris,

I sent Mr. Baker to procure a map. I did not get any answer till last night, and I went to Philadelphia on Sunday night. Mr. B. reported that the Harbor Commissioners told him the matter belonged to the Harbor Committee, and the latter says it belonged to the former. If the Committee is correct, a bill may have to be passed through the leg[islature], and it is too late to go in now. Moreover, the thing will be per[formed] in the legislative session, and I am too busy to go in now. The Committee is not satisfied with the 2,000,000 acres in the Pan-American. It does not agree with me. I am too busy to look after it. I am sorry I have not more time.

Sincerely yours,

Robert Morris

Robert Morris Papers, Boston Athenaeum
The Irish Lawyer

- Morris eulogy: about 75% of Morris’s clients were Irish
- Joining the Catholic Church
All the residue of my property I give to the church of the Immaculate Conception on Harrison Avenue in said Boston. I nominate John F. Manning of Boston to be executor of this will and I request that he be exempt from giving surety or sureties on his bond as such executor. In testimony whereof I hereunto set my hand and in the presence of three witnesses declare this to be my last will and testament, this third day of November A.D. 1895.

Catharine Morris.

Purses of gold were awarded as follows:

- Twenty-five dollars for Declamation to Michael Glennon.
- Twenty-five dollars for Reading to Stephen J. Hart.
- For the best Centennial Ode, a prize (the gift of Robert Morris, Jr., Esq.) was awarded to Patrick H. Callanan.

On the death of Robert Morris, Esq., in 1882, another department became a fortunate heir. As yet no provision had been made for the ordinary literature of our language; it was done by the studious and noble-hearted lawyer whose least title to remembrance is that he was the respected protegé of the Lorings, the Danas, the Sumners and Phileas.

Within the last year Miss Edith Agnes, the daughter of the late venerable Doctor Richard Henry Salter, has presented to the College of Irish genius, and a goodly treasure of Irish History and Biography.

we remember, is as follows: A couple of assassins had penetrated into the royal palace to slay the young prince. In the room of the queen there was a copy of the Kazanski Boje Matre, held in highest veneration by the Muscovites. At the sight of the murderers the mother seized her son. held him up before this picture and invoked Our Lady of Kazan, and instantly rays of keen and brilliant light darted from the eyes of the Madonna, dazed and blinded the ruffians, and enabled the queen to make her escape with her child.

Our picture is a piece of tapestry of fair design and gorgeous coloring, worked by the Oblate Sisters of Providence, in Baltimore, and donated to the College by Mrs. Catharine Morris, widow of the late Robert Morris, Esq.
Recovering the Morris Library

- How big was it?
- Continuing the search at BC
- Account book
- LibraryThing Legacy Library
The WHY and HOW of a Digital Exhibit
Robert Morris: Civil Rights Lawyer and Antislavery Activist

https://bc.edu/robert-morris
## Why a Digital Exhibit?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical Accessibility</th>
<th>Physical Exhibit</th>
<th>Digital Exhibit</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limited access <em>on-campus</em> in Newton, MA.</td>
<td>Unlimited free access <em>online</em>.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assumed Audience</th>
<th>Physical Exhibit</th>
<th>Digital Exhibit</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assumed <em>legal &amp; historical background</em>.</td>
<td>Developed for a secondary-school audience.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Content Breadth</th>
<th>Physical Exhibit</th>
<th>Digital Exhibit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td>Generally limited to <em>BC or other local collection items</em>.</td>
<td>Able to draw from <em>multiple geographically-distributed collections</em>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Website-Building: Tools & Strategies

**TOOLS**

- University Platforms
- Adobe Experience Manager
- Open Source Software
  - Timeline JS (Knight Lab)
  - StoryMap JS (Knight Lab)

**STRATEGIES**

- Using Pre-Made Tools
- Building on Prior Experience
- Collaborative Research
Tools:
Adobe Experience Manager (AEM)

- Content Management System (CMS)
- Drag-and-drop components
- Provides space to store files (images, documents, etc.)
- Same software used for the Law School and Law Library websites
Strategies: Adapting Existing Components

Alumni Profiles
Our alumni are dedicated and leading professionals driven by a desire to give back and help new students reach their career goals.

- https://www.bc.edu/content/bc-web/schools/law/careers/alumni.html

Morris's Circle

- https://www.bc.edu/content/bc-web/schools/law/sites/students/library/special-collections/robert-morris/morris-in-boston.html
Tools:

Timeline JS

- Open source interactive timeline
- Available via [timeline.knightlab.com](https://timeline.knightlab.com)
- Images and text pulled from a Google Sheet
- Minimal coding required
March 7, 1866

Parental Pride and the Family Business

Morris writes to U.S. Senator Charles Sumner, his former co-counsel, about the accomplishments of his son, Robert Jr. Years before, Sumner had helped secure a passport for the young man to study in France after a delay within the State Department "on account of his color." Morris expresses gratitude for Sumner's support on behalf of himself and Mrs. Morris. Robert Jr. returns home to Boston around 1870 and eventually joins his father's law practice.

https://www.bc.edu/robert-morris
Strategies: Building on Existing Skills

Past projects allowed library staff to develop relevant skills, including familiarity with HTML, CSS, and JavaScript.

https://github.com/BCLawLibrary
Tools: StoryMap JS

- Open source interactive, map-based slideshow
- Available via storymap.knightlab.com
- Intuitive interface (fillable fields, drag-and-drop location pins)
- Zero coding required
The Roberts Home (3 Andover Street)

In 1848, after his five-year-old daughter Sarah was ejected from the nearby public school and forced to walk to the Abiel Smith School, Boston printer Benjamin Roberts hired Robert Morris to file suit against the City of Boston. Morris argued that Sarah had been unlawfully excluded from the public school closest to her home. He explained that Sarah had to walk almost half a mile from the family’s home on Andover Street (today, the site of the Thomas P. O’Neill Federal Building, next to North Station) to the Smith School on Belknap Street in Beacon Hill. She passed five other primary schools along the way.

They lost at the trial and appellate levels, with the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ultimately adopting a “separate but equal” holding. It was a crushing loss for the Roberts family, Morris and his co-counsel Charles Sumner, and the broader community. In 1855, after continued lobbying by Morris and many others, the Massachusetts legislature essentially reversed the decision by enacting a statute that prohibited segregation in public schools. The Smith School closed soon thereafter.

https://www.bc.edu/content/bc-web/schools/law/sites/students/library/special-collections/robert-morris/morris-in-boston/storymap.html
Abiel Smith School (46 Belknap Street)

The Abiel Smith School at 46 Belknap (now Joy) Street became a focal point of civil rights activism for Boston's African American community, particularly during one of Morris's most important cases, Roberts v. City of Boston. Originally founded as the African School in 1812 in the lower floor of the African Meeting House, the school was established to educate African American students, who were refused entry to segregated white public schools. In the 1840s, tensions and protests intensified. Some Black Bostonians defended the Abiel Smith School, but many other parents and community members lamented its subpar conditions and the lack of funding. Activists like Morris, William Cooper Nell, and Benjamin Roberts organized protests and boycotts, pushing for the integration of public education. Visitors can still tour the site of the Smith School, which closed soon after the Massachusetts legislature prohibited segregation of public schools in 1855. The site is now operated by the Museum of African American History.

https://www.bc.edu/content/bc-web/schools/law/sites/students/library/special-collections/robert-morris/morris-in-boston/storymap.html
Strategies:
Collaborative Investigation

1. Laurel identified locations of interest.
2. As a group, cross-referenced locations between modern Boston maps and contemporary historical maps.
3. Made use of collective & individual familiarity with Boston’s history and geography as well as Boston Public Library resources.

https://www.atlascope.org/
Impact
Since launch in Nov 2021, we have had approximately:

- **11,000 total page views**
- **8,000 total visits**

(That’s an average of about 280 visitors per month!)

### Total Page Views, Nov 2021 - Feb 2024

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Page Views</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Robert Morris - Homepage</td>
<td>3,793</td>
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<tr>
<td>Antislavery Activism</td>
<td>1,479</td>
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<tr>
<td>Morris and the Early Civil Rights Movement</td>
<td>1,471</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religion and the Irish Community</td>
<td>1,397</td>
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<td>Morris’s Boston</td>
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<td>About Us</td>
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<td>516</td>
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<tr>
<td>StoryMap</td>
<td>799</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[https://www.tableau.com/community/public](https://www.tableau.com/community/public)
Distribution of users in the past year (Feb 2023 to Feb 2024):

US Users: 1,683
Non-US Users: 144

https://www.tableau.com/community/public
Not the end...
Questions and Answers

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davislp@bc.edu

Avi Bauer
bauerac@bc.edu

The digital exhibit:
bc.edu/robert-morris