

Boston exhibit illuminates stories of ‘Patriots of Color’ through genealogy for America’s 250th

By [Lauren Albano](#) Globe Correspondent, Updated April 23, 2026, 6:00 a.m.



Boston 04/17/2026 The Patriots of Color Exhibit has opened at the American Ancestors location on Newbury Street in the Back Bay. A silhouette of Cambridge student artist Preceous Gomez portraying Salem Poor, a Black man from Andover who fought in the American Revolution. John Tlumacki/Boston Globe JOHN TLUMACKI/GLOBE STAFF

American Ancestors, the nation’s oldest and largest genealogy society, Thursday unveiled a new exhibit, Patriots of Color, at the Family Heritage Experience museum in Back Bay.

The exhibit invites visitors to consider the role people of color played in shaping the nation’s founding 250 years ago.

It’s part of 10 Million Names, a research project to recover all the names of the men, women and children enslaved from the Colonial era until the end of slavery in 1865.

American Ancestors selected 75 patriots of color to create family trees, “tying the past and those stories from the Revolution to living descendants today,” said Ginevra Morse, chief of learning and interpretation at American Ancestors. The organization used “family history as a lens” to tell the broader human narrative, she added.

“We have millions of stories in the archives just waiting to be told,” Morse said.

Crispus Attucks, the first person killed in the American Revolution, is the first patriot honored in the exhibit. An 1832 copy of Paul Revere’s famous engraving of the Boston Massacre does not depict a Black person at the scene. While

future images of the engraving may alter the coloring to acknowledge Attucks' role, Morse said, Revere's original engraving demonstrates the obscuring of Black stories from the start of the nation's history.



Boston 04/17/2026 The Patriots of Color Exhibit has opened at the American Ancestors location on Newbury Street in the Back Bay. A copy of Paul Revere's engraving of the Boston Massacre sits in a glass case. John Tlumacki/Boston Globe JOHN TLUMACKI/GLOBE STAFF

The centerpiece of the exhibit features a large digital screen where viewers can read about 26 patriots of color from across the 13 original colonies. Student artists in the Teen Public Art Program at Cambridge's Community Art Center created original silhouettes of the 26 patriots.

Erin Muirhead McCarty, executive director of the art center, said the project reflects the values embraced by the students, , "which is ensuring that folks whose stories have been diminished or erased or relegated to the margins are being told through art."

Students researched the patriots' lives to imagine what they might have looked like before posing themselves for silhouette portraits, McCarty said.

McCarty said she could recognize students' noses and foreheads in certain images.

"This felt like a way of honoring people whose stories hadn't been told, and in doing that, honoring ourselves," McCarty said. "[The students are] really proud, and I think it made them a little bit more curious about their own histories."

The silhouettes were consistent with the time period, but Judy Lucey, special collections manager at American Ancestors. They also give viewers "the essence of a real person," she said.

"These were real people that participated in the Revolutionary War, and I think our role here is to really flesh out those stories," Lucey said.



Boston 04/17/2026 The Patriots of Color Exhibit has opened at the American Ancestors location on Newbury Street in the Back Bay. Family Heritage Experience Manager Jennifer Zanolli looks at an interactive touch screen that has a silhouette of Cambridge student artist Jason Talbot portraying Cato Fagan, one of the only black men from Delaware to serve in the Continental army between 1776 and 1778. John Tlumacki/Boston Globe JOHN TLUMACKI/GLOBE STAFF

Several artifacts document Black people in revolutionary America, such as a muster roll that listed soldiers of color with the rest of the regiment, and a family Bible that documented the births of children of an enslaved mother.

The organization also examined the stories of thousands of Black patriots who supported the loyalist cause. In 1772, slavery had been deemed illegal in England, so some people of color supported the loyalists with the hope of slavery also being outlawed in the colonies, Morse said.

“Fighting for freedom during this period had different meanings and different contexts,” Morse said.

Bridging the past and present is a core element of the exhibit, Morse said. In one display, American Ancestors showcases four patriots of color whose genealogy they traced to living descendants. Nanyehi, or Nancy Ward, a Cherokee political leader who advocated for peaceful coexistence with European Americans until her death in 1823, was traced to Academy Award winning actor Wes Studi, who starred in a play about Ward’s life.

Morse said she hopes patrons learn the “fuller scope” of the American Revolution, and “how the past is so present with us.”

Lucey hopes the archival work of American Ancestors allows people to connect with the patriots whose stories went untold for centuries.

“It’s our role as caretakers to also provide access, and broaden and strengthen that community memory, remembering these people and families,” Lucey said. “I’m always trying to bring out those hidden voices.”

Boston 04/17/2026 The Patriots of Color Exhibit has opened at the American Ancestors location on Newbury Street in the Back Bay. Guide Beck Green looks at the exhibit of four patriots who have living descendants. John Tlumacki/Boston Globe JOHN TLUMACKI/GLOBE STAFF