

Walk a Mile for Racial Unity

October 1, 2016

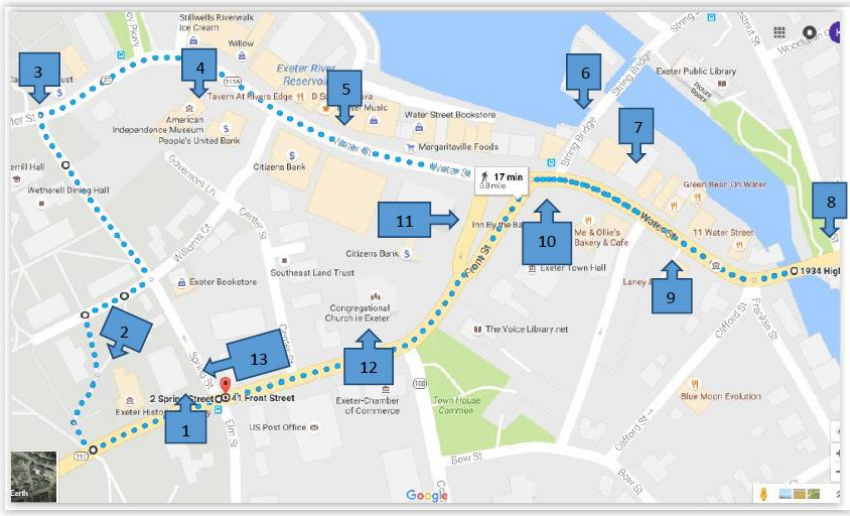
Exeter, NH

The Racial Unity Team invites you walk in the footsteps of African Americans and other minority people who have lived in Exeter, as well as those who were change agents in promoting racial equality.

Racial issues began when Exeter was officially settled in 1638 by British immigrants and the Squamscott and Algonquian people living in the area were displaced.

This tour will further explore how race has shaped Exeter's history and will, hopefully, open a dialog that will help shape its future.

After the Walk you are invited to return to the starting point, 2 Spring Street, where you can write and post your ideas about racial unity in Exeter. We will also have a short "town hall" meeting about how we today can promote racial unity in Exeter and beyond.



The numbers on the map correspond with numbered descriptions of importance to each site.

1: Start at The Red Brick Church (First Baptist) – Were there ever enslaved people in Exeter? Yes! Census records for Exeter indicate that in the year 1767 the population was 1,690 with 50 slaves and nine years later in 1776 the population was 1,741 and the number of slaves 38.

The present building was constructed in 1875. First Baptist was the first congregation in Exeter to admit Blacks to membership. The southeast corner of the first 1805 meeting house was reserved for “colored people.”

2: Phillips Exeter Academy – Exeter public schools were integrated, if only because it was impractical to segregate. Phillips Exeter Academy accepted students of color, although housing was kept separate.

In 1864 three students from Kentucky withdrew from the Academy rather than attend school with Emanuel Sullavou, a Black student from New Bedford, MA. Sullavou finished his studies in Exeter and went on to Harvard and Harvard Law School.

3: Corner of Spring & Water Streets – **Revolutionary War Pensioners:** Enslaved men were recruited for military service during the American Revolution. Granted freedom after the war, Exeter’s free Black population swelled. The 1790 census records 14 free Black families; 11 of these being headed by Revolutionary War pensioners.

In 1790 Exeter had New Hampshire’s greatest percentage of free Black population (4.8%). By comparison, the 2010 census records Exeter’s racial background: 95.5% white, 2.0% Asian, 1.6% mixed race, 0.6% African American, 0.2% “other race” and 0.01% Native American.

4: Water Street, across from Ladd-Gilman House (Independence Museum)

– As some of the early settlers established their own wealth, they accumulated slaves. One of those enslaved people lived at the Ladd-Gilman House during Nicholas Gilman, Sr.'s residency. According to his probate inventory, Gilman owned "a Negro Boy nam'd Bob" who was valued at 15 pounds in 1779. By 1790 only two slaves remained in Exeter.

In 1834 the women of Exeter joined a national campaign petitioning the US Congress to outlaw slavery and the slave trade in Washington, D.C. Congress chose not to act on these petitions and in 1836 passed a "Gag" rule to table all discussion about slavery.

5: 127 Water Street – It was possible for African Americans to be independent businessmen. On this site Rufus Cutler (son of Black Revolutionary War veteran, Tobias Cutler), his wife Anna Cilley Cutler and their son, John Cutler, owned a series of businesses on Water Street that included two restaurants, two dry goods stores and a billiard hall. John's sister Harriet married businessman George Harris of Philadelphia, and together they ran a grocery store. The Cutlers moved their business to Hampton Beach after a series of fires in the Exeter downtown in 1872. Another son, Nathaniel Cutler, was a local barber.

6: Old Mill Site on String Bridge – The Exeter Manufacturing Company cotton textile mill began production in 1830. The mill owners would not hire Black employees, instead hiring immigrant laborers from Quebec, Ireland, Poland and Germany—many of whom did not speak English.

Here you begin to see evidence of institutional racism being practiced. Exeter's African-Americans could read and write but could not find work. Difficulty finding work was the primary reason Exeter's Black population decreased during the 19th century.

7: The IOKA Theater – Ioka is a Squamscott word for "playground." The theater opened on November 1, 1915 with a heavily publicized viewing of D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*. The film, based on the book *The Clansman*, presented a romanticized view of slavery and the Ku Klux Klan. To publicize the film, owner Edward Mayer had two horsemen ride around town in KKK costumes. Although the NAACP took exception to the film, there is no evidence that it disturbed any Exeter residents.

8: At bridge near 4 Pleasant Street – This red brick building was where Robert Lincoln boarded when he attended Phillips Exeter Academy in 1859-60. Abraham Lincoln visited his son here during his 1860 visit.

Three years later during the Civil War, President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, which declared that "all persons held as slaves...shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free"—but it applied only to states designated as being in rebellion. The careful planning and release of this document ensured that it had a great positive impact on the Union efforts and redefined the purpose of the war. The Emancipation Proclamation continues to be a symbol of equality and social justice.

9: Near 42 Water Street – Where a bead shop and Chinese restaurant now stand once stood a Chinese hand laundry. Nearly every New England town had a laundry operated by a Chinese proprietor. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 prevented further immigration from China to the United States.

Chin Lee owned and operated the laundry in the early 20th century until his death—in the shop—in 1925 at the age of 62. He was never able to bring his wife or children to this country and was prevented by law from becoming a U.S. citizen.

10: Corner of Front & Water Streets – In 1989 a local Ku Klux Klan recruiter and five others in white Klan outfits and hoods marched through downtown with signs, “Save our land, join the clan.” In June 1990 they picketed a Racial Unity Day rally. Exeter took notice, and in August when the KKK marched in full regalia through town, they were faced with closed businesses and the bandstand and downtown festooned with yellow ribbons, balloons, shirts and paper tulips that read “Klanbuster.” Public rejection of the Klan presence resulted in the recruiter leaving NH in 1991.

11: Town Hall – The State of New Hampshire never formally abolished slavery, although there were no slaves counted in the state after the 1840 census.

It was in this building that during Abraham Lincoln’s visit to Exeter in 1860 his “A house divided against itself cannot stand.” message and his position on the resolution of the slavery question as vital to the survival of the nation was delivered to local residents.

Slavery was not officially illegal until passage of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution in 1865. New Hampshire did not have any laws prohibiting intermarriage and did not have legal segregation. However, businesses were allowed to deny service, and there were no protections for fair housing or hiring.

Minstrel shows with white musicians in blackface were a common and popular entertainment at Exeter’s Town Hall into the mid-20th century.

12: Congregational Church – In February of 1845 Exeter politician Amos Tuck led a meeting at the Congregational Church in Exeter to demand changes to the Democratic Party platform. Tuck and like-minded members—calling themselves Independent Democrats—wrote a series of resolutions opposed to the expansion of slavery into the new Western territories and particularly Texas. Tuck would later galvanize the Free Soil members of his party with other political party factions to form the anti-slavery Republican Party. By 1860 Tuck was a friend of Abraham Lincoln.

The pew Lincoln sat on at Second Parish Church is now located inside the Congregational Church.

13: Return to The Red Brick Church at 2 Spring Street.