

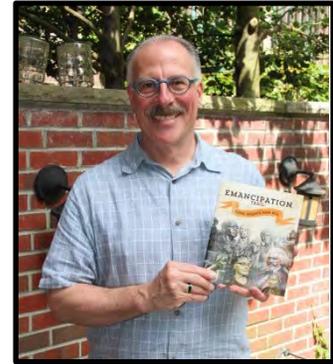
# A New Trail to Follow

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I love it when one person decides to do a good deed for the rest of us just because he or she is interested in a topic.

Vincent Licenziato, 64, of Phillips Street on Beacon Hill, decided to celebrate art, social justice and education by calling attention to the many statues and memorials around the city that honor those who helped free enslaved people. But there are also nods to many groups who have faced discrimination or a less-than-equal status. He leads walks, gives talks and, with the help of several contributors, has published a free guide, “Emancipation Trail: Civil Rights For All,” that individuals and families can use to help them appreciate and discuss the rich culture of emancipation to which Bostonians and others have contributed.



The trail he has devised goes beyond the Black Heritage Trail, which is mostly confined to Beacon Hill. It complements the Boston Women’s Heritage Trail, and dips into the American Revolution, when America was “emancipated” from England, and expands the celebration of black emancipation to the Back Bay, the South End, Roxbury, Mattapan and Boston City Hall Plaza with its towering statue of Bill Russell, who, I guess one could say, helped emancipate basketball.

“We have a complicated history in our country,” Licenziato said. “Each section tells a story that encourages people to have a dialogue.”

Licenziato became intrigued with the public art of emancipation when he listened to African Americans complain about the paternalistic statue of Abraham Lincoln with an enslaved man in Park Square, a replica of an original in Washington, D. C. The figure of Lincoln is majestic and dignified. The figure of the African American is less so, only partially clothed and in a subservient position.

Black Americans paid for the statue about a decade after Lincoln’s assassination, but it was designed by white guys more interested in what whites had done for blacks than what blacks had done for themselves, said Licenziato.

He began to research statues and what they portrayed. In doing so he found many statues beyond the Black Heritage Trail that portrayed history-makers in many ways—perfect for the kind of conversations he wanted to provoke. His narrative describes people as well known as the intrepid and persevering Harriet Tubman, whose statue is in the South End, to lesser known figures as A. Philip Randolph, a labor organizer for railroad workers in the 1920s.

Licenziato did not begin as a trail maker. His career has involved stints at several defunct companies, Filene's, Bay Banks and Shawmut Bank. Now he works in curriculum development in the pediatric department at Boston Medical Center. His department uses the hospital complex's research results to develop manuals and educational materials for its users. With that background the "Emancipation Trail" was easy for him to envision and put together.

His descriptions tell the history of the person portrayed, and questions that provoke discussion follow the descriptions.

Licenziato drops a chilling thought into his talks. The first enslaved African arrived in America in 1619, a year before the Pilgrims landed. It will be 2111 before Americans of African descent will have been free as long as they were enslaved.

Licenziato is available for talks and will lead groups on the trail for a fee, which goes to support the printing of his guides. He wanted to thank his friends in the Beacon Hill Scholars, as well as the United South End Settlements, which has helped pay for the guide's printing costs.

He likes to quote Walt Whitman's view of America: "Here is not merely a nation, but a teeming nation of nations."

You can get your own version of the guide by printing the PDF that is on the web site, [UnityFirst.com](http://UnityFirst.com). Click on DiverseCity and then on Tours. Licenziato is reachable by phone, 617-720-2839 or his email at [Licenziato@aol.com](mailto:Licenziato@aol.com).