

EDITORIAL

Royall House: Facing history in Medford

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The slave quarter building is the only such structure left in the northern United States.

Because Massachusetts celebrates its role in fostering the abolitionist movement, it's easy to forget that some wealthy families here once owned slaves. And because some of those families left behind impressive homes, it would be easy to focus on architectural splendor rather than on the forced labor that kept those households going. All of which makes the repositioning of the Royall House and Slave Quarters in Medford all the more impressive. The house was built in the 1700s by a family that traded in sugar, rum, and slaves, and the museum founded there a century ago used to exhibit the property as "just another rich person's house," as a descendant of the owners put it in a recent Globe story.

That wasn't a full depiction of life at the property, which is believed to have the only freestanding slave quarters in the region. Over time, the leadership of the museum courageously worked to change its mission, and it now provides a look into the interwoven lives of the owners and the slaves — and into the economy they inhabited. Now, the Royall House is rightly gaining recognition for its efforts, most notably a \$100,000 grant to develop educational programs about slavery in the North.

With good reason, tourists from New England roll their eyes when they visit Southern plantations, only to hear tour guides rhapsodize about hoop skirts and parasols but say little about the slaves who also lived there. It's only right to apply the same critical eye to landmarks closer to home.