



# Beacon Hill Friends House



Residents took walks together during fall retreat, sharing their favorite places with each other.

## Fall 2013 Newsletter

### Contents

• Time to go exploring	1
• Hello, goodbye to our RM	1
• Health care reform Q&A	2
• Changing seasons	3
• Seven new residents profiled	4
• Collaborative fall poem	5
• Loving in the light	6
• Alumni news	7
• The simplest chocolate cake	7
• Annual holiday party	8
• Stay in touch!	8

## A year in a room: time to go exploring

*By Carol Mitchell, resident*

One day earlier this summer, Bill and I walked through our four-bedroom house on the water in Florida and had a ritual good-bye. We remembered important things that had happened in different rooms and thought about all the people who had stayed in them. Then we got in the car and began our journey north. I turned to him and said, "It's a magical world, Hobbes, ol' buddy..." to which he replied, "Let's go exploring."

Certain benchmark ages cry out for response. Turning 65 (which will happen for Bill in October and me in December) is

typically marked by signing up for Medicare. We had something further in mind. For the past several years we'd been getting impatient with Florida. I find the heat and humidity oppressive and physically taxing. We were spending more time in our house, and less time interacting with people, exercising or pursuing interests. We were challenged less often and I began to see how easy it would be to live in an increasingly narrow world, to grow old. It was time for something to jog us out of what could easily become a rut.

We have always loved Boston. Bill was born about a half dozen miles from where

we now live, but moved away as a child. I fell in love with the city as an adult. Good friends and most of Bill's cousins live here. Our daughter Kate and her husband, Marton, had moved here. In February they gave birth to Leila, their first child, our fourth grandchild. While in the process of figuring out a living situation in Boston we were told by our friend, Margaret, about Beacon Hill Friends House. We went for a visit and fell in love with the place. They accepted us as residents. A week after leaving Florida, we began the process of moving into our third floor, 16 by 18 foot room overlooking

*continued on page 2 →*

## Hello & goodbye to our Residency Managers

*By Holly Baldwin, Director*

There has been another transition in the staff at BHFH! After 1 ½ years as Residency Manager, Mykal Slack was surprised by an opportunity join First Parish (UU) In Cambridge as their Community Life Coordinator and as a worship leader. In his time here, Mykal impressed us with his warmth and compassion. When we were struggling with chores, he listened with a sympathetic ear, told us firmly what was expected, and fol-

lowed up with a fantastic hug. We benefited from his positive attitude, his love of this community, his pastoral gifts and experience, his good organizational skills, and his commitment to justice and equality for all people.

After a 6-week search process, and many good choices, we decided to hire Ben Sachs-Hamilton as the new Residency Manager. Ben started work at the end of September. Ben was recently a history teacher at New-

ton South High School. His organizational skills are already being put to excellent use in the office! Ben's partner is our Resident Chef-Kitchen Manager, Myles Dakan. It's great to have a couple on staff—the first one we are aware of since Ernest and Esther Weed! Together, Ben and Myles bring a lot of energy and vitality to the Beacon Hill Friends House as staff and as residents.

Best wishes to Mykal and to Ben as they journey in their new positions!

# Health care reform Q&A

*By Ben Lawent, resident*

In my two years at the Beacon Hill Friends House, I have had some great conversations with housemates about the Affordable Care Act (ACA). With the open enrollment period underway as of October 1st, I want to answer some questions you might have about this important piece of legislation.

Note: Much of the information in this article derives from a wonderful online course I took in the summer of 2012 through Coursera ([www.coursera.org](http://www.coursera.org)). The course was taught by Ezekiel Emanuel, an oncologist and health policy expert at the University of Pennsylvania. I would highly recommend the free online courses offered by Coursera for anyone who loves to learn.

## What are the main features of the ACA?

The ACA introduces premium subsidies and cost-sharing provisions for people who earn 100% to 400% of the Federal Poverty Line (FPL) and expands Medicaid to cover people who earn up to 133% of the FPL. It also provides tax credits to small businesses for providing health coverage, and imposes tax penalties for large employers and cer-

tain individuals who do not purchase insurance. Insurance companies may not deny coverage based on pre-existing conditions, rescind coverage after a policyholder gets sick, impose annual or lifetime benefit limits, or charge co-payments for preventative services, and plans offering dependent coverage must make the coverage available until the dependent reaches age 26. The ACA also defines a set of essential benefits that health plans must provide and requires easy-to-understand plan summaries. The ACA strengthens regulatory review of health insurance premium increases. Health insurers must provide rebates to consumers if they spend less than a certain portion of premium dollars on health care and quality improvement expenses. Lastly, the ACA gradually closes the Medicare Part D “doughnut hole”, which impacts seniors who purchase prescription drugs.

## I've heard that some states have elected not to participate in the Medicaid expansion that is part of the ACA. What is that all about?

Eligibility for Medicaid varies by state, and currently there are many states where adults are not eligible for Medicaid even if their income falls below 100% of the Federal Poverty Line. The ACA provides federal funds to states to expand Medicaid to cover people with incomes up to 133% of the FPL. At the same time, insurance subsidies are available to people with incomes between 100% and 400% of the FPL.

Many states have chosen to reject federal funds to expand Medicaid, meaning that adults in those states with incomes below 100% of the FPL will fall into a gap: their incomes will be too low to qualify for insurance subsidies but too high to qualify for Medicaid in their states. These millions of individuals will continue to be uninsured.

## If the projected cost of the ACA is about \$1 trillion between 2012 and 2022, why do its advocates claim it will save the country money?

The cost of the ACA is the money need-

ed to expand coverage to those who are currently uninsured. At the same time, the ACA's provisions will reduce health-related costs and increase government revenues in several ways. The ACA will reduce overpayments to Medicare Advantage providers and increase the Medicare payroll tax and Medicare premiums for high-income individuals. It will reduce reimbursement rates to hospitals and fees assessed to health industry companies such as drug makers, medical device makers, and insurers. Hospitals and companies agreed to these changes in exchange for the new business that will come their way as a result of the expected influx of Americans who will obtain health coverage and use more medical services. The ACA also penalizes insurers offering high-cost policies, certain individuals not purchasing insurance, and large employers not providing health coverage.

## Why are health outcomes in the United States currently so poor relative to our high level of health care spending?

In the US, there is uneven access to health care. The uninsured have poor health outcomes (since medical conditions are more likely to be undiagnosed and treatments received are less effective), and this drags down the national average. Meanwhile, those with sufficient resources can pursue expensive disease treatments and aggressive end-of-life treatments, which typically provide small increases in lifespan relative to the cost. America's lead in medical technology and the development of new drugs also contributes to medical cost inflation, since newer medical technologies and drugs are often expensive, and the price insensitivity of medical consumers leads to heavy use of expensive new technologies and drugs. Lastly, health administration is more expensive in the US, partly because of our multi-payer system.

There's no question that this law is complex. A recent headline in *The Onion* read, “Man Who Understands 8% of Obamacare Vigorously Defends It From Man Who Understands 5%.” Hopefully by now you know more than both of those guys put together!

← EXPLORING from page 1

Chestnut Street.

During a recent visit to Boston, our friend, Julie, commented that on the surface it looked like our lives were contracting – we had to radically downsize. But, she went on to say, the contraction was in service of an expanded life. That has been our experience so far. We have a great city to explore, 19 other lovely housemates to get to know, easy access to parks, museums, universities, libraries, and public transportation, a new grandchild to watch grow up, and some different and gentler ways of pursuing our careers. It is a magical world. We are so lucky to get to go exploring.

This article originally appeared on Carol and Bill's blog about their time at BHFH. Read more at [www.ayearinaroom.com](http://www.ayearinaroom.com).



## Changing seasons at BHFH



Scenes of summer & fall at the Beacon Hill Friends House, counterclockwise from the top right:

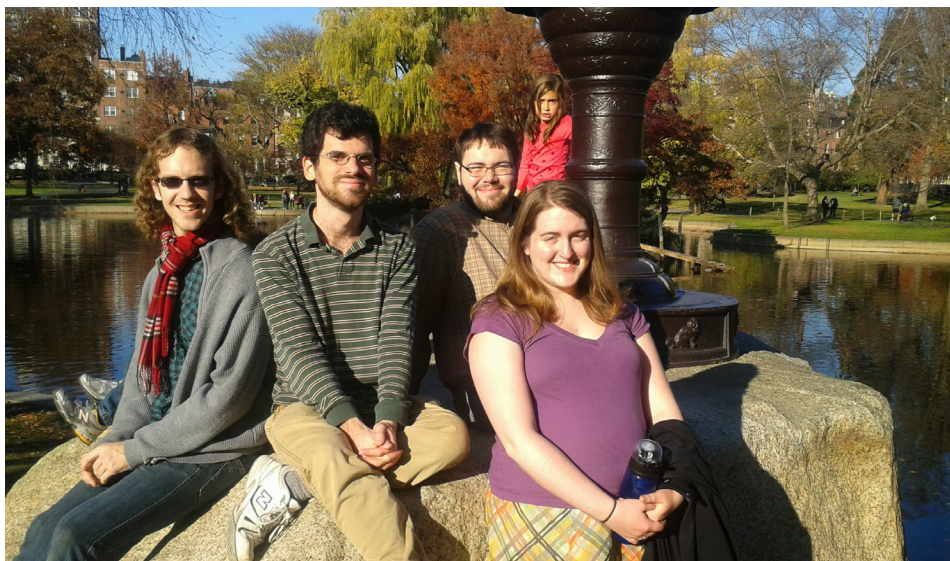
Lucas Braun & Rachel Spilecki preparing the table saw for workday carpentry projects.

Many hands made light(er) work of moving gravel into the kitchen courtyard, part of a year-long project to build a bike shed.

Alumni, residents, & friends gather on the deck for the first annual midsummer BBQ.

Mykal Slack training Ben Sachs-Hamilton.

Residents on a walk in the Boston Public Garden during retreat.





# Seven new residents reveal challenges & rewards of co-op life (and a few favorite meals)

By Bill Mitchell, resident

The newest residents of BHFH arrived by varied paths. But ask them about their experience living in the house so far and a lot of common ground appears.

## Favorite part of Beacon Hill

*Proximity to Common, Public Garden, and public transportation.*  
- Carol

*I like being able to bike just about anywhere in the city.* - Ben

*I enjoy talking with tourists from all over the world whose guidebooks encourage them to walk down our street.* - Bill

"I really appreciate the opportunity to see so many sides of my housemates," says **Myles Louis Dakan**, who joined BHFH as kitchen manager in April. "By living together and interacting in so many different ways, we can arrive at very full understandings of each other."

Myles, 25, grew up near Stroudsburg, Pa., went to college in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania and lived in Takoma Park, Maryland for a year before moving to Boston.

Carol and Bill Mitchell also lived in Takoma Park—about 30 years before



Carol Mitchell, new resident



Lucas Braun, new resident

Myles—and moved into BHFH just a few months after he did.

## Favorite room at BHFH

*The kitchen! There's always an interesting conversation and/or a yummy snack being shared.* - Shannon

*The dining room: because of all the plants, the quiet workspace it provides during the day, the energetic and delicious dinners, and the special conversations that carry on afterward.* - Lucas

*Library. Peaceful.* - Clarissa

*The elevator has a lot of charm. I like how it feels extravagant while also being very useful.* - Myles

**Carol Mitchell**, 65, knew nothing about BHFH before a friend tipped her off to a couple of openings in the house earlier this year. Asked what she's found rewarding about her first several months in the house, she says: "All the interesting, wonderful people who live here." She adds: "The simpler life."

Carol, who grew up in Louisville, Kentucky, moved to Boston from St. Peters-

burg, Florida. In addition to Takoma Park, the Mitchells' previous homes included South Bend, Detroit, Fremont, California and Vienna, Austria.

**Shannon Fuller**, 35, also points to people, one in particular, when asked what prompted her to apply for residency: "I fell in love with one houseie and then became very fond of all the rest. It's really amazing to have so many great people around the

## Favorite house dinner

*Pumpkin lasagna.* - Bill

*Vegan mac & cheese. Or the amazing coconut milk & sweet potato soup.*  
- Shannon

*The Game of Thrones themed week was a lot of fun.* - Myles

interact with."

Born in Jacksonville, Florida, Shannon moved a lot as a child and has continued the tradition as an adult.

**Ben Sachs-Hamilton**, 26, says he was drawn to BHFH by the opportunity to "exist in a community where people live together by choice, rather than by chance."

Ben, who grew up in Burlington, Vermont and was recently hired as the BHFH residency manager, offers a quite specific response to the question of rewards-of-resi-

*continued on page 5 →*



Ben Sachs-Hamilton, new resident

# Collaborative fall poem from house meeting

At a recent house meeting, residents shared some of their favorite things about fall. By the end of the meeting, Rachel Spilecki had arranged snatches of what she heard into the following poem.

## “Autumn with Friends”

Seasonal beer—it’s cold.

Caramel apples. Definitely.

Pumpkin stuff, pumpkin stuff,  
pumpkin stuff!

Oh right, and school?

Students galore!

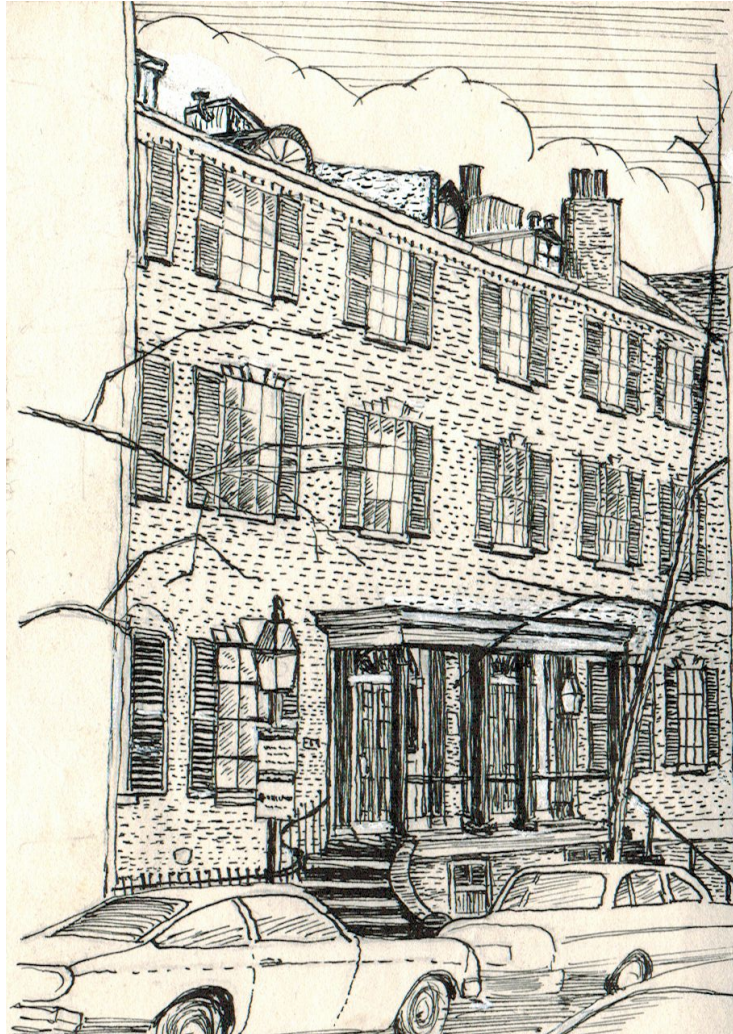
But not for me.

Just smoke smells, dewy smells,  
death smells. And light.

Sweeping chestnuts on the deck.

Baking mini apple pies in the  
kitchen.

Looking out of the library on a  
rainy day.



A recently discovered illustration of the Beacon Hill Friends House. If you know more about its origins, we would love to hear from you at [news@bhfh.org](mailto:news@bhfh.org).

## ← NEW RESIDENTS from page 4

dency: “Going down to the kitchen at night and discovering fresh baked goods left out on the table.”

The kitchen comes up a lot in conversations about life in the house.

**Bill Mitchell**, 65, describes returning from a trip to a big welcome in the kitchen as a reflection of what he’s found especially rewarding at BHFH: “Living with interesting, supportive friends.”

Bill was born in Boston, a half dozen miles from BHFH, but moved away as a child and says he’s excited to experience the city as an almost grown-up.

**Lucas Braun**, 23, is the youngest of the



Bill Mitchell, new resident

house’s residents (for now). Lucas says he enjoys “living with and getting to know such an age- and faith-diverse group, learning to clerk house meetings and coming home to a house full of friends every day.”

Lucas, who was born in San Jose, Costa Rica, moved to Boston earlier this year after finishing college in Vermont.

**Clarissa Westney** sums up what she likes about BHFH in a single word: “Everything.”

Clarissa, who moved to Boston from Schenectady, New York, reflected a similar economy of words when asked what she finds challenging about life at BHFH: “Nothing.”



## Loving in the light: a couple's experience

By Hugh Gelch, Clerk, Development Cmte.

2013 marked a wonderful event for BHFH residents Ben Lawent and Rachel Gross: They were married! Their story is an affirming account of the nurturing environment to be found in intentional living communities in general and BHFH in particular.



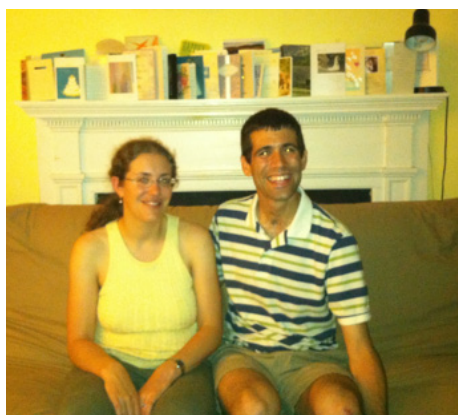
Rachel Gross Lawent and Ben Lawent

Ben and Rachel are confirmed proponents of intentional living communities. Ben started as an undergraduate at University of Wisconsin whose city of Madison he describes as a hotbed of ILCs. His roommate decided to join one and after hearing about his friends experience and learning more he decided to follow suit. Rachel also found an ILC in her college years, spending the summer in a community oriented around a Jewish farming program. The shared values each of them found among the residents, social progressiveness for Ben, Judaism and environmental concerns for Rachel, added a rich element to their lives that shapes their choice of residential living to this day.

Ben and Rachel are an example of how love can spring within an ILC, as they first met when both came to reside at the MO-SAIC (Members of Society Acting in Co-

operation) Co-op in Evanston, IL. Sharing meals and weekly house meetings offered them a chance to know one another in a natural, co-operative environment (I am reminded of the Friends' saying "To know a Quaker, work with one."). House activities blossomed into socializing, then dates, and the rest is history!

When Ben moved to Boston he knew he would choose an ILC and an internet search turned up BHFH. The social values he recognized as well as the diverse, relatively large community of 21 residents attracted him to BHFH and when Rachel arrived in Boston to pursue a Master's degree in accounting he convinced her to join him. While they came to BHFH for the social values and commitment to community, they learned about Quaker values and the edifying effects of Quaker process in House Meetings run in a Quaker fashion, deepening their community experience. This year Ben, who has some Quaker relatives, presented "The Abolitionist Legacy in Modern America," a book salon linking the rich Quaker tradition of social action to issues we face in the contemporary world, and wrote an article for our newsletter on the importance of charitable giving using *The*



Rachel Gross Lawent and Ben Lawent

*Life You Can Save* by Princeton University bioethics professor Peter Singer as a backdrop.

Recognizing that communities depend upon the active involvement of their members, Ben and Rachel are on the BHFH Finance and Development Committees respectively. While they are a couple they



Rachel Gross Lawent and Ben Lawent

believe in letting their individual lights shine through their activities and independent voices in House meetings, although sometimes that takes work: Ben and Rachel recounted a House meeting where they and other couples did not sit next to their respective partners, only to have the group separate into smaller work sessions by counting off which put the couples back together! Ben and Rachel also do not take "work" home with them and try not to talk about House committee issues in their private lives.

There are four couples currently residing at BHFH, and we are fortunate to have them within our community. They enrich our residential experience through their relationship and as individuals, and we look forward to Ben and Rachel and our other couples maintaining their relationship with BHFH when the time comes for them to be House alums.

**If you were a couple living at BHFH in the past and would like to recount your time here and how it may have affected your life afterwards, please email us at [news@bhfh.org](mailto:news@bhfh.org)!**

## Alumni news from Montana & the Midwest

### Eden and Jim (Condict) Grace '84

After nearly nine years in Kenya, the Grace family has relocated to Richmond Indiana where Eden is serving as Global Ministries Director for Friends United Meeting and Jim is working remotely for the University of Oslo on an open-source software project for healthcare in developing countries.

### Victor Neuman '09

When Victor Neuman lived in the house, his most notable activity was bringing in a series of indie films for housies and neighbors to watch. This month he returns to his cowboy roots when he returns to Highwood, Montana with his sister to sell the family wheat and cattle ranch. This ranch was founded by his grandfather in

those hard days of 1941. The family has been in Montana more than 130 years and the best story involves a great grandfather US Marshal and his brush with Calamity Jane in the gold mining town of Zortman. Fortunately he survived to have children.

### Craig Simenson '06

Craig Simenson spent the last year in the Hyde Park neighborhood of Chicago, where he could be found among Friends at 57th Street Meeting most Sundays. There, he began another master's program at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. Now, he's in Lincoln, Nebraska, where he'll be through August 2014—discovering what life is like on the Great Plains and practicing how to be a Lutheran pastor.

### Ginny Wilson '73

When Ginny Wilson lived at BHFH, she was working as a library assistant at the Harvard Divinity School, where she eventually worked as a serials cataloger. Much has happened in the 41 years since she lived in the house. In 1984, she was married and acquired 3 step children—ages 16, 18, and 21. She now has 5 step-grandchildren, 2 step-step grandchildren, 3 step great grandchildren, and 3 step-step great grandchildren. The youngest grandchildren are 17-year-old twin boys who both compete in wrestling. Recent challenges with her hip have taken her off the square dance floor and off the line dance floor, but she hopes to return soon.

Email us at [news@bhfh.org](mailto:news@bhfh.org)!

## Chef's notes: the simplest chocolate cake

*By Myles Louis Dakan, Resident Chef – Kitchen Manager*

Dessert is not currently a regular part of dinner at the Friends House. Older job descriptions from the archives tell me this was not always the case—but with the present arrangement, an occasional treat can yield a lot of appreciation for the cook.

And to top that, dessert need not be complicated either. Variations on this straightforward chocolate cake recipe abound, many originating from Depression era rationing. Vegan, simple, and pretty darn quick, I recommend taking this cake to potlucks and parties whenever possible. In the photo it's been dressed up with some coconut-based dulce de leche, but don't stop there. I've tried glazing it, layering it with pumpkin filling, adding nuts, and of course plain with only powdered sugar.

With a cake this easy & versatile, there are few reasons not to enjoy more cake.

### Ingredients:

- 1 1/2 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/3 cup unsweetened cocoa



- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 cup sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 5 tablespoons oil (coconut or vegetable)
- 1 cup cold water
- 1 1/2 vanilla
- 1 tablespoon cider vinegar
- powdered sugar (optional)

### Directions

1. Preheat the oven to 350 °F.
2. Mix the dry ingredients together well.
3. Warm the coconut oil just until liquid if using, and whisk together all of the wet ingredients.
4. Whisk the two mixtures together until entirely smooth.
5. Now for my favorite part: Pour into a greased 9-inch round cake pan. Drop repeatedly from 6 inches high onto the counter to remove air bubbles.
6. Bake for 25 minutes, or until set in the middle.
7. Cool before removing. If desired, dust with powdered sugar for an appropriately simple finish.

# Annual Holiday Party on Dec 8

Beacon Hill Friends House and Beacon Hill Friends Meeting warmly invite you to attend our annual Holiday Party at 6 Chestnut St. on Sunday, December 8th from noon to 4:00 PM. We are excited to again co-host this event with Friends from the Meeting.

Potluck contributions to supplement the cookies and cider are appreciated, but not required. Come enjoy the food, fellowship, and even some English country dancing! Music and merriment will continue with caroling around the neighborhood at 4 PM.

**We look forward to sharing the joys of the holiday season with you!**



## What's your email?

Beacon Hill Friends House has a goal of developing our online communication to reach out to as many in our community as possible. This will allow us to give you timely updates about the wonderful activities happening here without increasing our use of paper and ink.

To do this, **we need your email address.** Please write your email address on your annual giving form, or email us at [news@bhfh.org](mailto:news@bhfh.org).

We look forward to keeping in touch!

The mission of Beacon Hill Friends House is to embody the Quaker principles of faith, simplicity, integrity, community, and social responsibility in order to nurture and call forth the light in all of us.

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

6 Chestnut Street  
Boston, MA 02108  
617-227-9118  
[www.bhfh.org](http://www.bhfh.org)

**BEACON HILL  
FRIENDS HOUSE**

NON-PROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
BOSTON, MA  
PERMIT NO. 59862