

Boston Public Garden

Boston, Massachusetts

Photographs by Alan Ward 2022-2023

Notes on the Making of the Photographs

The Public Garden is a nineteenth-century landscape design adjoining the much older Boston Common, that was established in 1634. The twenty-four-acre site of the Garden is on reclaimed land that was originally part of the Charles River estuary. The filling began in the 1820s, and when partially completed in 1837, the site was designated by the city as a botanical garden for a private association. With filling complete in the 1860s, a change in course led to the vision of making the land available for public use. This was just a few years after the opening of New York's Central Park, and with Boston constrained on less than eight hundred acres of the Shawmut peninsula, the city opted for a public garden rather than an extensive park. George Meacham won a design competition that established the layout of the Public Garden, a plan that remains largely intact today.*

The dominant feature of Meacham's plan is a serpentine five-acre lagoon with curvilinear paths around the edge of the water in the spirit of an English garden (11-16). In contrast to the sinuous lagoon, there are three linear east to west paths in the design. A straight central path bisects the Garden and crosses over the water on a cast iron bridge (8). The path is on axis with an equestrian statue of George Washington - centered in symmetrically arranged floral planting beds (20). Another linear path along the southern border of the site is

lined with statues of Boston notables, that were added to the Garden in the early twentieth century (3,4). And finally, a straight path along the northern edge adjacent to Beacon Hill is terminated by the 1924 George White Memorial by sculptor Daniel Chester French and architect Henry Bacon (5). The pair had collaborated on the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., that opened in 1922.

A heavy overcast day in mid-April with low clouds created favorable conditions for photography, enveloping the Garden in soft, velvety light that compressed the tonal values - ideal for black and white pictures that express the spirit of a nineteenth-century landscape design. The photographs illustrate the framework of the plan and the interaction between curving lines of water and paths, that are overlaid with linear walks, as well as later sculptural additions. Several views of the bridge and equestrian statue along the main axis illustrate these central features of Meacham's plan (6-8,19-20). Two entrance gates are shown along with the cast iron fences that define the boundaries of the Public Garden (1,19). With origins as a botanical garden, there are several images under trees that portray the sculptural branching patterns of these mature specimens (2,3). I framed panoramic views at the edge of the lagoon to illustrate the varied ways people use this beloved garden as they would a public park (11-16).

List of Photographs

1. Entrance gate at Boylston and Charles Streets, 2023
2. Beech tree and granite basin along central spine, 2023
3. Phillips statue along south border walk, 2023
4. Sumner statue along south border walk, 2022
5. George White Memorial at Arlington and Beacon Streets, 2023
6. View northeast of Boston Public Garden Footbridge, 2023
7. View southwest of footbridge, 2023
8. View west on bridge, 2023
9. View southwest toward Arlington Street Church, 2023
10. Dawn Redwood, 2023
11. Japanese lantern on western side of lagoon, 2022
12. View south of lagoon and footbridge, 2022
13. View north from south end of lagoon, 2022
14. South end of lagoon, 2022
15. Bald Cypress grove at south end of lagoon, 2022
16. View northeast of lagoon, 2022
17. Duckling sculpture, 2022
18. Granite basin near Arlington Street, 2022
19. Granite basin and George Washington equestrian sculpture, 2022
20. View east of George Washington equestrian sculpture, 2023
21. Arlington Street entrance, 2023
22. Channing statue on Arlington Street near Boylston Street, 2022
23. Common and Public Garden terminus of Emerald Necklace, 2023
24. Commonwealth Avenue extending west from Public Garden, 2022

















































Notes

* See *Friends of the Public Garden* for the history of the site and the ongoing stewardship of the landscape.
friendsofthepublicgarden.org