Freedom Trail

Boston, Massachusetts

Photographs by Alan Ward 1985, 2023, 2024

Notes on the Making of the Photographs

The Freedom Trail draws visitors to experience a series of sixteen historic sites related to early Boston history and the American Revolution. I lived in the Boston area for decades. As a resident, you tend to go out of your way to avoid the Freedom Trail. With almost four million visitors per year - it was primarily for tourists. I moved out of Boston and returned to photograph the Freedom Trail with a fresh eye – as an explorer and as a photographer aiming to make a series of compelling images, that document the wide range of significant and well-preserved sites from the past.

The Freedom Trail was created in 1951 and begins at the Boston Common; it is marked by brick lines and bronze markers along paths and sidewalks (1,4). The Massachusetts State House, by architect Charles Bullfinch atop Beacon Hill, overlooks the Common (2). The Robert Gould Shaw and the 54th Regiment Memorial is across from the State House and honors a later chapter in Boston's history (3). The Park Street Church (5) at the corner of the Common is the first of four churches or meeting houses on the route. It is followed by the Granary Burial Ground (6-8), one of three Colonial-era burial grounds on the trail.

I embraced the challenge of putting together a series of images with a range of subjects that requires the photography of landscapes, architecture, as well as interiors of church buildings – along with one naval vessel. It was a self-imposed assignment to photograph the different sites, as well as the connecting brick lines and markers -

each with its own distinct requirements, and still make a coherent set of images in one portfolio.

Framing views of historic buildings were difficult and constrained because the locations were in downtown Boston with busy streets, parked cars, and large towers overshadowing these small historic structures, often competing for attention from most vantage points. I used a wide-angle, tilt shift lens (24mm), in order to get very close to the historic churches and other buildings to isolate them as much as possible from the competing context of the city (9,10,15,16). I sought out soft overcast skies to flatten the light and make simple and direct images, with each picture translating the available light into precise tonal relationships. Foggy conditions also helped diminish the presence of the large surrounding buildings. I elected to use black and white to help unify the collection of rather diverse sites. Perhaps it is because of historical associations, but black and white photographs tend to be perceived as more documentary or truthful in their content.

While visitors are a fundamental part of the story of the Freedom Trail, at peak times the historic buildings and grounds are overwhelmed by people. The image of the Granary Burial Ground illustrates the site along with a few individuals reading the interpretive plaques, portraying an appropriate balance between describing the characteristics of a place, along with how it is used and interpreted (7).

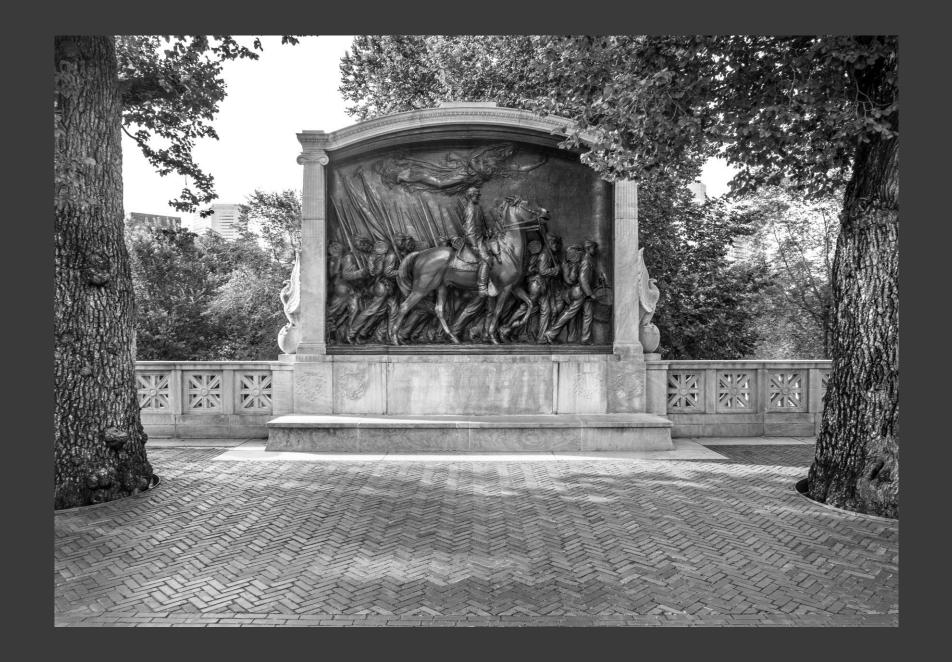
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- 2. Massachusetts Statehouse from the Common, 2024
- 3. Monument to Robert Gould Shaw and 54th Regiment, 2024
- 4. Freedom Trail plaque and brick lines at the Common, 2024
- 5. Park Street Church from the Common, 2024
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- 32. Statue of William Prescott, 2024
- 33. Statue of William Prescott and Boston skyline, 2024
- 34. North side of Bunker Hill Monument and museum, 2024







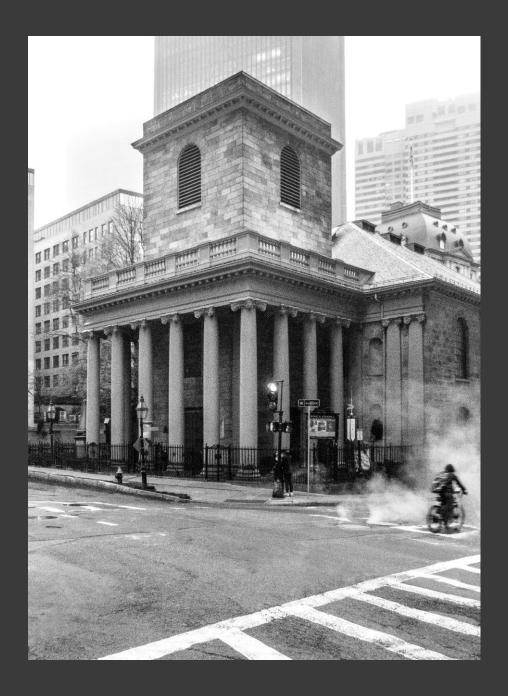














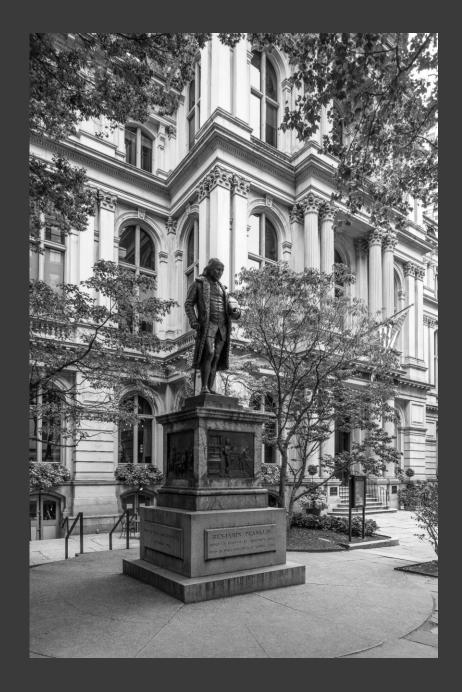


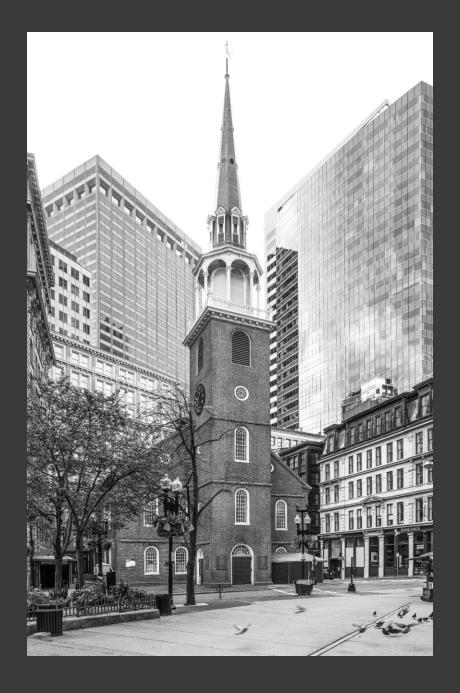


































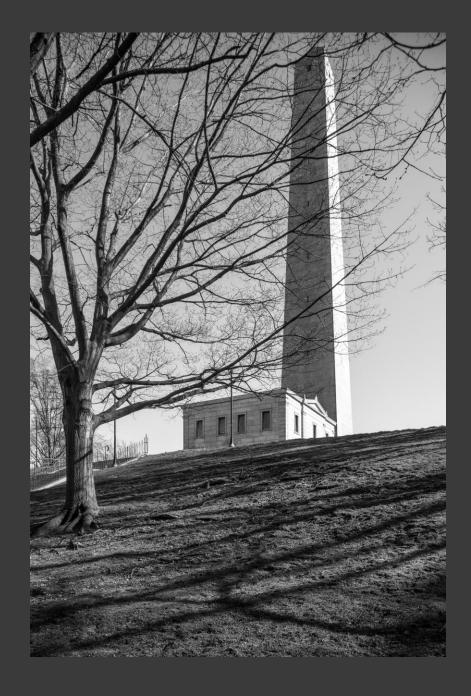












Notes

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