

CASE STUDY

The Freedom Trail, Boston, Massachusetts, USA (1951–8+)

The Freedom Trail through the heart of Boston is a 4-kilometre (2.5-mile) pedestrian route that links 16 sites of historical interest in the city (see Figure 5.7a). They are primarily places of importance in the United State's independence movement but the trail touches on many twentieth century developments. It begins at Boston Common, once a cattle pasture, and leads via important buildings (e.g. the Old State House; the home of the British colonial government prior to independence), the location of important events (e.g. the Boston Massacre site), a site of literary importance (Old Corner Bookstore), burial grounds (e.g. Granary Burial Ground; see Figure 5.7c), the Quincy Market/Faneuil Hall area (an eighteenth century public meeting hall revitalized as part of a shopping district in mid-twentieth century; see Figure 5.7d) to an ending at the Bunker Hill Monument across the Charles River.

The Government of the City of Boston provided the funds and sponsored the trail. Since 1976 (spurred by the bicentennial of the American declaration of independence) the National Park Service has spent more than \$50 million on capital improvements of sites along the trail. The project was, however, initiated in 1951 as the result of public pressure led by a journalist, William Schofield of the *Boston Herald-Tribune*. Schofield wrote editorials decrying the lack of recognition of the role of Boston in the history of the United States and agitating for the trail to be created. He received political support from the Mayor of Boston, John Hynes. The development of the trail illustrates the power of simple, workable ideas in fostering a variety of public realm designs.

Schofield lived until 1996 seeing his dream fulfilled.

The Freedom Trail Foundation (FTF) was established in 1958 with the John Hancock Insurance Company a major sponsor. The Boston Chamber of Commerce and the Advertising Club of Boston later joined the group. The Foundation finances maps and guides but volunteers run the whole programme. In 1964, the FTF was incorporated as a non-profit organization committed to the development of the trail and to a variety of activities, such as educational programmes, related to it.

Although the trail has been added to continuously over the years, its development can be said to have taken place in two phases. The first was somewhat casual with a red line painted on the surface of the ground leading from one site to the next. The line was regarded as aesthetically unacceptable. During the second phase more attention was paid to the landscape quality of the trail. The red line was replaced with red paving stones, pedestrian ramps were installed, signage quality was enhanced and bronze medallion location markers were put in place. The trail is regarded as a major success. Over 4 million people walk it each year and the visitors to each point along the trail increased as soon as it was put into place. It is estimated to contribute \$400 million to Boston's \$9 billion per annum tourism industry.

Walking the trail is an emotional experience for patriotic Americans and many international tourists alike. It has enhanced the knowledge that Boston's citizens have about their own city's history and,