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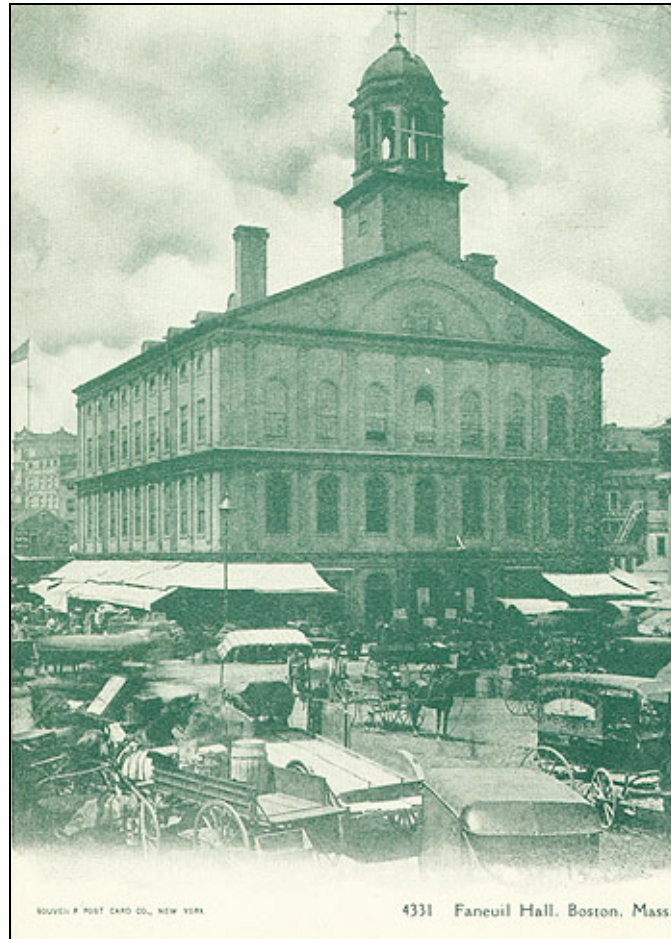
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The Tourist Experience in Boston, 1848-1910

*American History, Middle-Class Leisure
and the Development of Urban Tourism*



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American Studies Program
University of Massachusetts at Boston

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Of course, I must also thank my friends and family for their advice and support in all areas of life, especially during the past year. Their confidence that I could indeed do it all helped me believe it, too. My degree could not have been completed without the financial support of Fisher College, my employer since I began this program four years ago, and they have now offered me another invaluable opportunity – to teach the history of Boston and New England – upon the completion of this degree. Finally, my advisor, Ann Holder, took me on as an extraordinary favor, and I thank her for her ability to push me in new directions as well as her willingness to fit me into her demanding schedule.

Introduction

In *Doing the Town*, her groundbreaking history of urban tourism in the United States, Catherine Cocks writes that the scholarly study of tourism has only lately become valued in the fields of history and cultural studies. As recently as the 1950s, she points out, historians “usually invoked tourism in order to condemn mass culture.”¹ Yet, with the growth of American Studies as a discipline and the subsequent refocusing on social, rather than political, history in scholarship, tourism has become an important lens through which historians can examine the ways in which communities, residents and visitors have interacted with each other. Because American Studies was so closely connected during its formative years with Frederick Jackson Turner’s frontier hypothesis, a great deal of early tourism study was devoted to nineteenth-century nature tourism in the United States, particularly in the American West. However, the trajectory of that early tourism scholarship eventually realized the closing of its own original frontier, and, like American tourists themselves, rebounded to the urban centers of the United States, where it found fresh fodder for study in the history of urban tourism.

The history of urban tourism in the United States begins, rightfully so, with the birth of the modern American city. In the first half of the nineteenth century, cities in this country were rough, dirty places, certainly not for the faint of heart. Historians who study nineteenth-century cities paint even the mid-century cityscape with a muddy brush – the streets are unpaved, the gutters are clogged with garbage and raw sewage, the pedestrians are imperiled by passing carriages and omnibuses, and the treacherous night is lit only by dim gaslight. Although the vibrancy of young American cities inspired a generation of writers and artists, who were taken with the unpredictable, dynamic nature of cities like New York, Boston, Chicago and San

¹ Catherine Cocks, *Doing the Town: The Rise of Urban Tourism in the United States, 1850-1915* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 271.

Francisco, these cities' lack of gentility and refinement made them unsuitable destinations for pleasure travelers. Indeed, travel itself in this era was challenging and often unpleasant, even for the very wealthy.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, people generally only traveled between cities to relocate or seek work. Before 1850, vacationing was a privilege enjoyed only by those who did not need to work for a living, since most working Americans were employed six days a week and could not afford to take time away. Travel itself was expensive, and one didn't get many amenities for one's money. During the early days of the locomotive, in the 1860s and 1870s, most train travel was certainly far from luxurious, for a variety of reasons: the physical facilities were extremely uncomfortable, it was difficult to get a meal while traveling by train, and there were, at best, rudimentary toilet facilities for journeys that might span several days.

Because of the uncomfortable nature of train travel, most pleasure-seekers stayed fairly close to home in the 1870s and 1880s. If they did travel for recreation, they most frequently engaged in "romantic tourism." This phenomenon was characteristic of the era's "nature craze" and involved thoughtful contemplation of nature in serene, unspoiled surroundings – a direct reaction to the hectic and squalid cities in which they lived and earned their livelihoods. These romantic tourists were emulating the New England Transcendentalists, who emphasized the spiritual necessity of communing with nature (and who had the finances and leisure time to do so). This era saw the development of the country's first resorts, in areas such as Niagara Falls, the Catskills, and the White Mountains. Although such resorts offered tourists the chance to engage in active outdoor pursuits and to escape from their city lives, they were hardly recreations of Thoreau's Walden. Rather, the upper-class tourists who traveled there simply brought their byzantine social worlds with them. By thus physically removing their social circles

from the city, they were perhaps able to preserve a sense of insularity that was eroding as urban society became less rigidly hierarchical.

In Europe, urban tourism was already well established in the late nineteenth century. Then again, European cities were hundreds of years old and were well past the painful growth period that American cities had been experiencing. European cities boasted venerable works of art and architecture and offered visitors the opportunity to enjoy music, opera and dance performed by world masters. The “Grand Tour” was a sort of finishing school for upper-class Americans, a necessity for young men (mostly) and women (some) whose sense of cultural literacy was almost wholly informed by European, not American, high culture. Yet, slowly, American cities entered the world scene. Evidence suggests that, indeed, European travelers were among the first urban tourists in the United States; luminaries such as Charles Dickens visited American cities in the mid-nineteenth century and reveled in their youthful vitality. Naturally, upper-class Americans, eager to emulate Europeans in all matters, began to flock to American cities as tourists. But what did these cities have to offer these tourists? Besides experiencing the thrill of being in the midst of a bustling metropolis, visitors could see what fashionable men and women were wearing and purchase ready-made clothing in the latest styles; they could view American and European works of art at growing metropolitan museums; or they could visit significant historical landmarks and learn more about American history. Cocks points out that the wealth of these early urban tourists significantly influenced the development of the urban tourist industry – railroads, hotels, and guidebooks all tailored their services to their new well-to-do patrons, and urban tourism acquired a sort of glamour as a result.

Towards the early twentieth century, tourism in general, and urban tourism particularly, became more accessible to middle-class Americans. Cocks cites improvements in transportation

networks, a rise in personal income, and a shortening of the workday as factors contributing to the growing “ability of the comfortable but not wealthy to travel for pleasure.”² As train technology improved and it became less costly to produce and maintain trains, railroad travel became much more affordable and enjoyable. More and more Americans, then, were becoming accustomed to using public transportation and were perhaps more likely to take a short trip that involved a train journey. It is crucial to note, as well, that the burgeoning tourist industry in the U.S. encouraged many Americans to visit strange places and see the sights by using highly effective advertising, offering the services of travel agents, and promoting organized tour groups.

Improved mass transportation also aided the growth of urban tourism in particular through the development of suburban residential communities. Because many city-dwellers at the turn of the century took advantage of improved short-distance public transportation to move to new homes outside the city, the ideas of city and home were thus divided into separate realms, and the city itself became a viable tourist destination for the first time. Although in the first half of the nineteenth century, many upper-class tourists might have felt uncomfortable visiting squalid tenement neighborhoods, suburbanization and public works projects at the turn of the century “cleaned up” those areas and made them more appealing to the tourist gaze. Tenements and other working-class housing areas gave way to public mixed-use space throughout the early twentieth century, as the processes of urban planning and suburbanization altered the class and racial character of many city neighborhoods across the country.

Mass transportation in cities was beneficial to visitors as well as residents, and for reasons more than just ease of travel from place to place. Beginning in the 1880s, riding electrified streetcars or elevated cars was certainly a novelty for many tourists from outside the city, and thus “the cars” (as they were colloquially known) were a tourist attraction in and of

² Cocks, 6-7.

themselves. This mode of transportation also offered a unique way to catch glimpses of city life; in the words of urban scholar David Nye, “the cars transformed the city into a spectacle to be viewed.”³ On the elevated cars in particular, voyeuristic riders could gaze directly into private residences and places of business as they rode by – public transportation offered an anonymity that permitted visitors and residents alike to learn more about the lives of others.

Private companies even sold rides on special “touring car” streetcars, which followed routes different from those used by commuters and featured commentary from knowledgeable guides. Thus, visitors to the city, if they chose, could enjoy the sights without being crowded into the regular streetcars, which merely shuttled between residential and business areas. Streetcars also shared some of the railroad’s original bad reputation – fears of the improprieties suffered during crowded rush-hour commutes doubtless discouraged some tourists from braving the regular cars. Tourists who rode the special sightseeing streetcars thus had the experience of riding through the streets like any other resident, but they were also exposed to the most advantageous views of the city and entertained by the tour guides’ commentary, while avoiding the crush of unsegregated humanity found in the regular streetcars.⁴

As might be expected, the distaste of some tourists for mingling too closely with locals was not unreciprocated. Local residents indeed had mixed feelings about the influx of tourists to their home. Travel writing of this era tended to focus on the aesthetics of cities and the products of their industries, while ignoring the human element. As Cocks writes, “the interest in workplaces did not amount to an interest in the people laboring there.... In contributing to the transformation of cities into aesthetic landscapes, guidebooks helped to efface the evidence of

³ David Nye, *Electrifying America: Social Meanings of a New Technology, 1880-1940* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), 111.

⁴ Cocks, 167-170.

the social relations underlying them.”⁵ Most of this blurring was no doubt due to social tensions regarding class and ethnic difference; travel writers surely wanted cities to seem overwhelmingly white and middle/upper-class, like the tourists they wrote for. Although “slumming” became a fashionable pursuit for urban tourists around the turn of the century, most tourists chose to distance themselves from the working-class residents of the “slums,” who understandably resented being treated like scenery rather than individuals. Cocks argues that urban tourists also fostered a sense of “vicarious, democratic ownership” or “corporate ownership through tourism,” which “inscribed on city landscapes the legitimate social authority of well-to-do Americans.”⁶ Thus, in the late nineteenth century, tensions between tourists and residents developed as a sort of contention over what the city was – home or public space – and who owned it – native or visitor. By the early twentieth century, though, the growing anonymity of city life led to a greater ease between natives and visitors, as distinctions between the two groups were blurred.

Why Study Boston?

Cocks justifies her choice of the four cities she includes in her study – New York, Chicago, Washington, D.C., and San Francisco – by noting that they were regionally diverse, they were “all prominent in the popular imagination,” and they were all popular destinations among tourists by the 1890s. Perhaps anticipating questions about the cities she didn’t choose, she adds, “It is harder to justify my decision not to study closely the many other cities that were also tourist attractions during this era, especially New Orleans, Boston, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles.” Her specific reason for not including Boston and Philadelphia in particular is that

⁵ Cocks, 171.

⁶ Cocks, 172-173.

“historical attractions were important ... earlier and to a greater extent than in the four focus cities.”⁷

Cocks acknowledges that many turn-of-the-century tourists associated Boston and Philadelphia with the past, rather than the present – that was the place of these cities in the “popular imagination” of the time. Yet perhaps she, too, has unquestioningly accepted this cultural view. At the turn of the century, the four cities she chose might all have been described as “modern,” characterized by strong economies, building booms, and cultural diversity. Boston, New Orleans and Philadelphia, in comparison, seemed still tied to a provincial past, with distinct cultures that were more European or “old-world” than American.⁸ But certainly, as Boston guidebooks from the era show, there was more to do in Boston than gaze upon historical sites and the birthplaces of venerable patriots, and many guidebook authors and advertisers were careful to counter visitors’ history-book familiarity with Boston by highlighting the city’s modern architecture, popular entertainments and cosmopolitan atmosphere.

Cocks is certainly not the only historian or urban studies scholar to let her own perceptions of Boston color her selection of subject matter; in fact, almost nothing has been written about the history of urban tourism in Boston, usually because Boston is perceived as being too “unique” and therefore discarded as potentially representative of a national history. Unfortunately, it seems to happen too often in American history that the mainstream is studied to death, while that which is of regional or otherwise decentralized importance is left to specialized scholarship, and its national significance ignored. Boston’s appeal for the tourist lies in its historical sites, its associations with prominent figures in the Revolutionary era, and its

⁷ Cocks, 7-8.

⁸ Although Los Angeles, the other city that Cocks mentions, is certainly not “old-world” in the same way, her reasons for not including it in her study had to do with its primary appeal as a resort. She doesn’t specifically mention the strong Mexican influence in Los Angeles’s culture, but that may also have made it difficult to compare the city with others.

distinctive local color, and it will be both interesting and useful to examine how those aspects of the city were cultivated and marketed towards tourists. The goal of this project is thus to illustrate that a history of urban tourism in Boston is significant to the larger national history of urban tourism, and that Boston's role as an important American city at the turn of the century should not be ignored.

Scholars in other areas have proven successfully that Boston can be representative of a national history or nationwide trends. For example, Michael Holleran explains in his introduction to *Boston's "Changeful Times": Origins of Preservation and Planning in America* (1998) that "Boston could serve as a model [for early urban planning efforts] because, despite its distinctive local conditions and culture, it was a big commercial and industrial city in many respects similar to others.... Boston was fully a part of the nineteenth century's prevailing culture of change."⁹ However, Boston's urban tourism history has not been fully explored and added to the larger national story. Thus, the goal of this project is to respond to those urban tourism scholars who feel that Boston is too specialized to be relevant to their field of study by illustrating that it *is* relevant both to the study of urban tourism and to urban history in general.

This project analyzes a selection of representative guidebooks produced between 1848 and 1910, to illustrate the development of a tourist industry in Boston and to indicate how the changing nature of the city influenced a similar change in the tourist experience. It also provides the necessary context in which to place this narrative. Part I introduces two key elements essential to understanding the relevance of urban tourism in Boston: the city's experiences with the national phenomena of electrification and urban planning in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, and Boston's distinctive role in nineteenth-century America's developing national

⁹ Michael Holleran, *Boston's "Changeful Times": Origins of Preservation and Planning in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 11.

identity and history. In Part II, an interpretation of Boston guidebooks during this time period can be seen as providing a unique way of viewing Boston's history – the writers of these guidebooks are presenting their city as they knew it to us, visitors not from another place, but from another time. They tell us what they think is important to know about Boston, and their words highlight the pride they took in their city as well as hint at underlying social tensions and changes in progress. Readers of this project, then, can experience Boston of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as tourists themselves, and thus gain a better awareness of how that experience is essential to understanding urban tourism's importance in the history of the American city.

Part I. Boston's Place in American History and Urban History

Boston Becomes a Modern City

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the geography, population, and economy of Boston changed dramatically. It moved “from town to city,” as Boston historian Thomas O’Connor has said. Although Boston’s population had grown since the period of British rule, in 1800 only twenty-five thousand people lived there. The economy was still very small-scale and resembled that of a small English town – artisans practiced skilled trades, farmers and fishermen sold their goods at communal markets, and those with an education filled roles in government, schools, and religious life.¹⁰ The massive industrialization of the 1820s and 1830s truly changed the face of American cities, and Boston was no exception. New England was most well known for the textile mills that sprang up outside of Boston, but, as O’Connor writes, these factories had a significant effect: the multimillion-dollar industry they spawned “helped create a new aristocracy of wealth and power” in the city.¹¹ Such an influx of new money into the local economy made possible the major city-planning projects of the mid-nineteenth century; namely, the creation of the Back Bay and South End neighborhoods out of fallow marshland.

In the 1840s and 1850s, Boston’s population increased considerably, and its ethnic composition was also radically altered. Most notably, the city experienced a massive influx of Irish immigrants fleeing starvation and economic blight caused by the potato blight of the late 1840s. Although the “Great Famine” is often associated specifically with 1847, Irish immigration to North America was steady throughout the late 1840s and 1850s. Boston received a large proportion of the immigrants, particularly relative to its small size and native population (compared to a larger city like New York). In 1847 alone, over thirty-seven thousand

¹⁰ Thomas O’Connor, *The Hub: Boston Past and Present* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2001), 74.

¹¹ O’Connor, 86.

immigrants landed in Boston, compared to four or five thousand in previous years.¹² Between 1840 and 1850, the city's population increased from 93,383 to 136,881; no doubt the majority of Boston's new residents were recent immigrants from Ireland.¹³ In a city that had long prided itself on its Puritan, Protestant heritage and small-neighborhood atmosphere, it was a shock to many Bostonians to find themselves seemingly overrun by strangers – *Catholic* strangers. Irish immigrants and first-generation natives found jobs in the massive earthworks and construction projects necessary for the development of the Back Bay and South End in the 1850s and 1860s, and many found that their participation in Boston's expansion made them feel more a part of the city, paving the way (literally!) for heavy Irish American involvement in local politics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The Back Bay and the South End were initially populated by Boston's wealthiest residents, who relocated there from neighborhoods like the West End and the North End, which were becoming less desirable because of the influx of recent immigrants and the increasingly transient nature of the neighborhoods. However, the 1870s saw a rise in suburbanization, as streetcars increased access to outlying neighborhoods. Those who could afford to moved out of the city and created opportunities for redevelopment of previously residential areas. The science of city planning was developed nationwide in this decade, as several large cities were forced to rebuilt after massive disasters – most notably, “great fires” in Chicago (1871) and Boston (1872).¹⁴ Such disasters, while devastating in the immediate sense, gave cities the opportunity to develop urban centers that were most useful and meaningful to contemporary residents and industries, rather than inherited amalgamations of decades of different ideas and uses. These

¹² O'Connor, 152.

¹³ Lawrence W. Kennedy, *Planning the City Upon a Hill: Boston Since 1630* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), 256.

¹⁴ The “great earthquake” of 1906 prompted a similar redevelopment in San Francisco.

disasters also pointed out flaws in older building codes (or the complete lack thereof), and the necessity for better regulation in such matters as street width and public water works. Much early urban planning was therefore devoted to the scientific study of how best to prevent reoccurrences of such massive loss of property and life. Public parks were also developed, most notably in Boston and New York by Frederick Law Olmsted; reformers touted the moral benefits of parks for the working class, but citydwellers of all classes enjoyed New York's Central Park, Brooklyn's Prospect Park and Boston's Emerald Necklace. As cities thus became cleaner, more organized, and more aesthetically pleasing, they became viable destinations for local daytrippers and more wealthy long-distance travelers.

Between 1874 and 1890, Boston grew dramatically in size with the annexation of Brighton, Charlestown and West Roxbury (which included the communities of Jamaica Plain and Roslindale, as well as present-day West Roxbury). These neighborhoods quickly became the nation's first "streetcar suburbs" with the introduction first of horsedrawn cars in the 1870s and then electrified streetcars in 1889.¹⁵ Many city workers were earning more and paying less to live, and an urban middle class, composed primarily of civil servants and small business owners, had begun to develop. These streetcar suburbs quickly filled up with middle-class Bostonians who were purchasing their own homes – the quintessential American dream. As the city itself became less residential towards the turn of the century, city planners were able to better identify and preserve historic buildings, while creating centers for shopping and parks for the increased leisure time that the middle and working classes enjoyed.¹⁶ Jack Tager has written that "The Gilded Age was the period when Boston shed its small-scale, walking-city image to

¹⁵ Sam Warner's classic *Streetcar Suburbs* (Harvard University Press, 1962) is still the most thorough and interesting study of this subject.

¹⁶ See Michael Holleran, *Boston's "Changeful Times"*, chapter 9, and Lawrence W. Kennedy, *Building the City Upon a Hill*, chapter 4, for more discussion on late nineteenth-century urban development and preservation in Boston.

become the indecorous, sprawling, volatile metropolis of the present century.”¹⁷ Rapid geographic and population growth, coupled with expanding industrialization, helped to effect this dramatic change in the city’s character. However, Boston, like other cities nationwide, achieved its most remarkable transformation through the introduction of electricity, a development that deserves closer study for its influence on urban history as well as on the growth of urban tourism.

Electricity and the City at the Turn of the Century

In his excellent book *Electrifying America: Social Meanings of a New Technology, 1880-1940* (1990), David Nye carefully considers the myriad ways in which the introduction of electricity changed life in the late nineteenth century. Of particular interest here is his study of electric light and electric-powered transportation in the urban environment, which is quite revealing of the ways in which electricity transformed the urban experience at the turn of the century for tourists as well as for women and the working class. Nye, an American Studies scholar and historian of technology, is clearly aware of the crucial link between technological advancement and social opportunity. His choice to highlight the urban tourist experience in his study is unusual for urban studies scholarship and thus points out a significant gap in other scholars’ research.

Although Nye does not specifically discuss Boston, much of his exceptional work serves to illustrate how any city’s development in the 1870s and 1880s was directly linked to the increased use of electricity. The bright lights of the big city, which drew visitors and new residents alike, were electric, of course. Electrified streetcars and elevated railways offered those

¹⁷ Jack Tager, “Massachusetts and the Age of Economic Revolution,” in *Massachusetts in the Gilded Age: Selected Essays*, eds. Jack Tager and John W. Ifkovic (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1985), 19.

residents and visitors new opportunities to quickly move from place to place in the city, and in the process to become sightseers of the urban landscape. Nye writes, “Electric streetcars were speeding sightseeing platforms, and could be used to tour the city; they could cover a vast area in a few hours. An 1882 guide, *New York By Daylight and Gaslight*, suggested just such a trip on the elevated ‘which may be made within three hours [and] will show the visitor more of the great city than can be seen in two days by any other means.’ Such a ride was a common touristic experience by the 1890s, as the postcards and stereo cards depicting the line attest. Two popular views were the giant curve at 110th Street and elevated cars passing over the Brooklyn Bridge.”¹⁸



"Boston, Mass. Dudley Street Terminal Station." The intricacies of Boston's streetcar system are clearly the focal point of this postcard, postmarked September 1908.

Historians of Boston during this era confirm that Bostonians also experienced expansion and transformation as a result of electrification of the city. In *Streetcar Suburbs*, for example, Sam Bass Warner writes that “in the late 1880s and 1890s the electrification of street railways brought convenient transportation to at least the range of six miles from City Hall. The rate of building and settlement in this period became so rapid that the whole scale and plan of Greater Boston was entirely made over.”¹⁹ And Scollay Square, Boston’s answer to the Great White

¹⁸ Nye, 106.

¹⁹ Sam Bass Warner, *Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston, 1870-1900* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press), 1962, 22.

Way, was dramatically enhanced by the introduction of theater signs lit by electricity, as detailed in David Kruh's study of the neighborhood, *Always Something Doing*.²⁰ Indeed, these signs, lighted by hundreds of smaller bulbs, heralded Scollay Square's transformation from its mid-century identity as a hub of commerce and transportation to its new position in the city as a center for popular entertainment. Although no historian has written of the effect of electrification on Boston tourism, electricity's influence is clear in turn-of-the-century guidebooks. Visitors are encouraged to make use of the city's extensive streetcar system, to visit its massive department stores (which Nye argues could not have come into existence without electricity for light and ventilation), and to take in electrified entertainment at the termini of the streetcar lines.²¹

By 1910, Boston (and indeed all American cities) had become virtually unrecognizable from its nineteenth-century, pre-electricity self. It had become, in the words of Jack Tager, "indecorous, sprawling, volatile" – the lively, unpredictable and ever-changing city of the twentieth century. In his preface to *Electrifying America*, Nye writes, "At the most abstract level, the intensifying use of energy represented the increasing national greatness of the United States. In daily experience, adopting electricity changed the appearance and multiplied the meanings of the landscapes of life."²² As with urban tourism, we are able to place Boston in this national phenomenon of electrification and are thus better able to understand both the history of Boston as a city and the history of Boston as a part of a larger whole.

²⁰ David Kruh, *Always Something Doing: Boston's Infamous Scollay Square*, Revised ed. (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1999).

²¹ Nye illustrates how these "streetcar parks" were the forerunners of modern amusement parks. Run by streetcar companies, they incorporated rides that were similar in technology, design, and maintenance to the streetcars themselves, most notably bringing to life our modern-day roller coasters (128).

²² Nye, x.

Boston and the American Historical Consciousness

Since the mid-1800s, Boston's place in the American patriotic consciousness has been as the birthplace of the nation, home of the Massachusetts Bay Colony and incubator of the American Revolution. From the late 1800s into the twentieth century, Boston's reputation was characterized by its two very diverse populations – the genteel, landed “Brahmins” and the newly arrived Irish. Today, the city's character has been defined for a generation of Americans by the television show “Cheers,” which featured an all-white cast of characters who represented various Boston stereotypes. If we are to unpack the stereotypes and limited representations of Boston in American history and culture, we would do well to begin by studying the roots of Boston's popular image.

For many late nineteenth-century Americans, the Civil War was within living memory, and others doubtless had direct ties to the Revolutionary era. But even for those who did not have these direct personal connections to nation-shaping historical events (perhaps especially for those who were first-generation Americans), celebrating American history and expressing nationalism were central to the experience of “being American.” This sense of shared identity was quite new, however, and dramatically different from how Americans thought at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The first half of this century saw the formation of a unique American identity, in which many elements of the European American experience were brought together to create the archetypal rugged individualism and republican idealism which came to define the United States. Certainly, a sense of sharing a history, much as members of a family would, contributed significantly to the creation of a perceived “American identity.” David Glassberg argues that “a shared history – elements of a past remembered in common as well as elements forgotten in

common – is the crucial element in the creation of an ‘imagined community’ through which disparate individuals and groups envision themselves as members of a collective with a common present and future.”²³ Of course, such a community, as imagined by the white American majority in the 1800s, excluded most citizens and residents of the United States who were not of Northern or Western European origin, especially if they were recent immigrants or first-generation natives. Although African Americans, Irish Americans, Italian Americans, and Asian Americans, to name a few prominent groups, certainly felt that they also had a “shared history” with their fellow Americans, they were not invited to participate in the “imagined community” which worked to create a national identity that excluded them. This American identity began to take its shape through the development of a national history, which was disseminated through popular culture and public education.

American history textbooks for schoolchildren first appeared in the 1820s and 1830s. Although public schooling was not standardized or compulsory for much of the nineteenth century, those who did receive some formal education were well versed in the major names and dates of American history. Alfred Young describes early history textbooks as “conservative ... and their very format constricted the events they described: a short, numbered paragraph describing each event was followed by an appendix of didactic questions keyed to each paragraph.”²⁴ Even though these textbooks were certainly not regulated as to the material they contained, they contained very similar information about American history, presented in similar ways. Thus, schoolchildren across the country, as they advanced in their education, began to espouse a sense of shared history that was new to the United States.

²³ David Glassberg, *Sense of History: The Place of the Past in American Life* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 11.

²⁴ Alfred E. Young, *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party: Memory and the American Revolution* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 136.

In a more detailed study of history education in the United States, George H. Callcott notes that “the same educational revolution that brought public schools and a new curriculum in the early nineteenth century also brought a radical change in teaching methods which caused history to enter the schools not as a dry and dreaded subject but as an enjoyable one.” He points out that the early history textbooks, which emphasized memorization of short passages, went out of vogue in favor of more descriptive, interpretive histories. The study of history took on a larger role in public education, and by 1860, one-fourth of the typical school primer was devoted to history. The format of these textbooks also changed, “as more pages, larger type, more generous margins, topical headings, maps and pictures came in order to add attractiveness to history.” Although memorization of facts was still a popular educational tool, “history came to have a new meaning: to be pleasant, interesting, dramatic, inspiring.”²⁵



An American Selection of Lessons in Reading and Speaking... Early 1800s school primer, written by Noah Webster, that includes lessons in “Geography, History, and Politics of the United States.”

Young draws a connection between the development of American history education and the commemoration and celebration of important people, places and events in American history. In *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party*, his study of a “forgotten” participant in the Boston Tea Party, he discusses the relative dearth of information available in the early nineteenth century about the Revolutionary War and pre-Revolution events. This may be partly attributable to a reluctance to record and celebrate a history that might have turned out to be short and unsuccessful, and partly due to a need to focus on the more pressing tasks of nation-building. By the mid-century, though, the United States was well established as a nation, and the formative

²⁵ George H. Callcott, “History Enters the Schools,” *American Quarterly* 11 (1959): 471-475.

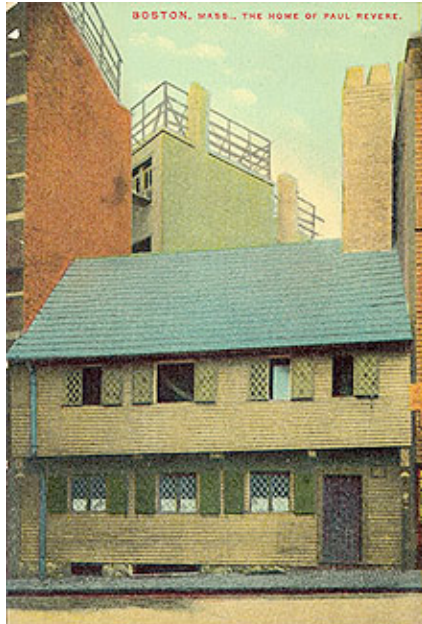
events of the eighteenth century were no longer within living memory for many Americans. The history of the nation needed to be formally recorded and presented to its citizens. While the need for education was being met in the classroom, the needs for preservation, commemoration and celebration were being addressed in the city where the American Revolution began – Boston.

Because memorization of names and dates was the preferred method of history education from about 1820 onwards, almost every adult by the mid-century who had received a basic schooling would have been familiar with Paul Revere and John Hancock, the Boston Tea Party and Bunker Hill, and the major dates of the American Revolutionary era. As Young says, “The history of Boston came into vogue.” Local histories for adults and children, biographies of important citizens, and historical novels set in Boston were produced in the 1820s and 1830s.²⁶ Boston’s central role in American history as the original home of Puritan settlers and the birthplace of the American Revolution ensured its permanence in the consciousness of a patriotic, educated culture. Bostonians became keenly aware of their surroundings and many ardent battles were fought over whether to preserve historic buildings, how to best do so, and what sorts of memorials were appropriate.

Michael Holleran has studied extensively the history of preservation and planning in Boston. In his introduction to *Boston’s “Changeful Times”*, he sets the scene for the development of preservation efforts in Boston by describing the state of affairs at the mid-century: “The whole American culture of city building relied on continual change.... Old buildings were regarded with distaste.... Historically significant buildings were not exempt from this perception; while many Bostonians took great pride in them, their appreciation was not aesthetic, and in any case antiquarianism was an attitude of connoisseurship, not a prescription

²⁶ Ibid.

for action.”²⁷ In other words, historical buildings, while valued, were not guaranteed preservation. Perhaps one of the most well-known examples of this philosophy in action is the home of John Hancock on upper Beacon Street. Although it was valued for its historical relevance, still architecturally sound, and the focus of highly charged preservation efforts throughout the nineteenth century, it was demolished in 1863 to make way for new



"Boston, Mass. The home of Paul Revere."
This postcard shows Revere's home after
it was restored by early preservationists.

development.²⁸ However, in the defense of those who opposed or misunderstood preservation, it is important to remember that the nineteenth-century city was an uncertain place, where it was not uncommon for entire neighborhoods to be completely demolished by fire or natural disaster, and where increasing industrialization made new and urgent demands on the built environment. More successful was the restoration of Paul Revere's birthplace in the North End. A preservation group fought to have the building stripped of its nineteenth-century embellishments and carefully restored it to the low-roofed,

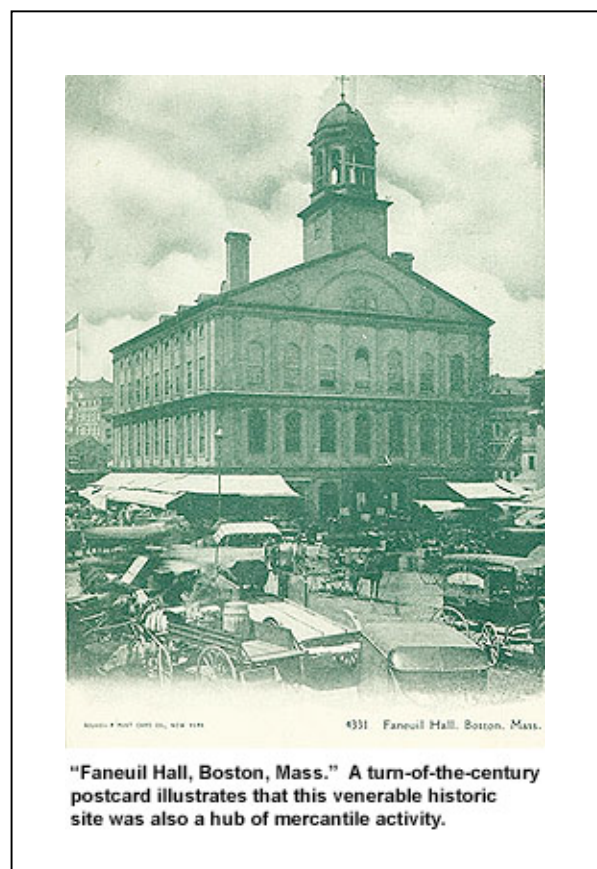
simple structure that Revere would have remembered.

As history education made Americans across the country more aware of Boston's historical significance, Bostonians became subject to an external gaze that was new. If the United States as a country was going to celebrate the people and events of its past, many Americans wanted to be sure that the *places* of the country's past were still available to be visited and appreciated. Urban tourism in Boston thus developed to a large extent as a response to the city's growing importance in American popular history. As we will see in Part II, visitors

²⁷ Holleran, 3.

²⁸ Holleran, 91-92. The Hancock mansion was replaced by two smaller private residences – smaller than the original mansion, to be sure, but still grand enough to be considered “mansions” in their own right.

to Boston were usually encouraged to make its historical attractions their top priority. But we will also see that Boston's guidebook writers and advertisers wanted their readers to appreciate Boston's appeal as a modern city; their efforts to balance the past with the present when representing Boston to their readers indicate their concern that Boston continue to resonate in Americans' shared history while remaining relevant in the modern urban milieu.



Part II. Visiting Boston Through Its Guidebooks, 1848-1910

The methodology of urban tourism scholarship must necessarily include close study of primary documents – namely, guidebooks, advertisements and other tourist-focused material. Cocks writes, “Studying the spatial practice of urban tourism for the most part means examining the ideal: the itineraries laid out in guidebooks and the destinations lovingly described in travel articles.... [T]he prescribed itineraries represent the most conventional and thorough exposition of tourist possibilities.”²⁹ As in any field of historical study that relies heavily on ephemera as primary sources, urban tourism scholarship sometimes becomes a matter of piecing together a puzzle from what resources are still with us. As Cocks points out, “Archives have obtained few records from tour companies, and the plethora of brochures, tickets, souvenirs, and schedules these businesses produced has largely gone the way of most interesting ephemera.”³⁰

Ephemera, documents that are not created with permanence in mind, can even include guidebooks themselves. Although we generally think of books as documents that can and should be preserved, and which are created with that goal in mind, anyone who purchases a guidebook before going on vacation quickly learns that the information contained in that guide is quite likely already out of date and inaccurate, and will probably keep it only as a souvenir of the trip, not as a resource for future use. Libraries usually keep guidebooks only for the current year, since a five-year-old guide to New York City, for example, will likely have little appeal to patrons. Likewise, bookstores stock only the current year’s edition of guidebooks; older editions therefore go immediately out of print once a new edition is published. Because the guidebook publishers realize the fleeting relevance of their books’ subject matter and the likelihood that the books will be discarded rather than preserved, they tend to publish guidebooks on cheap paper,

²⁹ Cocks, 7.

³⁰ Cocks, 273.

in lightweight paperback formats that please the traveler as well as lower the publishing costs. This practice evidently dates from the early days of publishing guidebooks – no doubt then, as now, it was important for guidebooks to be inexpensive, lightweight and as up-to-date as possible. Many of the Boston guidebooks held in the archives of the Massachusetts Historical Society and the Bostonian Society are in poor condition because they were never intended to be preserved for one hundred years and more. Such documents may indeed have been incidental components of larger, more traditional collections of books and documents that were donated to archives such as these. But although they may have been valued by their original owners simply as souvenirs of a vacation, the guidebooks' subsequent preservation by professionals indicates the deeper value that these books have as historical documents, and their unassailable importance in the study of urban tourism in Boston.

The examination of Boston guidebooks that follows is divided into three sections. This organization reflects the three distinct periods in the development of travel and tourism in the United States as identified by Hugh DeSantis in his 1978 study of the history of travel. While by no means absolute, DeSantis's categories do help keep track of major historical phases in this field of study.³¹ The first period is the "era of informal travel," roughly 1800 to 1860, in which there was no formalized travel industry; urban tourism in particular was nascent only towards the end of this era. Next is the "age of travel exclusivity," encompassing the 1860s, 1870s, and 1880s, in which tourism was marketed only to the very wealthy. The third era is the "period of travel democratization," from the late 1880s to 1915; this period "heralds the beginning of mass tourism and the development of an institutionalized travel industry."³² By examining Boston guidebooks that were produced during the three stages of this history, we can read them as

³¹ Catherine Cocks also incorporates DeSantis's timetable into her historical framework in *Doing the Town*.

³² Hugh Desantis, "The Democratization of Travel: The Travel Agent in American History," *Journal of American Culture* 1 (1978): 1.

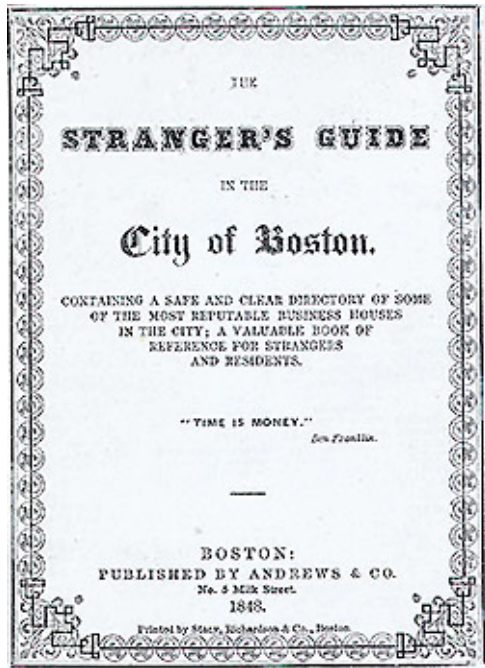
telling the story of how urban tourism in Boston emerged and evolved over time. The culmination of this narrative takes place in the “era of travel democratization,” from 1885 to 1915. In those last years before the automobile transformed American life, improved urban technology, new popular entertainments, and the rise of the middle class came together to produce what might well be considered the golden age of urban life in the United States. Because this era is the most engaging when studying urban tourism, it is the focus of the narrative that follows.

Guidebooks Before 1860: “The Era of Informal Travel”

Boston in the late 1840s was strongly characterized by its two distinct social groups – the insular, well-established “Yankee” community, and the enormous group of poor, newly arrived Irish immigrants. The idea of “us vs. them” or “natives vs. strangers” would no doubt have been prominent in the minds of many Bostonians, and the earliest examples of Boston guidebooks certainly confirm this hypothesis. Beginning in 1848, annual volumes of a book called *The Stranger’s Guide in the City of Boston* were produced for the benefit of businessmen visiting the city. These years fall just at the dawn of the age of urban tourism, if we use Cocks’s starting point of 1850. *The Stranger’s Guide* is more of a directory of “reputable” businesses than a true guidebook; no doubt there was not much market for guidebooks in an era when almost no one visited a city just for pleasure. Yet the development of the *idea* of a tourist, one who visits a place for recreation, as distinct from the idea of a traveler, one who visits for business or is on a journey to another destination, is quite clear in the four volumes of this work, published between 1848 and 1851. Guidebooks that have been published serially – that is, in intervals under the

same title – are particularly helpful in getting a sense of how the urban tourism industry developed over time.

Each volume of *The Stranger's Guide* contains frontmatter, before the main directory section, that provides useful information for “strangers” in the city. This informational section grows exponentially with each subsequent volume of *The Stranger's Guide*, from three pages in



The Stranger's Guide in the City of Boston. 1848.

1848 to ten pages in 1851. In 1848, the information consists of a one-page “Railroad Directory” of timetables, one page on the “Territory of Boston,” including general demographic information, and a one-page directory “Halls, Public Buildings, Offices, Etc.” in Boston. The informational section is expanded in the 1849 and 1850 editions to include details of “Hotels in Boston,” “Cab and Coach Fares,” “Boston Two Hundred Years Ago,” “Changes of Names in Some of the Streets of Boston, Since 1700,” historical information about the

Boston Common, and distances to various points in Boston from the State House – additions that illustrate changing expectations of what visitors to Boston would be interested in knowing about the city.

In 1848, the guide’s publishers anticipated that “strangers” to Boston would be primarily concerned with knowing where they could conduct business transactions, but by 1851, these strangers were beginning to act more like tourists. In fact, the introduction to the 1851 edition no longer refers to its readers as “strangers”; instead it alludes to the developing national transportation network that “encourages a visit by merchants from all parts of the Union.” The

writers of *The Stranger's Guide* clearly do not wish to alienate their readers by making them feel like outsiders in an insular community; rather, they welcome “visitors” who are, in fact, members of a larger community in which they all take part. This indicates a refiguring of the relationship between visitor and visited – a change in perception from stranger/native to guest/host that dramatically affected the future of travel and tourism in American cities.

Further evidence of the developing concept of urban tourism can be found in the 1851 edition's expanded informational section. It contains a directory of “Places Worthy of a Visit By Strangers,” a list which includes the Boston Common, the Custom House, Faneuil Hall, Quincy Hall (now called Quincy Market), the Merchants Exchange, the Perkins Institution for the Blind,³³ and places outside the city such as the Charlestown Navy Yard, Bunker Hill, Mount Auburn, Harvard College, and various adjacent towns like Brookline and Lexington. *The Stranger's Guide* advises that “cars leave for these places as well as omnibuses,” and that all are “beautiful places, situated within ten miles of Boston.” Even more outlying places, like Hingham, Cohasset and Spectacle Island, it assures the traveler, are within a mile or two of the Eastern and Old Colony Railroads. The 1851 edition is also the first to include advertisements geared towards the traveler – specifically, for various railroad lines and hotels in the Boston area. Significantly, *The Stranger's Guide's* list of sites to visit within the metropolitan area places an emphasis on historical tourism in Boston that continues to the present day.

Bowen's New Guide to the City of Boston and Vicinity, published in 1849 by Abel Bowen, confirms the birth of urban tourism in Boston during this time period. In his introduction, addressed “to the Reader,” Bowen writes, “The frequent calls for a smaller work

³³ This listing hints at a future tourism trend – the development of a sub-genre of reform-oriented tourism, no doubt a product of the reformation interests of the late nineteenth century. Many of the guidebooks studied here listed public institutions like the Perkins Institution for the Blind, the Massachusetts State Prison, the City Hospital, the Houses of Industry and Reformation, and so on, as “places worth visiting.” Perhaps these were intended to appeal primarily to upper-class women tourists who were actively engaged in reform work at home.

than those I have heretofore published (Bowen's *Picture of Boston* and Snow's *History of Boston*) have induced me to prepare this Guide for those who may wish a mere sketch of those most prominent objects of interest to be seen in a speedy drive through the City and vicinity." If his audience was intent upon rapidly seeing the sights in Boston, their tourism was most likely a sidelight of a business trip or visit to family. (It was hardly likely that one would travel any significant distance to Boston just for a "speedy drive" through the city, and transportation scholarship confirms that very few Americans traveled from home solely for recreational purposes during this era.) *Bowen's New Guide* illustrates that services to support travelers were being developed in Boston on a grand scale; in the section on hotels, Bowen writes that the Tremont House is "one of the most convenient and best managed hotels in the United States," and that the United States Hotel "is said to be the most extensive establishment in the country."³⁴ Surely this is partially editorializing, but it is certainly true that the United States Hotel, with approximately five hundred rooms, was a massive establishment – clearly developed in response to a growing transient population.

Like the 1851 *Stranger's Guide*, *Bowen's New Guide* also contains a list of "Places Worth Visiting," which includes the Old State House, the "venerable Mansion of John Hancock" (the focus of an early preservation effort, but demolished in 1863), and the sites of historical buildings no longer standing, such as the First Church, the Old Province House, the birthplace of Benjamin Franklin, and the mansion of Governor Winthrop. Bowen further supports the growing emphasis on Boston's historical attractions in a section entitled "Antiquities of Boston," writing that "a stranger in visiting our city, particularly if he has an inquiring mind or an antiquarian taste, desires to see something that will remind him of the men who lived and acted

³⁴ Abel Bowen, *Bowen's New Guide to the City of Boston and Vicinity: State of Massachusetts* (Boston: J. Munroe, 1849), 9.

here, previous to the establishment of our independence.”³⁵ Bowen also encourages visitors to climb to the top of the State House’s dome for a bird’s-eye view of the city – clearly a tourist activity. He even gives advice on how to sway the dome’s guards if they prove reluctant to allow visitors!

In 1856, R. L. Midgely published *Sights in Boston and Suburbs; or, Guide to the Stranger*, a work clearly influenced by the earlier, four-volume *Stranger’s Guide to Boston*. It is also similar to *Bowen’s New Guide* in that it emphasizes sights to be seen in Boston, rather than business to be conducted. However, Midgely intends his audience to include *residents* of Boston as well as visitors, a new development. In his preface, he writes, “This work, although more particularly designed for the use of travellers, will be found of great service to the public

generally, for few of the inhabitants know where to see the sights in the city, nor how to see them.”³⁶ In this era, Boston was beginning its transition from the colonial “walking city” of two miles in diameter to a vastly expanded metropolitan area; Midgely seems to be responding to Boston residents’ new feelings of being strangers in their own city. He is also expressing an awareness that when people walk past places every day, they fail to acknowledge their value in the way that visitors do – this seems obvious today, but in 1856, the notion that people would come to a place specifically to see its historical buildings was quite novel. His prose also



Title page of R. L. Midgely's *Sights in Boston and Suburbs; or, Guide to the Stranger*. 1856. The images depict sightseeing must-sees that can no longer be seen: a well-known house built in 1680, the Liberty Oak, and tall ships in the harbor.

³⁵ Bowen, 21.

³⁶ R. L. Midgely, *Sights in Boston and Suburbs; or, Guide to the Stranger* (Boston: J. P. Jewett, 1856), 1.

assigns the role of interpreter and educator to the guidebook itself. By asserting that his book will help its readers know what to see and how to see it, he is encouraging his audience to relinquish authority and to accept his advice as expert.

Midgely and his cohort of guidebook writers in the 1850s are in fact setting the stage for the formal development of a full-fledged tourist industry, which we can see taking place during the next thirty years. It is also important to note that these early guidebook writers were clearly influenced by history textbooks of their era. As discussed in Part I, midcentury textbooks changed from a format that emphasized terse, factual summaries to a style that included descriptive narratives intended to capture the reader's interest and imagination. Guidebook writers like the ones mentioned above mimicked this transformation in textbook writing, moving from very brief listings of places to what we might today call "virtual tours" of the city, including description, historical context, and local character to give their writing a touch of color. Yet their style of describing Boston's history and historical sites varied little, giving guidebooks even towards the end of the century a formulaic feel. Partly this was no doubt due to growing competition in the guidebook market – writers and publishers probably wanted to keep their products similar to those produced by others in the field in order to remain competitive and attractive to consumers.

Although the physical format of the guidebooks varies – hardbound vs. softcover, tinted or black and white illustrations, and so on – according to who was buying them and how much they were willing to pay, the material contained inside follows unspoken, prescribed guidelines that writers may well have picked up from their own history educations. Like textbooks of the nineteenth century, the guidebooks encourage standard, traditional interpretations of historical places and events. The rote descriptions in these guidebook extend to non-historic attractions as

well: the 1851 edition of *The Stranger's Guide* describes Fresh Pond in Cambridge as “a splendid sheet of water,” and R. L. Midgely writes in 1856 of the pond as “a handsome sheet of water.” Clearly, the writers of these guidebooks were sharing their information and writing styles, whether formally or otherwise. These guidebooks show that their writers strove to cultivate the same enthusiasm about history that writers of textbooks and popular history works did, and they illustrate the publishers’ growing awareness of a consumer market developing in which they could take advantage of their audience’s interests in order to sell guidebooks and bring visitors to their city.

A Developing Industry: “The Age of Travel Exclusivity,” 1865-1885

Tourism during the 1860s seems to have been strongly affected by the national economic depression following the Civil War. It is difficult to find Boston guidebooks from this time period, and what tourism did take place appears to still have been on the “informal” level of the previous era of travel in the United States. Following DeSantis’s structure, however, Boston guidebooks produced during this period do indicate that they are intended for a well-to-do, educated audience.

In this era, the idea of pleasure as a commodity to be consumed had not yet developed; rather, luxury, leisure and refinement were seen as innate privileges of the wealthy. As discussed previously, one area in which these ideas were promoted was that of travel and tourism. Transportation was becoming more luxurious, for those who could afford it, and a tourist industry was developing to meet the needs of those who traveled for pleasure. And because most pleasure travelers between 1865 and 1885 were quite wealthy, advertisements for trains, steamships, hotels, and restaurants all “emphasized elegance, luxury, fashionable patronage, and

first-class accommodations” and “increasingly flaunted images of status.”³⁷ Organized tours and excursions were introduced to appeal to the well-to-do traveler’s desire to mingle exclusively with those in his or her accustomed social milieu, even when among strangers.

Moses King’s *King’s Hand-Book of Boston*, produced in 1879, provides a good example of this era’s focus on the upper-class tourist. King uses high-flown language to describe the major landmarks of the city, even those that no longer exist – he writes of the demolished John Hancock home, “In 1863, the old Hancock House ... one of the noblest private mansions of the colonial period, and one of the unique features of this part of the city [Beacon Hill], was removed.... A great effort was made to preserve this old landmark, but without avail, although the house was in excellent preservation.”³⁸ King seems clearly to appeal to the upper-class sensibilities of his readers, who, he assumes, will be distressed to learn of the callous destruction of such a fine and “noble” home. (Indeed, many of King’s readers would have known that John Hancock was arguably the wealthiest man in Revolutionary-era Boston, and he may well be assuming that they would identify with Hancock.) Yet King also tacitly acknowledges that his readers may be impatient with a sentimental desire to preserve the past – as previously mentioned, the driving impulse in American cities at the mid-century and afterwards was change, change, change. He writes, “Boston has changed marvellously during the past half-century; and a great, far-reaching, imposing modern city has taken the place of the bustling, quaint,



King's Hand-Book of Boston: Profusely Illustrated. 1879.

³⁷ DeSantis, 7.

³⁸ Moses King, *King's Hand-Book of Boston: Profusely Illustrated* (Boston: D. Lothrop, 1879), 12.

picturesque town of a hundred years ago.”³⁹ His prose is clearly designed to impress the reader and the visitor, and he lists the city’s modern improvements, such as the streetcar system, with as much fanfare as its historic landmarks. Although King acknowledges Boston’s tradition of historical tourism, and opens his guidebook with a section called “The Boston of the Past: A Sketch of Its History,” he seems to be more interested in making an impression with Boston’s recent developments in technology and building construction. While this might seem an odd focus for a city so well known for its history, King’s choice of emphasis is characteristic of this era.

Guidebooks produced during the post-Civil War era also indicate a new national trend: civic pageantry, celebration and commemoration. In 1869 and 1872, Boston hosted two Peace Jubilees, musical extravaganzas celebrating the end of the Civil War. These celebrations may seem rather after-the-fact, the war having been concluded in 1865, and it is indeed likely that the events, like many other such urban celebrations during this era, were in fact intended to have more of an advertising effect for the city. David Glassberg, a scholar of urban pageantry, writes, “Like the municipal symphony orchestra, art museum, [or] library ... the large civic celebration announced the city’s status to the outside world while offering a focus for civic identity within.”⁴⁰ Although the Peace Jubilees were likely organized for Boston and area residents, the growing guidebook industry took advantage of the events’ natural tourist appeal. By uniting the historical importance of Boston’s tourist sites with an intensified sense of national loyalty following the war, guidebook writers used the Peace Jubilees of 1869 and 1872 to market the city to visitors. Their books became, in effect, tie-ins to the celebrations, providing detailed programs, maps and descriptions of events surrounding the Jubilees, in addition to the usual

³⁹ King, 19.

⁴⁰ Glassberg, 67.

tourist information about the city itself. *Tilton's Visitor's Guide*, published in 1869, advertises on its cover that it is "Supplemented by a programme of the Peace Jubilee" and is careful to inform readers that "the Great Musical Peace Festival Building is located on St. James Avenue, leading from Berkeley Street."⁴¹ *Chandler's Visitor's Guide*, published in 1872, also makes prominent mention of the Peace Jubilee taking place in that year.⁴²

The national centennial of 1876 was also cause for civic celebration. However, as national and international expositions came into vogue during this era, it became impractical and undesirable for more than one city at a time to host a massive celebration. In 1876, the honor was Philadelphia's, as it hosted the Centennial Exhibition in commemoration of the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776. At least one guidebook publisher showed remarkable marketing savvy in assuming that travelers coming to Philadelphia for the Exhibition might be likely to visit other Northeastern cities while in the area. Its author writes persuasively that "this book [is] designed especially for the centennial traveler, and it [is] quite certain that a very great majority of all visitors to the Exhibition, coming from remote points, will visit, at least the Capital and the Metropolis, if not all the great cities from Boston to Washington.... Although the distance is not great, about 460 miles, it is yet more interesting than any other section of the United States of similar extent, being the oldest, most prosperous, and thickly populated district." He cautions potential visitors that "the entire journey can be made by direct travel in less than twenty-four hours, but should not be so made unless under the press of absolute necessity."⁴³ Of course, by encouraging more leisurely travel, he is also ensuring that travelers will infuse more of their money into the economies of the cities they visit. Thus, although Boston itself did not

⁴¹ *Tilton's Visitor's Guide: Containing a Directory to All Objects of Interest In and About Boston* ([Boston]: J.E. Tilton & Co., 1869).

⁴² *Chandler's Visitor's Guide In and Around Boston* ([Boston]: W.H. Chandler & Co., 1872).

⁴³ *Boston to Washington. A Complete Pocket Guide to the Great Eastern Cities and the Centennial Exhibition With Maps* (New York: Hurd & Houghton; Cambridge, Mass.: The Riverside Press), 1876.

host a national-scale centennial celebration, it certainly benefited from enterprising guidebook writers' efforts to draw civic-minded travelers north from Philadelphia.

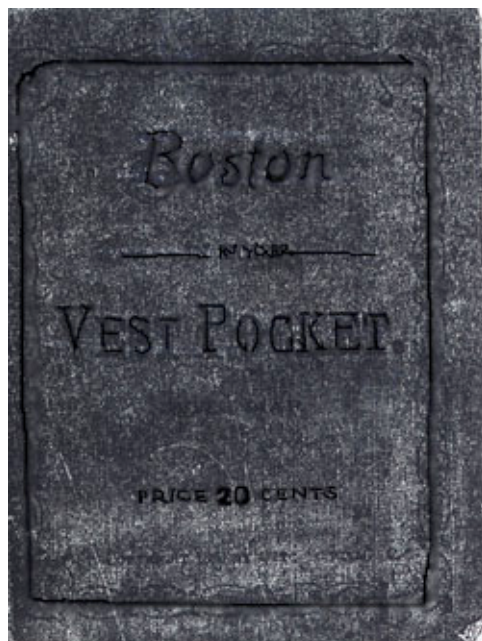
Into the Twentieth Century: "The Era of Travel Democratization," 1886-1915

The final era in this study shows a change in American life from the nineteenth-century culture of self-improvement to our modern culture of self-satisfaction. Although the wealthy had always been able to indulge themselves in the pleasures of life, if they so chose, only at the turn of the century did it become possible for those with more modest incomes to do so as well. The emergence of a white-collar middle class, with a moderate disposable income and scheduled leisure time, forced the emergence of American consumer culture, in which products and services competed with each other to provide buyers with the most value and enjoyment for the lowest cost. Urban tourism experienced an enormous boost in popularity as cities themselves came to represent the modernity of the nation; the consumerism and entertainment that cities offered appealed to visitors as well as residents, and cities became meccas for shoppers and pleasure-seekers. Guidebooks from this era illustrate Boston's transformation from a regional capital into a modern American city, and they also indicate the changing nature of Boston's visitors.

One important new component of Boston guidebooks from this era is the advertising for various city services and leisure spaces. Hotels, restaurants, tour guides, even shoe stores (for the uncomfortable sightseer) and real estate agents (for those with an eye to relocating) purchased advertising space in guidebooks with the express goal of attracting tourist business. Many of these guidebook advertisements allude to elegance and sophistication, as Hugh DeSantis points out, but they also convey an awareness of their customers' need for value and

comfort. Thus, although a hotel might advertise its accommodations as “strictly first-class,” it also does not fail to mention the free transfer of baggage from the station and the cheaper nightly rate if breakfast is not included. During this time, the format of the guidebooks themselves also began to exhibit changes that suggest an attempt to appeal to budget-conscious travelers. Gone were the hardcover, illustrated historical guides to the city; twentieth-century guidebooks were strictly paperback, with modest two-color covers and few illustrations inside. They generally cost between five and twenty-five cents, and, like today’s guidebooks, were clearly not intended for permanence.

Boston in Your Vest Pocket: With Map, published in 1886, is quite clearly a departure from earlier guidebooks to Boston – specifically, it shows that the tourist industry’s focus was shifting to a more middle-class, budget-conscious customer base. Most notably, it is one of the first books that is clearly designed specifically with the tourist in mind, rather than the armchair traveler or Boston history buff – *Boston in Your Vest Pocket* really *is* vest-pocket-sized, being



Boston in Your Vest Pocket. 1886. This is the book's actual size!
(Note: image has been digitally enhanced to improve quality.)

approximately four centimeters wide by nine centimeters high. Although, unlike previous guides to the city, *Boston in Your Vest Pocket* does not directly address the reader, its emphasis is certainly upon providing quick access to information that readers will find useful. It begins with an alphabetical index of the book’s contents, and the book itself consists of short descriptions of places of interest. Among these places are the usual sites of historical note – Faneuil Hall, the Old South Church, and so on – but also more modern features of the city, such as telegraph offices

and “street railways.” This book’s small, lightweight format would seem to make it ideal for travelers of either sex, but its mention of “vest pocket” in the title signals to potential buyers that it is intended primarily for men. Its contents confirm this intention, as it lists male-only facilities, such as public bathing places and the YMCA, and “places of amusement” such as variety theaters that middle-class women would not likely visit without male accompaniment. Probably most nineteenth-century guidebook writers and publishers envisioned a male audience when creating their books, regardless of who actually purchased them, but this one seems noteworthy in its use of exclusively male language.

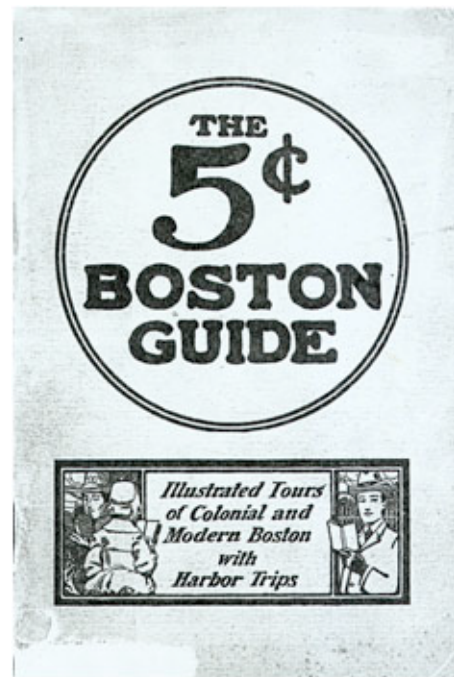
Boston in Your Vest Pocket is also noteworthy in that it does not waste any time with lengthy narrative – each site’s entry includes only a small paragraph of information, mostly detailing its location. This book’s authors assume that their readers are not particularly interested in a history lesson; rather, it is fairly clear that they know their readers will already be aware of why these sites are important to visit. Apparently, little exposition is necessary. Its contents, as well as its format, also indicate that it was designed with the budget-conscious traveler in mind – such a tiny, flimsy volume could not have cost more than ten or twenty-five cents, and its authors thoughtfully advise that the street railways are “altogether the most complete and cheapest means of seeing the city and environs.”⁴⁴ *Boston in Your Vest Pocket*, then, reveals new characteristics of the urban tourist as the age of travel exclusivity was ending and the era of travel democratization was beginning. The new urban tourist, according to this guidebook’s writer, was male, middle- or upper-middle-class, traveling on a budget, perhaps interested in lowbrow as well as highbrow entertainments, and possessed at least a basic knowledge of American history in general and Boston history in particular. At the turn of the twentieth century and beyond, this new conception of the urban tourist would really begin to

⁴⁴ *Boston in Your Vest Pocket: With Map* (Roxbury, Mass.: Otto Schumm, 1886), 67.

drive the direction of the tourist industry's growth, and would strongly influence the continuing focus on historical tourism and the marketing of popular forms of entertainment to city visitors.

Although *Boston in Your Vest Pocket* is clearly marketed towards men, other guidebooks indicate that middle-class women also engaged in urban tourism in this era. As Nye and others have pointed out, electrified transportation greatly enhanced the independence of women in the city, and entrepreneurs developed their grand department stores in large part to attract women shoppers from the suburbs. The heightened presence of women on their own or in groups in the city made it increasingly acceptable for women who were not local residents to travel about the city without men.⁴⁵ Some guidebook writers tailored their guides specifically to women tourists.

The 5¢ Boston Guide, produced in 1904, is an interesting example of a women-oriented guidebook. Like *Boston in Your Vest Pocket*, it does not explicitly indicate its intended audience; rather, it relies on contextual clues within the text to tell its readers who it is for.⁴⁶ Although *The 5¢ Boston Guide* contains the usual narrative descriptions of Boston's historic sites, its heavy emphasis on shopping as a leisure activity hints at its female audience. In addition, almost all its product-oriented advertisements are for items that were solely the province of women – silver polish, floor polish, chocolates, and women's shoes are all advertised in this



The 5¢ Boston Guide. 1904.

⁴⁵ Cocks writes of the growing popularity of conventions at the turn of the century. These annual meetings convened in cities and were designed to bring together members of unions, benevolent societies or professional associations. Many of these groups, such as the National Education Association, had large female contingencies, and members were likely to attend such conventions either alone or with their colleagues.

⁴⁶ The places in which these guidebooks were sold may also have been male- or female-oriented, but that information would be difficult to ascertain.

guide. Even an advertisement for shoe polish, a gender-neutral product, features women and girls. Although *The 5¢ Boston Guide*'s publisher is male (Charles E. Brown), its lack of signed authorship may indicate that its writer was herself a woman, and an advertisement towards the back of the book announces that "Advertisements in this 5¢ Guide were solicited by Turner & Semple" – further named as Alice M. Turner and Inez M. Semple. It is important to note that neither the text nor the tourism-specific advertisements of this guidebook speak down to readers, indicating that the writers and advertisers assumed that their women readers would be as aware of Boston history as their male counterparts, and were as significant to the tourist industry as male travelers.

Because the new urban tourists, male and female, did not belong to the elite upper class, they were more likely to travel with a fixed budget, and they were also probably interested in finding attractions and entertainments that would welcome "their sort." Although they still certainly purchased guidebooks and followed the writers' recommendations to see the standard sites of the city, these middle-class tourists were also more likely to use public transportation, dine in inexpensive restaurants, and visit non-exclusive entertainment venues. These services, of course, already existed in the city for its residents, and so it was quite natural that middle-class tourists found themselves rubbing elbows with their Bostonian counterparts in ways that were not expected or even considered appropriate in the upper class.

Middle-class tourists at the turn of the century were more likely to attend a vaudeville show than the symphony, and, through guidebook advertising, they were also encouraged to visit local popular recreational spaces like the streetcar parks that were built in the suburbs at the ends of the streetcar lines. Developed by the competing streetcar companies, these parks featured amusement-park rides, dancing pavilions, and places for swimming or other outdoor recreations.

The most prominent of these streetcar parks in the Boston area were probably Norumbega Park in Newton, and Revere Beach, which still exists as a working-class leisure space today. In the city, there were cheap amusements like dime museums (the most famous owned by the showman P. T. Barnum), where curious visitors could see novelties such as the telegraph demonstrated. Sporting events – professional, amateur and collegiate – were also popular, plentiful and cheap, and baseball especially became a regional and national phenomenon in the 1890s and 1900s. Although probably only the most ardent fans regularly traveled to other cities solely to attend baseball games, no doubt many casual sports fans chose to take in a Boston Nationals or Americans game when visiting the city, especially if they followed the teams’ wins and losses in the newspapers back home.⁴⁷ In his introduction to *Going Out*, David Nasaw refers to this period as the “era of public amusements,” during which Americans were “beginning to share a common commercial culture and public amusement sites, where social solidarities were emphasized and distinctions muted.”⁴⁸

Shopping also began to be a major recreation for all classes in the 1890s, and, not coincidentally, tourist guidebooks began to feature the advertisements of local businesses. Although some of the goods offered in these ads were intended to appeal specifically to tourists, such as “the Traveler Shoe,” other advertisements were for milliners or department stores that would have had a general audience. In visiting these establishments, then, tourists again mimicked and interacted with the city’s residents, also going about their shopping. Department stores frequently touted themselves in their advertisements as not-to-be-missed sights for visitors to the city. A 1904 guidebook contains three advertisements for prominent Boston department

⁴⁷ Despite their origins in the Cincinnati Red Stockings, the Boston Americans were not known as the Red Sox until 1907, when they adopted a uniform featuring red leggings. The rival Boston teams were colloquially and officially known in the early years of baseball only by the leagues to which they belonged – National and American. (Later, the Nationals became known as the Boston Braves.)

⁴⁸ David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 2.

stores. A Filene's ad promotes the store as "One of the Sights of Boston," and appeals particularly to women shoppers with the statement, "Visitors will be personally shown through our handsome stores by women store guides." Jordan Marsh is advertised as "One of the principal sights of Boston. The mercantile heart of New England." And an ad for the R. H. White department store also appeals directly to tourists: "The finest Department Store in Boston and one of the sights of the city. Its Reception Parlor and Grand Salon the home of all strangers. All its privileges are yours. Make use of its many conveniences: its telephone, its telegraph, its post-office, its lavatories, its lunch room, its soda fountain. Its Moving Stairway may be new to you. Try it."⁴⁹ The language of these advertisements creates the sense that, for travelers, the department store is both an important feature of the city and a microscopic version of the city, containing all necessities under one roof, serving as "a home of all strangers" while remaining useful and relevant to city residents as well.



"The shopping hour, Washington St. Boston, Mass." The rectangular sign on the building in the left foreground proclaims this area "The busiest corner on Boston's busiest street." Shopping is clearly something in which all can participate, and this postcard celebrates consumerism as a leisure activity.

At night, when the department stores were closed and the baseball fields in darkness, some middle-class tourists probably took in a show at one of Boston's several fine vaudeville

⁴⁹ *G.A.R. Souvenir Book of Boston: Where to Eat, Sleep, Rest, and Shop: What to See, How to See It* ([Boston?]: Prepared for the encampment of the Grand Army of the Republic held in Boston, August 15-20, 1904).

theaters. Scollay Square, which continued to be the city's center of popular entertainment until it was razed in the 1960s, was at the turn of the century a place where working-class and middle-class residents, respectable members of society, could go for an evening's entertainment. As Don B. Wilmeth writes in his guide to the history of popular entertainment, "Modern vaudeville's heyday lasted a scant fifty years or so, from the 1880s to the early 1930s, but during its time Americans of all classes were amused and found relief from the relatively new industrial complex."⁵⁰ Unlike the more refined theaters of Boston's burgeoning Theatre District, the vaudeville theaters of Scollay Square and elsewhere in the downtown area were places where audience members could blow off steam, enjoy a beer and some peanuts, and boisterously interact with the performers and each other. Women as well as men were welcome in vaudeville theaters, and children were even frequently present at the matinee performances. Nasaw writes, "There were no restrictions as to gender, ethnicity, religion, residence, or occupation in the new amusement spaces."⁵¹ Even burlesque in this era co-existed with the more respectable vaudeville, focusing primarily on comedy, not striptease – and what stripping did take place was fairly tame by today's standards.⁵² It would have been entirely acceptable for middle-class tourists at the turn of the century to visit Scollay Square in the evenings, and doubtless many did, even though the theaters and amusements there were infrequently mentioned by name in tourist guidebooks. A 1903 guidebook presents a list of what the writer no doubt considered the more highbrow theaters in the city, after which is added the statement, "There are also in Boston a number of theaters devoted to vaudeville and burlesque, duly advertised in the daily papers."⁵³

⁵⁰ Don B. Wilmeth, *Variety Entertainment and Outdoor Amusements: A Reference Guide* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1982), 132.

⁵¹ Nasaw, 2.

⁵² Wilmeth, 153.

⁵³ Edwin M. Bacon, *Boston: A Guide Book* ([Boston]: Ginn & Company, 1903).

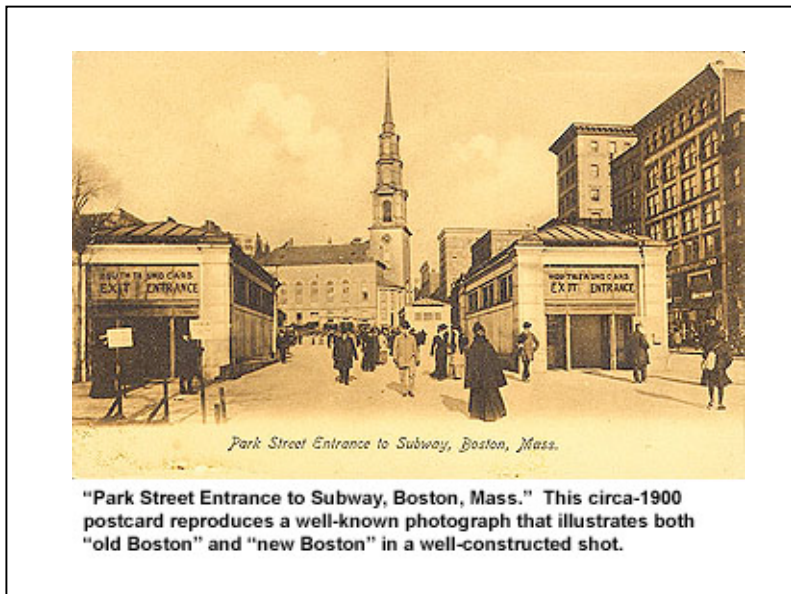
Tourists walking about the city would also have learned of these theaters from the broadsheet advertisements plastered at streetcar stops and in other areas with high pedestrian traffic.

One important reason that tourists were able to participate in activities and make use of services primarily intended for residents was because the city at this moment was truly becoming a metropolis. In the early years of the twentieth century, Boston was no longer a place where one necessarily knew one's neighbors or saw the same people on the street every day. Bostonians could no longer easily distinguish between residents and visitors, and this blurring of distinctions affected the way tourists were perceived and how they perceived themselves. If they put away their guidebooks, they could perhaps stop being "strangers" and become participants in the life of Boston, in places like restaurants and theaters where there might be regulars but also an ever-changing, anonymous crowd of faces. Nasaw agrees, saying that "the new entertainment centers held more strangers than friends.... The 'crowd' replaced the select circle of acquaintances as the setting in which one sought and found amusement."⁵⁴ Of course, tourists still possessed characteristics that, up close, distinguished them from residents, but in a city made up of strangers, they were a more natural component of the urban landscape. Ezra Pound captured the both the anonymity and the unexpected beauty of this new urban milieu in his 1913 poem, "In a Station of the Metro": "The apparition of these faces in the crowd;/Petals on a wet, black bough." Although the twentieth-century city could be frightening and alienating, urban tourists understood and shared Pound's sense of exhilaration at the city's newness.

By the 1910s, the guidebook industry itself became characteristic of the twentieth-century urban landscape – more rigorously organized and dominated by a few major publishers. Perhaps the most familiar of these is Rand, McNally, which still produces guidebooks and road atlases for travelers. They began producing regular editions of their Boston guidebook in the early years

⁵⁴ Nasaw, 2.

of the twentieth century, and by 1910, the information in that book had become standardized to an extent that each year's edition shows only slight modifications. The success of publishers such as Rand, McNally, in the guidebook industry is symbolic, in a way, of the history of urban tourism itself. That a Chicago-based company could become established as the leading expert in information about Boston, a city more than one thousand miles away, while the expertise of local authors fell into disfavor, is indicative of the commercialization of the tourism industry in the first half of the twentieth century. As Catherine Cocks writes, "The rise of urban tourism is one of the signs of the increasing centrality of consumption and leisure in defining meaningful participation in the social order."⁵⁵ Of course, guidebooks themselves are by nature a commodity, and their consumption, as we have just seen, played an important role in driving the growth of the urban tourism industry from a city-based, decentralized phenomenon in 1850 to a national-scale enterprise by 1910.



⁵⁵ Cocks, 7.

Conclusion

By “visiting” Boston through its guidebooks, we can clearly see the development of a tourist industry in the city from about 1850 to 1910. At the early end of the spectrum, there were very few services in place to serve visitors from outside the city, and those visitors were almost always business travelers, not vacationers. Yet even in the small span of four years represented by the publication run of *The Stranger’s Guide*, we can see the concept of urban tourism begin to develop. The writer of *The Stranger’s Guide* begins to market the city’s historic sites to his readers and to catalog the city’s growing services to visitors – hotels, train stations, and so on – for the benefit of those unfamiliar with the city. These services grow exponentially over a relatively short period of time, and in sixty years, Boston boasts a booming tourist industry, complete with sightseeing tours, souvenir shops, tourist-class hotels, and, of course, a multitude of guidebooks.

In this manner, Boston as a case study exemplifies the development of urban tourism as portrayed in Catherine Cocks’s work. But it also shows a side of urban tourism that Cocks does not explore – the relationship between education, patriotism, and urban tourism. Cocks, like other scholars, notes the role of national pride in the development of so-called “nature tourism,” which arose from an adulation of American landscape in the mid-nineteenth century. But she does so only as a backdrop to her own study, and in her thesis, national identity does not explicitly inform the development of urban tourism. Because Boston’s tourism was linked so directly to the development of a national history in the nineteenth century, Cocks and other scholars of urban tourism miss an important component of their subject area by choosing to omit Boston in their work. In the study of Boston lies an important connection between the development of “national identity” as a concept and its attendant expectations of patriotism,

shared history and the civic education thought necessary for full membership in American society of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By visiting sites that were the sources of that shared history, Americans extended their classroom education and leisure reading and vicariously experienced the nation's past in a more tangible manner. In turn, such experiences led to a more fully realized sense of shared history and national pride in a period when the United States needed a strengthened identity as it entered the world economy and political arena.

Boston's tourism, while on one hand focusing on the historical figures and sites that were becoming increasingly significant to educated Americans, also reflects the successes and struggles of the city during its most concentrated period of growth. Examining the city through how its guidebook writers chose to market it offers readers an unusual opportunity to understand how Boston itself changed during this time period. Its development as a city typifies the trajectory of American urban history. The nineteenth century, with its rigid social stratification and limited opportunities for the non-wealthy, gave way to the more lateral culture of the twentieth century, in which members of the new middle class moved freely about the city and partook of commodities and entertainments designed for their income and interests. Women also were afforded new opportunities for independent movement in the city and as a result of their increased visibility, it also became acceptable for women to travel as tourists without the accompaniment of men. Of course, tourism in this era was essentially a white pastime; any non-whites who may have been financially able to engage in urban tourism would doubtless have been met with resistance at most of the tourist sites and service establishments in the cities they visited. Boston offered little exception to the pervasive racism of the American city at the turn of the century.

Boston's experiences as a growing city, although certainly informed by its particular circumstances as a center of industry and immigration, reflect many of the successes and tensions experienced in other cities. The changes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries benefited many in the city, but they also created new inequities that have not proved easy to resolve. The guidebooks studied in this project do not speak directly of Boston's social problems, but their rote prescriptions of routes to take and sites to see indicate quite clearly to the trained eye what was not considered appropriate for visitors to learn about the city – omitted neighborhoods and unspoken statistics of crime and economic depression fill in the back story of Boston's urban history that the guidebooks avoid in order to depict the city in a manner that will be appealing to visitors.

In this new urban environment at the turn of the century, the city itself was thus marketed as a thing to be consumed. Boston's culture and history were crafted into commodities to be bought and sold in the growing industry of urban tourism. As Cocks writes, "The brilliant, exciting, and thoroughly safe city that the guidebooks depicted and that growing numbers of tourists visited was the landscape of an emerging consumer culture."⁵⁶ Electricity played no small part in creating that brilliant and exciting city at the turn of the century; bright, safe lighting for buildings and public outdoor spaces, and efficient, low-pollution public transportation revolutionized the urban landscape, making the city quite different from its dark, dirty nineteenth-century counterpart. Boston's guidebook writers and advertisers clearly display pride in their city at the turn of the century – a pride that combines a patriotic respect for Boston's venerable history and an enthusiasm for the city's modern, cosmopolitan atmosphere.

That no historical scholarship on urban tourism in Boston exists is certainly indicative of a gap in research that must be filled in. This project has only touched the surface of what is

⁵⁶ Cocks, 207.

certainly a goldmine for further study. Personal narratives of visitors to Boston should be studied, including middle-class tourists' travel diaries as well as those of literary luminaries like Charles Dickens. A study devoted entirely to tourist-related advertising would be fascinating, and tourist ephemera other than guidebooks should also be examined more closely. The rich material history of Boston's early tourism exists in archives and doubtless in private collections and other unexpected places. It is waiting to be found and pieced together. Boston's tourism history is relevant not only to the study of urban tourism, but to the history of Boston and of all American cities. Further study can only advance our understanding of Boston's significance to generations of visitors, and closer consideration of their experiences will alter the ways we think about tourism and history in the United States.

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Further Reading

Those who are interested in furthering their knowledge of urban tourism, of Boston, or of the various ancillary topics introduced in this project would do well to begin their reading with the excellent resources listed here. The constraints of this project prohibited a full consideration of these works, but their absence from the works cited list should not diminish their importance or relevance to further study.

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