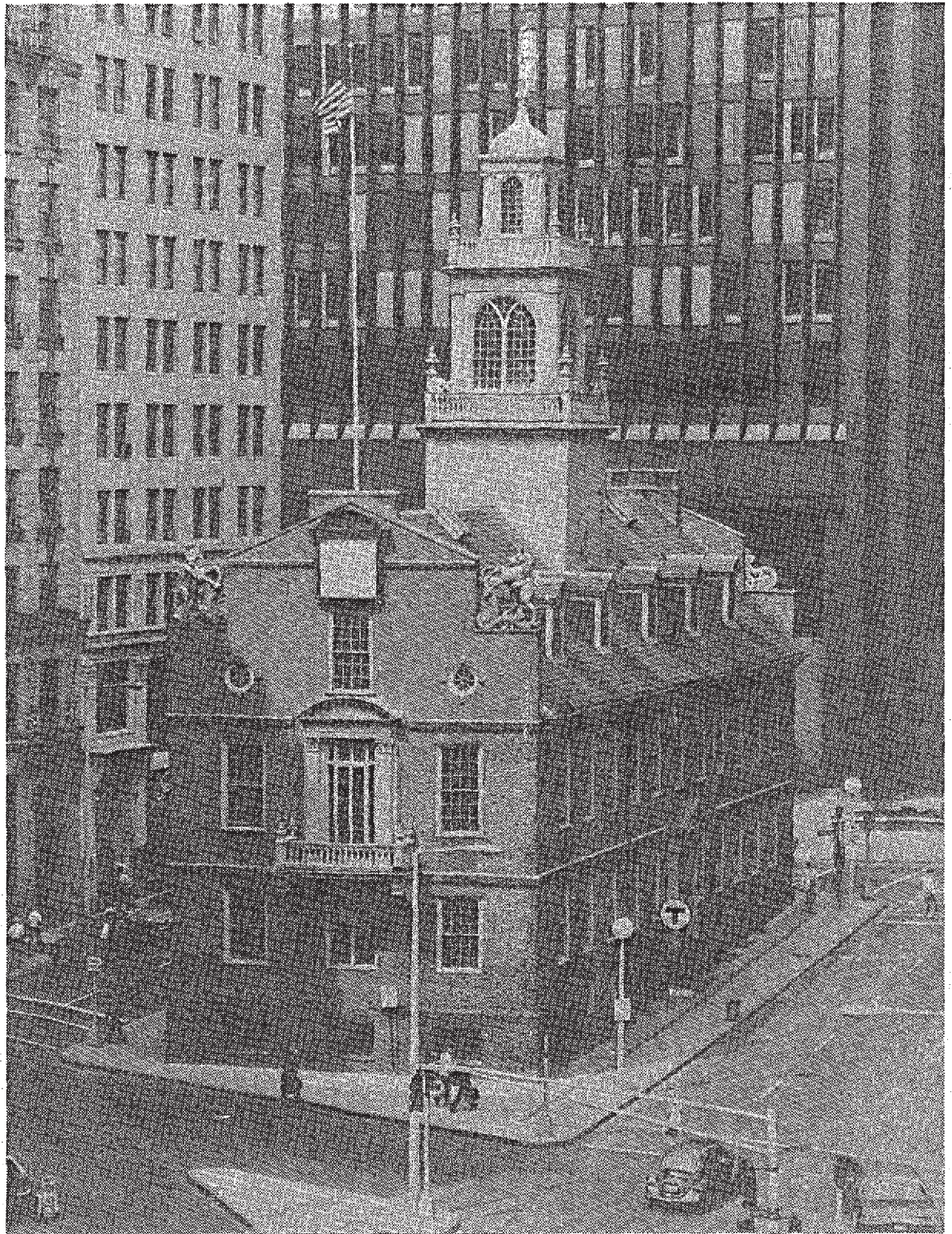


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Visitor Use Patterns and Interpretive
Effectiveness in Two Urban Historical Parks:
Boston and Lowell, Massachusetts

B&W Scans

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VISITOR USE PATTERNS AND
INTERPRETIVE EFFECTIVENESS
IN TWO URBAN HISTORICAL PARKS:
BOSTON AND LOWELL, MASSACHUSETTS

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April 1986

VISITOR USE PATTERNS AND EFFECTIVENESS OF INTERPRETATION IN TWO URBAN
HISTORICAL PARKS: BOSTON AND LOWELL, MASS.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarizes a research project concerning visitors to urban historical parks in Boston and Lowell, Massachusetts. The study was designed to produce systematic information about visitor experiences and patterns of behavior, emphasizing the issue of orientation.

The research consisted of extensive visitor contact in both cities, involving several research methods. "Study 1" focused on visitor experiences and had two parts: initial interviews at or near the beginning of the visits, and follow-up contacts after visitors had returned home (telephone interviews or mailed questionnaires). In Lowell, this study was based on an initial sample of 338 visitors, with a follow-up rate of 63%. In Boston, this study was based on a sample of 506 visitors, and a follow-up rate of 57%. "Study 2" was an evaluation of the principal visitor center in each park, consisting of interviews with visitors as they exited from the center. In Lowell the sample size for this study was 221 visitors; in Boston, 281 visitors were interviewed. Overall, 1346 visitors were interviewed.

In Boston, the research results indicate that visitors have a positive experience, and they are especially excited by their exposure to actual historical sites such as the U.S.S. Constitution, Paul Revere's House, and the Old North Church. However, spatial orientation is a significant challenge to visitors. The red line of the Freedom Trail works well as a self-guided walking experience, but there is room for considerable improvement in both spatial and conceptual orientation. Among other findings, visitors spend more time than they expected to spend visiting the historical sites, averaging 7.4 hours; this time may be split across more than one day. Recommendations include some relocating or renovating of visitor centers, improvements in spatial orientation, and increased programming related to walking tours.

In Lowell, this study provides conclusive evidence that the guided tours are a tremendous asset to interpretation and audience development. Many visitors are aware of several major interpretive themes when they arrive, including water power, industrial revolution, and immigrants; their experience in Lowell is both rewarding and effective, as all major themes are recognized by more than half of the visitors after returning home. Seasonal variations are discussed in terms of two major audience types: "intentional visitors" and "casual visitors." Recommendations focus on the need to foster repeat visits, widening the geographic base of the audience, and developing more active exhibits.

This research was conducted by People, Places & Design Research, in Northampton, MA, under contract with the National Park Service, and the cooperation of Massachusetts' Department of Environmental Management. The data were collected during the summer season of 1984; data analysis was performed during the fall of 1985. An earlier report presented similar types of information for the fall 1983 season, using smaller samples (refer to "Measuring the Effectiveness of Interpretation and Orientation Programs from the Visitors' Perspective," by Hayward and Zeff). For ease of comparison, all Tables of data are numbered and labelled identically with the earlier report.

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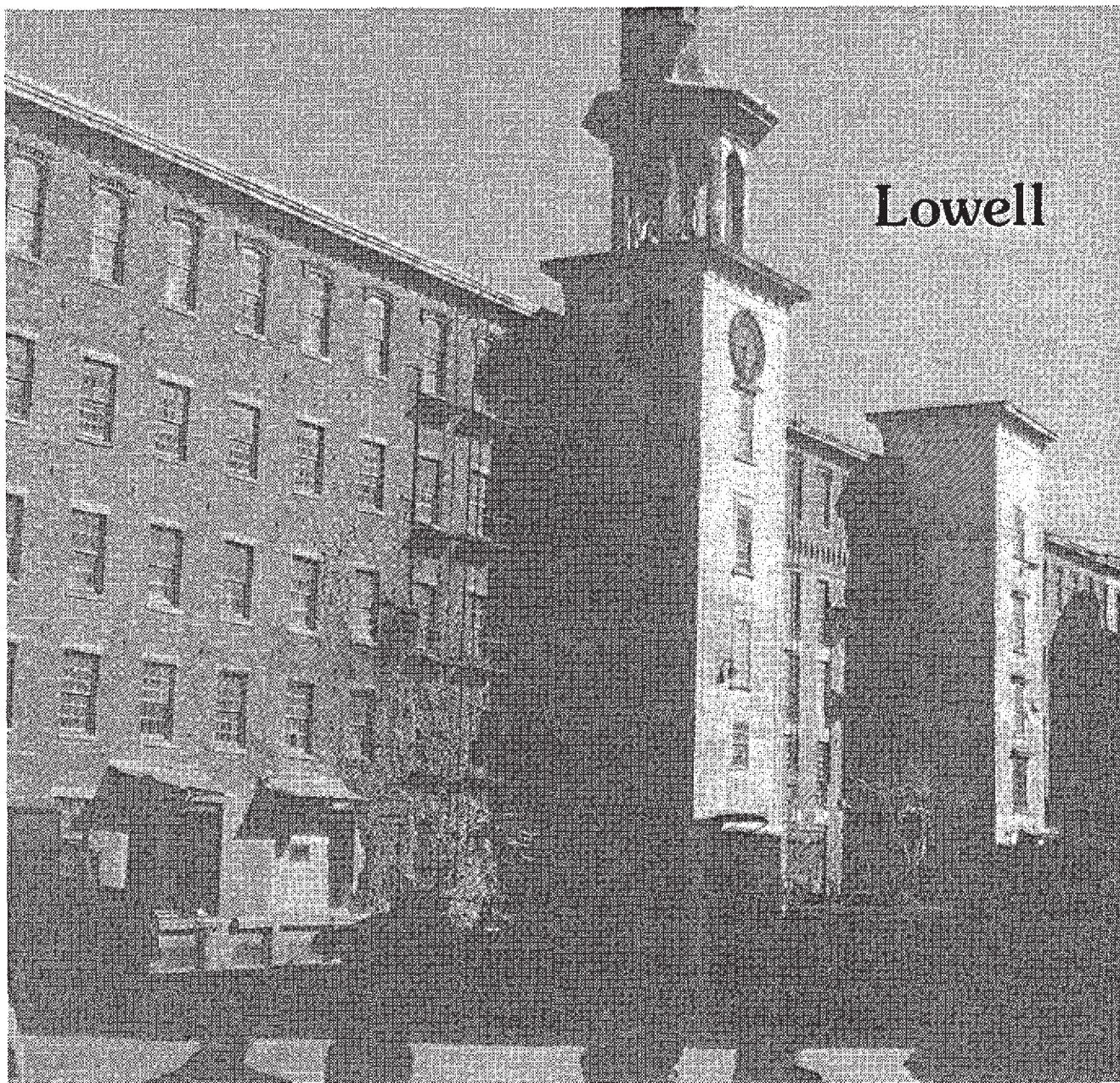
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Lowell

1. WHY STUDY LOWELL'S VISITORS?

This research was conducted to create a systematic foundation for planning at the National Historical Park and the Heritage State Park, in Lowell. Among many aspects of planning and development, this work focuses on planning for visitors — who they are, what they want to see, and how they perceive the experience of a visit to Lowell's historic sites.

The Lowell National Historical Park consists of a series of sites and linkages within the City of Lowell. This part of the park is operated by the National Park Service, and raises important planning and management questions for that agency: What are visitors expecting to see when they arrive in Lowell, looking for a National Park? Compared to other urban parks, does Lowell offer an experience which is less or more effective? Do the ranger-led guided tours provide a significantly better interpretive experience compared to self-guided exploration of the city?

The Heritage State Park at Lowell is intertwined with the national park, and is the premier site of a state-funded program which has expanded to include a dozen urban historical parks. As the earliest and most complete Heritage Park, what can be learned from Lowell visitors which might affect and assist the planning and management of other parks? Is the state's participation in Lowell recognized by visitors? Is the state's role in interpretation (i.e., fixed stations with role-playing by costumed interpreters) effective and appreciated by visitors?

During the period of this research, some people have said "It's too EARLY to do this kind of study....we're not finished developing the park." At the same time, others have said "It's too LATE, we should have done this visitor research years ago, so we could have used it to plan what we've got now." Obviously, Lowell has been undergoing change, and the research must fit in with the constraints and opportunities of ongoing development. The period of this work — 1983 to 1985 — was completely appropriate for an analysis of Lowell's visitors: there was a growing visitor population, the principal elements of visitor services and interpretation were in place and suitable for evaluation, and yet there are many decisions still to be made, ranging from exhibit development to the management and allocation of staff. Thus, a systematic analysis of visitor experiences could serve as a preliminary evaluation of the overall concept, and also serve as a baseline against which future efforts can be measured.

Based on questions and priorities of representatives of both the National Park Service and the Heritage State Park program, this research was designed to be used for the following types of applications:

Interpretive Services: tour planning, interpretive strategy

Operations: seasonal vs. year-round, visitor interests

Program Planning: new programs, educational vs. recreational vs. entertainment

Promotion: visitor profiles, target markets, strategies

Cost: charging for services, what types, visitor reactions

Facilities Planning: exhibit development, recognition of themes, amenities, fine-tuning of existing development

Information Management: monitoring changes in visitors, applying information to decisions

Although these various applications are quite different and may be carried out by different people, they rely on similar types of information about visitors. Therefore, the extent and depth of information in this report should serve to assist each of these topic areas, and improve present and future planning for Lowell.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

One of the major challenges of this research was to represent visitors' experience of Lowell, ranging from their image and expectations as well as their degree of learning and satisfaction at the end of a visit. Consequently, the research strategy called for contacts with visitors before, or at the beginning of, their visit and follow-up contact after a visit. Also, since the scope of work required visitor samples to be small and efficient, a strategy had to be developed to provide accurate demographic and behavioral profiles, capable of representing the entire visitor population.

Direct visitor contact was needed to obtain data about visitor experiences, perceptions, and knowledge. The following methods were developed to accomplish this purpose:

Study # 1: Visitor Experience

Randomly selected visitors were interviewed at their point of arrival, between the parking lot and the visitor center. Interviewers selected the adult who was physically closest as the visitor group walked by, and administered an interview about their expectations and knowledge about the park. At the completion of the interview, the visitor was asked to cooperate in a follow-up contact, alternately selected for a "call-back" telephone interview or a "mail-back" post-visit questionnaire. Both methods of follow-up contact asked identical questions but the use of two methods served to (a) reduce the potential bias from any one method, (b) reduce the cost of follow-up contacts, and (c) increase the response rate by offering an alternative to visitors who did not want to be (or who could not be) contacted by mail/phone. In Lowell, 338 visitors were interviewed at the beginning of their visit, and follow-up contacts were completed with 212 of those visitors, a response rate of 63%.

Study # 2: Visitor Center Evaluation

To assess the pattern of use and effectiveness of the visitor center, randomly-selected visitors were interviewed as they exited from the center. These people were asked about their activities in the visitor center, expected use of the park, and various demographic questions. In Lowell, 221 of these interviews were completed.

Sampling

To ensure an adequate representation of the visitor population, this study was first conducted in the Fall of 1983 (see earlier report by Hayward & Zeff) and again in the Summer of 1984. During the 1984 season, three sampling weeks were distributed over the summer (late June, mid-July, and late August). Visitors were interviewed on weekdays and weekends, mornings as well as afternoons (with an emphasis on mornings, reflecting visitor counts). Later analysis revealed that the home origins of visitor samples in this study were nearly identical to the visitor origin data from tour reservations, as collected by NPS and HSP staff. Other analyses of sampling weeks and times also supported the reliability and adequacy of the research procedures, and the data are considered to represent the broad range of independent visitors to Lowell (including distant visitors as well as local residents, but not including school groups or organized bus tours).

3. AUDIENCE ANALYSIS

Who are our visitors?

Why should we be concerned with who our visitors are? There are many reasons. The more we know about our visitors, the better we can address their needs and interests. Knowing who uses the site, and who does not, helps to direct promotional efforts and planning. We need to know who our visitors are to successfully execute the mandate to maintain and interpret a valuable historic and cultural resource.

This entire report addresses questions about our visitors. Here we begin with the most basic characteristics:

A) The Lowell historical park is primarily a regional attraction. The majority of visitors are from Massachusetts, with about 20% coming from greater Lowell. There is a seasonal shift in the proportions of local residents and out of state visitors in attendance: in the fall, the balance swings towards local residents; in the summer, there are proportionally more visitors from elsewhere in the U.S. (Table 1, Figures 1-3)

B) Group sizes of 4 (and up) are most common, followed by couples. In the summer, a third of all parties contain children, up from a fifth in the Fall of 1983. (Table 1)

C) Lowell draws visitors of all ages, from teens to seniors. All age groups are represented in roughly the same proportions as they are found in the general population. Men and women are equally represented.

D) In the summer, almost half the visitors were in Lowell "on vacation" (48%). Similar to the geographic distributions, another one quarter "lived or worked" in Lowell. The remaining visitors were visiting friends (6.7%), in town on business (3.9%), and so on.

Two Types of Visitors

Beyond these broad descriptions of the demographics of visitors to Lowell, it is helpful to define and describe the major "user groups" — the most common "types" of visitors. In Lowell, the data suggest two principal types: intentional visitors and casual visitors. Understanding these two types, and the differences between them, will help to guide future planning and management decisions.

"Intentional visitors" are those who plan their visits and come to Lowell because they are interested in the subject matter (as a reason for coming, they are more likely to cite "historical importance of the sites," "personal interest in Lowell" and "personal interest in the textile industry"). They arrive with better than average knowledge about the interpretive themes and during their visit they are sincerely interested in paying attention to exhibit material and the guide's talks. They see their visit as educational moreso than entertaining.

"Casual visitors" come to Lowell because it sounds like an interesting experience (citing reasons such as "it's something to do," "vacationing," or "friends recommended it."). These visitors decide to visit on much shorter notice, and some of them arrive without tour reservations. Among this group, there is less advance knowledge about interpretive themes (although there is a general awareness of the historical nature of the park), and their visit is more likely to be seen as recreational or entertaining moreso than educational.

Some analyses about these groups indicate that:

* Intentional visitors are the most common type of visitors to Lowell. In general, the visitor audience has advance knowledge or expectations about the subject matter; they are looking to gain knowledge of general topics which they've heard about. Based on their stated reason for visiting Lowell, intentional visitors (reasons such as "historical importance," "personal interest in the textile industry") comprise at least 64% of visitors in the fall and at least 40% of summer visitors). (Table 2,3)

* Casual visitors are more common in the summer, compared to the fall. There are more people who arrive "on impulse" (33% planned the trip only "hours in advance" compared to 3% with such short notice in the fall), and they expect to do other things in addition to the 3-hour tour (49% expect to stay for four hours or more, compared to only 28% in the fall). The increase in casual visitors is also evident in their knowledge of the subject matter, as 10% fewer people in the summer arrive knowing that they will learn about the Industrial Revolution in America and about the use of Water Power in Industry. (Table 2,3)

Considering these patterns, the following implications or suggestions are warranted:

Intentional visitors are extremely dominant in the off-season. Therefore, interpretation during the fall, winter and spring should continue to focus on "content" — the educational aspect of the experience — rather than becoming more casual, more self-guided, and less informative. Period rooms and a museum-type experience (or a series of indoor experiences as part of a walking tour) would be extremely appropriate.

Casual visitors are probably looking for things to do in addition to a tour. Picnics in a park, and recreational activities such as concerts and performances are appropriate for this group.

Some intentional visitors complain about casual visitors because they don't pay as much attention to the tour guide (having loud conversations, wandering off), and suggested that fees for the tour would make people more appreciative or possibly eliminate the not-so-interested visitors.

Marketing and promotion efforts should try to strengthen the "intentional visitor" segment — continue to attract these semi-knowledgeable visitor groups because (a) they are the most common segment, and (b) they are "good" visitors, interested in the subject matter and probably willing to pay for some part of the experience. These visitors are also excellent "ambassadors" for the park because they will tell others about it and may themselves become repeat visitors, if they can see a reason to come back.

In the summer, marketing and promotion efforts should also focus on the needs and interests of "casual visitors," promoting the park as a family-oriented educational and recreational experience. Since many casual visitors expect to spend most of the day here, give them a reason to do so: morning and afternoon tours, easy access to picnic facilities and recreational spaces, performances and concerts.

4. CONCLUSIONS: EFFECTIVENESS OF INTERPRETATION

How effective is Lowell in communicating its message to visitors? Do people understand what they see? What parts of the interpretive system are most effective, and what elements can be recommended for other urban historical parks?

Assessing the effectiveness of interpretation in Lowell has been a major concern of this project. There was great value in having data from more than one season, and from more than one city. Highlights of the data analysis reveal some "solid" conclusions on this topic:

A. Visitors to Lowell are treated to a comprehensive and effective interpretive experience. They enjoy themselves (in part, because they may have had low expectations), and they have learned a great deal about the Lowell story and its significance for the nation. A test of visitors' recall of topics after returning home, for example, indicated that they could easily discriminate the themes of Lowell from other closely related topics (such as themes of historical Boston): at least 94% recalled the topics of water power, industrial revolution, and immigrants as workers — representing a 40% increase over their guesses about themes at the beginning of the visit. Lowell's other two themes were also recalled by more than half of the visitors, representing at least a 50% increase over the pre-visit estimate. (Figure 5, Table 5)

B. Guided tours are tremendously effective in making Lowell a successful interpretive experience. When visitors were asked what helped them get a sense of what the whole park was about, 51% named the tour guides — more than doubling the next most common answer. (Table 5)

C. The visitor center at Lowell is an extremely effective element. It attracts people to a particular spot in what may be an unfamiliar city, and it provides a basic orientation to the historical park (people use the visitor center for an average of 28 minutes, and 88% recall visiting it). Using this location as the beginning and ending of guided tours is a successful strategy.

D. Exhibits at the visitor center are extremely effective, compared to other visitor centers. When asked what was most helpful in understanding the whole park, 28% mentioned the visitor center — a significant endorsement (in Boston, by comparison, this figure is less than 10%). Most of this effectiveness, however, is due to the slide show, mentioned by 22% of the visitors; the remaining 6% mentioned the visitor center as a whole. (Table 5) The information desk and opportunity to talk with a staff person is also an important feature of orientation, followed closely by the large map on the wall (recalled and mentioned by an impressive 39% of the visitors after they returned home). Brochures were also helpful, but they were mentioned primarily as aids to SPATIAL orientation, and had relatively little impact on conceptual orientation compared to the tour guides and the visitor center. (Table 4)

E. Despite the overall effectiveness of the visitor center, there is room for improvement in some elements. The "static" theme exhibits in the visitor center do appear to attract attention, but less than might be expected: only 60% of the visitors said they saw one or more of these exhibits, immediately after leaving the visitor center. Recall of individual exhibits was limited to between one quarter and one third of the sample. In post-visit interviews, these exhibits were not recalled or mentioned as important features of spatial or conceptual orientation. Although the exhibits are attractive, simple and clear enough to be understood, static displays have to be much more "dramatic" or attention-getting to be effective. They might be improved by the addition of unusual artifacts, working parts, audio tapes or audio-visual elements, or active interpretation by staff.

F. An additional indicator of the effectiveness of the multi-agency interpretation in Lowell is the fact that 75% of the visitors understood that it's a cooperative effort, with 86% giving credit to the National Park Service and 50% crediting the state; the city of Lowell was mentioned by 25% and private non-profit organizations were mentioned by 14% . (Figure 7)

G. One of the state's contributions to interpretation is the use of "role playing" by staff at the gatehouses. This feature of interpretation is very effective: the gatehouses are cited as the most-liked sites, and the role playing is a primary reason. (Table 7) This program should definitely be continued.

5. CONCLUSIONS: VISITOR BEHAVIOR

Are there identifiable patterns of visitor behavior? If we understand what people do when they're here, and how they use the park, can it help guide management and planning? For example, how much time do they spend here? How much time did they EXPECT to spend here? Which tours did they take? Did they spend money here?

Analysis of visitor use patterns at the Lowell historical park indicates:

A. The majority of visitors to Lowell are "day-trippers" — seeing Lowell as part of a one day experience that does not require them to stay overnight away from home (65% are from Massachusetts, 50% come from 30 miles or less). Almost all visitors see Lowell as a one-day experience (87%), and only 7% stay in a hotel in the Lowell area. (Tables 1,8)

B. An average visit to Lowell lasts for 3.8 hours (median — 50% longer, 50% shorter); this is true for both summer and fall visitor samples. This duration of visit is longer than people expect, which usually indicates that they are enjoying the experience. However, considering the fact that most visitors are taking a 3-hour tour, and spending time in the visitor center before the tour, this duration (3.8 hours) suggests that there is little exploration of Lowell beyond the tour and the visitor center. There is considerable room for improvement in this direction. (Table 6, Figures 8,9)

C. Almost all visitors take a guided tour. The most popular tour is the Mill and Canal Tour (69%), followed by the Pawtucket Canal Tour (32%) and the Mill and Trolley Tour (31%). Only 13% reported that they did not take a guided tour (either self-guided tour or no tour at all). (Table 6)

D. Most visitors see the prominent sites on the tour, but do not see (or do not recall) secondary sites which they could explore beyond the tour. On the list of "prominent sites," for example, 88% of the visitors reported going into the visitor center, 67% saw one or both of the gatehouses, and at least 70% recalled stopping at one or more of the mills. However, only 30% recalled the Agent's House, only 20% saw St. Ann's Church, only 16% recalled the Boott Mill Boarding House, and only 12% saw the Old City Hall. Additional effort seems warranted to expand visitors' exposure to these "secondary" sites. (Table 6)

E. Use of the visitor center averages 28 minutes (median). This is a reasonable figure (State Street in Boston averages 12 minutes), and an adequate opportunity to accomplish the goal of informing and orienting visitors. Half of the people spend even more time than this average, which is almost necessary if they see the slide show (52% see the slide show).

F. Visitors spend very little money in Lowell. The average spending is \$26.65 per group (mean=3.9 persons; median 2.9 persons). The median spending (50th percentile) is only \$12.23! — 14% of the visitor groups spent no money at all. The principal expenditure is for food (average of \$14.98). In general, tourists are willing and able to spend money, but Lowell gives them little opportunity to do so. (Table 8, Figure 10)

6. CONCLUSIONS: IMAGE AND FUTURE VISITS

What do visitors think of Lowell? What kind of an image do they arrive with? Is Lowell the type of place where visitors say "I've seen it, and I don't need to do that again" or where they say "That was interesting, I'd like to go back and see more"?

Image factors are obviously important in people's experience; the image provides an overall conceptual framework which influences a person's decision to visit, summarizes their reaction to the place, and affects how they describe the place to others. Among the data on visitor experiences, these findings provide a perspective on the image of Lowell:

A. A major part of Lowell's "secret to success" is low expectations. Lowell has had such a negative image that it has nowhere to go but up; people say things like "WHY on earth would you want to go to Lowell?" and "Places like Lowell are the 'armpit' of the state -- dirty, smelly, and run down." Against a backdrop of negative (or at least ambiguous) expectations, visitors to Lowell are pleasantly surprised. The tours are interesting, the experience is enjoyable and educational, and the city is not as ugly and run-down as they thought it might be. In fact the whole story of revitalization is a positive one, and people enjoy hearing about this successful venture.

B. Visitors' positive experience and the image they have when they leave are based, to a large degree, on the coherent interpretation of Lowell as a planned industrial city -- a story which is dramatic in scale, and significant in the social and economic history of the nation. People get a sense that something "major" happened here, and they can also identify with the personal situations of mill girls, immigrants, and the conflicts between workers and management. Future interpretation should continue to stress both this "big picture" of the birth and rebirth of the city, as well as the personalized social history of its residents.

C. Visitors' positive experience is also based on the operations and practical aspects of a visit. They experience a place which is operated in a professional and efficient manner: tours begin and end on time, the guides are competent and informative, and the materials they see (e.g., visual aids during tours, the trolley, boat launches) are well constructed. Visitor services and amenities are also impressive: maps and brochures are accurate, the rest rooms are clean, and parking is readily accessible.

D. Visitors do enjoy the historical sites, especially the gatehouses, canals, mills, and the visitor center. The state's strategy of interpreting individual sites (e.g., the gatehouses) is clearly an important contribution to visitor enjoyment, and a valuable supplement to the guided tours offered by the Park Service. (Table 7)

E. While many visitors reported no major disappointments or problems (42%), about a quarter of the sample mentioned noise and organizational problems (e.g., boat engine too loud, didn't like taking a bus from the locks, long speech at the turbines in hot weather), and another one-quarter mentioned specific criticism of sites (sites not developed enough yet, loom not running, canals polluted, etc.). (Table 7)

F. Visitors' own advice to future visitors reflects positive recommendations rather than major disappointments. The most common category of advice focuses on specific sites to see or tours to take; other types of advice include the value of information sources and the visitor center, wearing comfortable clothing, preparing for the historical content, allowing enough time for the visit, and getting advance reservations. (Table 7)

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout this report, there are results and data which can be used to sharpen the picture of visitors to Lowell, as well as to inform planning and management decisions faced by NPS and DEM. In this section, some of these findings are synthesized and highlighted. All seven of these recommendations are solidly based on the data, analysis and interpretation of visitor knowledge and behavior, including both quantitative and qualitative data.

Recommendation # 1: CONTINUE GIVING GUIDED TOURS

The guided tours are extremely effective in promoting a broad understanding of Lowell. As visitors come to an urban park, with the points of interest spread out around the city, the opportunity for a guided tour is a critical factor in visitors feeling oriented (spatially and conceptually). Without the guided tours, visitors will see less of the park, leave with a weaker understanding of the development of the city, and will be less positive in their "word-of-mouth" recommendations to others. There would also be fewer visitors.

Recommendation # 2: GIVE INCENTIVES FOR REPEAT VISITS

Visitors should be encouraged to return to Lowell for repeated visits. At other historical sites in New England (e.g., Old Sturbridge Village, Historic Deerfield), approximately one-third of the visitors have been there before. Repeat users provide a continuing source of visitors and also an informed audience who are likely to enjoy themselves and appreciate the quality of interpretation. However, as the National Historical Park and the Heritage State Park approach completion of their development programs, there may be a tendency to think of the park as "finished". There is a danger that this feeling will be communicated to visitors, thereby reducing the incentive to return in the future (currently, staff say things like "come back in a few years, when such-and-such is finished."). It is very important to avoid the sense that "I've been there once, and I've seen it" — an image that once you've been on one of the tours, you've seen everything and there would be nothing new to see if you came back. At minimum, staff should continue to give VERBAL INCENTIVES for repeat visits ("Next time, you might want to see...." or "If you come back in a different season, you'll see...."). In addition, strong consideration should be given to a BEHAVIORAL INCENTIVE such as coupons for tour reservations, or a visit with a friend. Even the simple fact of a ticket containing the phone number and advice about tour reservations may be an incentive; beyond this, a special tour for repeat visitors may be an attractive option. If there is ever a fee for the tour transportation, coupons distributed at the end of a visit could be used for a discount on next year's tour price. Whatever the strategy, make visitors realize that there will be more to see if they come back again.

Recommendation # 3: WIDEN THE GEOGRAPHIC TARGET FOR PROMOTION

Visitors to Lowell travel a median of 30 miles; 65% of the visitors live within Massachusetts. Although the visitor audience to Lowell has been growing steadily, these statistics indicate that it is primarily an attraction for visitors from eastern Massachusetts and southern New Hampshire. To expand this base of visitors and continue the "word-of-mouth" network which has contributed to the growth so far, promotional efforts should be expanded to all of New England as well as the New York City metropolitan area. A successful strategy will include: publicity through normal media such as feature stories in newspapers and television, as well as cooperative publicity with other similar sites. In both of these strategies, it is important to attract people for the same reasons and patterns of use which work now: "intentional visitors" who can see Lowell in less than a day, adult groups, and people who are especially interested in social history, technology in industry, and labor. Cooperative publicity with other sites should include articles in member newsletters of museums and historic sites, and special presentations to the staff of historic sites around New England, informing them about visitor programs in Lowell and encouraging them to mention Lowell to their own visitors (also, offering to distribute their brochures in Lowell). A greater awareness of Lowell in the rest of New England will create a wider audience of visitors, as well as increased recommendations to friends and relatives who come to visit New England.

Recommendation # 4: DEVELOP ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMS
FOR SUMMER VISITORS

Increasing pressure on the Mill and Canal Tour is likely to affect the quantity and quality of visitors, eventually. If visitors think that this is the principal activity of the park (e.g., "Once you've taken the Mill and Canal Tour, you've seen what there is to see," or "If I can't get a reservation for that tour, there's no point in coming."), then we will be missing opportunities for more visitors and for a broader range of visitor experiences. To avoid this potential stagnation, additional activities and programs must be developed (or continued), especially in the summer season. Performances, role playing, concerts, picnics, parades and related recreational opportunities would help round out the experience of a visit to Lowell, making it feel interesting, "always something going on," and suitable for all ages.

Recommendation # 5: DEVELOP ACTIVE EXHIBITS IN ONE OR MORE OF THE MILLS

Visitors enjoy, and learn more from, active exhibits and presentations. At present, they attribute the greatest effectiveness to the tour guides and audio-visual presentation in the visitor center; the most-liked sites are the gatehouses, where they experience historical role playing. A prominent disappointment focuses on the lack of working demonstrations in the mill (looms, turbines). From this pattern, and from similar patterns at other historical sites and museums, it is clear that there is a great attraction to active exhibits. If possible, each mill should have an active exhibit, displaying the noise and power of mill operations. If this is not possible, at least some form of audio-visual presentation could be considered, to add activity to the setting.

Recommendation #6: FEES FOR VISITOR SERVICES

This research was not designed to explore the feasibility or desirability of charging fees for visitor services. However, based on an understanding of visitor experiences here as well as information from other sites, it's possible to speculate about this issue. First of all, it's clear that visitors to Lowell spend very little money, mostly on food. In general, visitors to historic/recreational sites EXPECT to spend money (e.g., at museums or historical villages such as Old Sturbridge Village, Strawberry Banke, Plimoth Plantation), so it's unlikely that some type of fee would have a drastic effect on the audience. However, we should also realize that when a place CHANGES from free admission to paid admission, visitation drops off and a vocal minority complains (for example, Worcester Art Museum, Denver Art Museum); eventually, visitor counts equal or exceed the earlier levels, after people are accustomed to the fees.

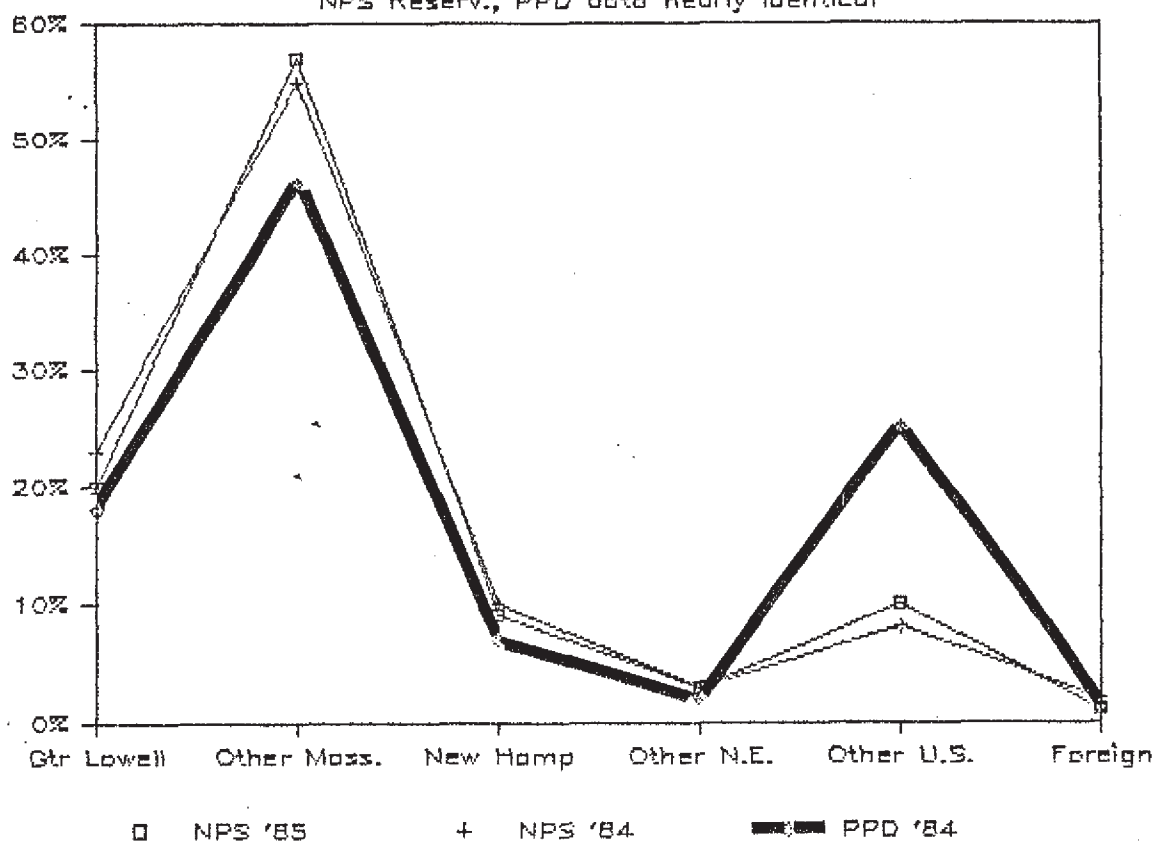
The existing free admission in Lowell is a pleasant surprise for some visitors, yet other visitors would prefer to have a fee, to keep out the casual visitors who are not as attentive during the tour. If it becomes necessary to charge for tours, the fee should be attached to the transportation (trolley and boat rides), with no admission fee to individual sites. The opposite strategy (charging for sites, not for the transportation) would lead to people taking free rides around the city, but balking at admission to individual sites; such a pattern would seriously undermine the interpretive programs. If a charge for transportation is instituted, it should be a one-time fee for the whole day, not a fee for each ride on a trolley or boat.

Recommendation # 7: CONTINUE A MODEST RESEARCH PROGRAM

As the Lowell historical parks continue to develop and as the audience increases, it will be extremely important to maintain accurate information about the audience. Two types of research could be valuable: (a) evaluations of specific programs or exhibits, and (b) general profiles of the total audience. The first of these strategies — evaluation — should be used to assess major elements of interpretive activity: the tours, Mack building, and other specific sites including the mills, gatehouses, the Agent's house and boarding house. Such evaluations could provide important feedback for interpreters, and assist with long-range planning by identifying which features and locations are most effective. The second strategy — monitoring the composition of the visitor audience — is necessary to stay current with trends and changes which may affect park operations, management and publicity. The current practice of monitoring the origins of visitors when they call for tour reservations should be continued. In addition, a thorough analysis of the visitor population should be conducted in 1990, six years after this study.

WHERE DO VISITORS COME FROM?

NPS Reserv., PPD data nearly identical



VISITOR ORIGINS, SUMMER '84 Vs FALL '83

Similar; more distant Summer Visitors

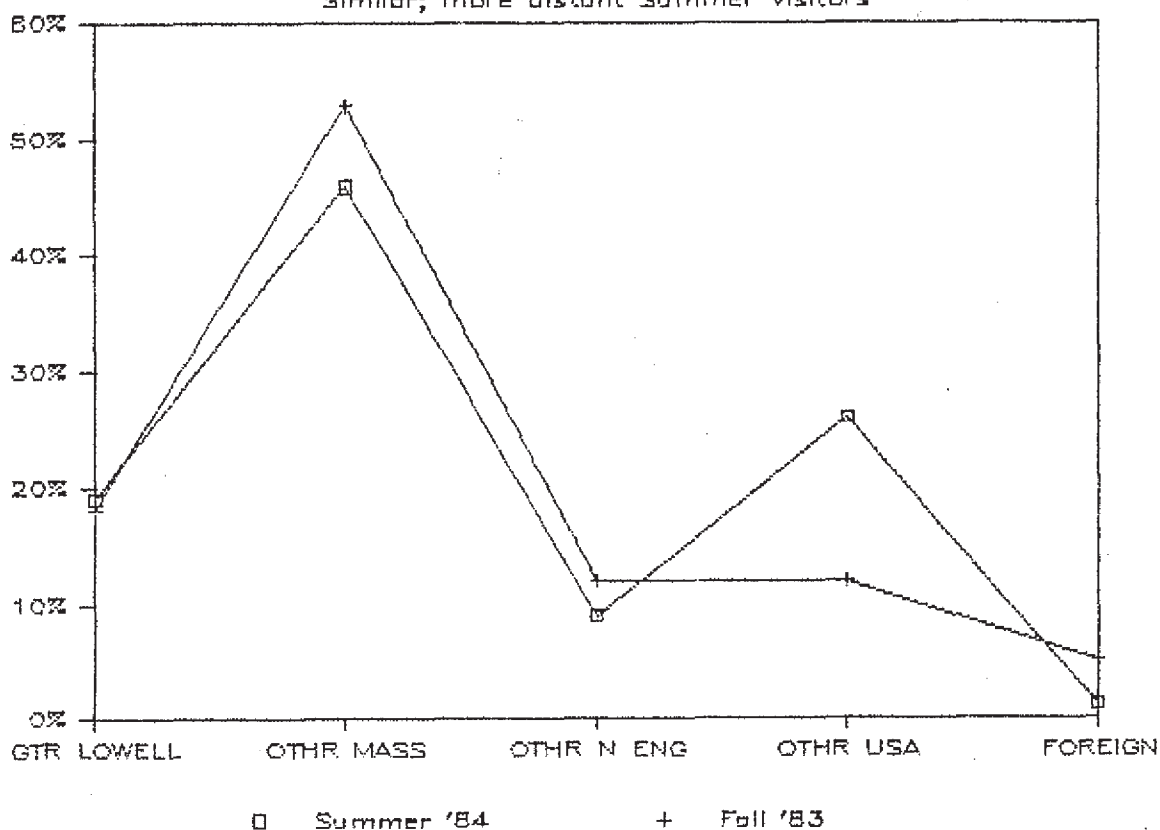


Figure 3. Map of Where Visitors Come From

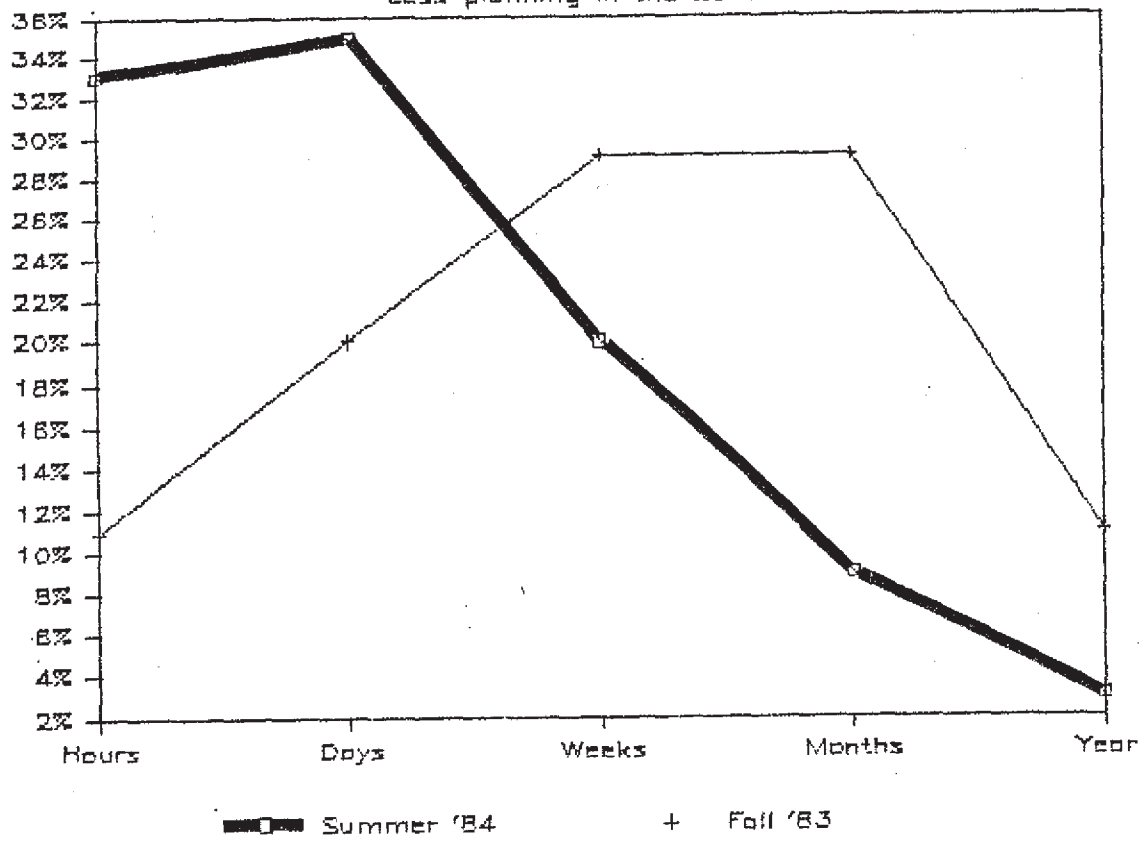
Summer visitors to Lowell came from local and sub-regional areas (eastern Massachusetts and southern New Hampshire). The median distance travelled was 30 miles, and 65% of the visitors were Massachusetts residents.



Foreign visitors: 1%

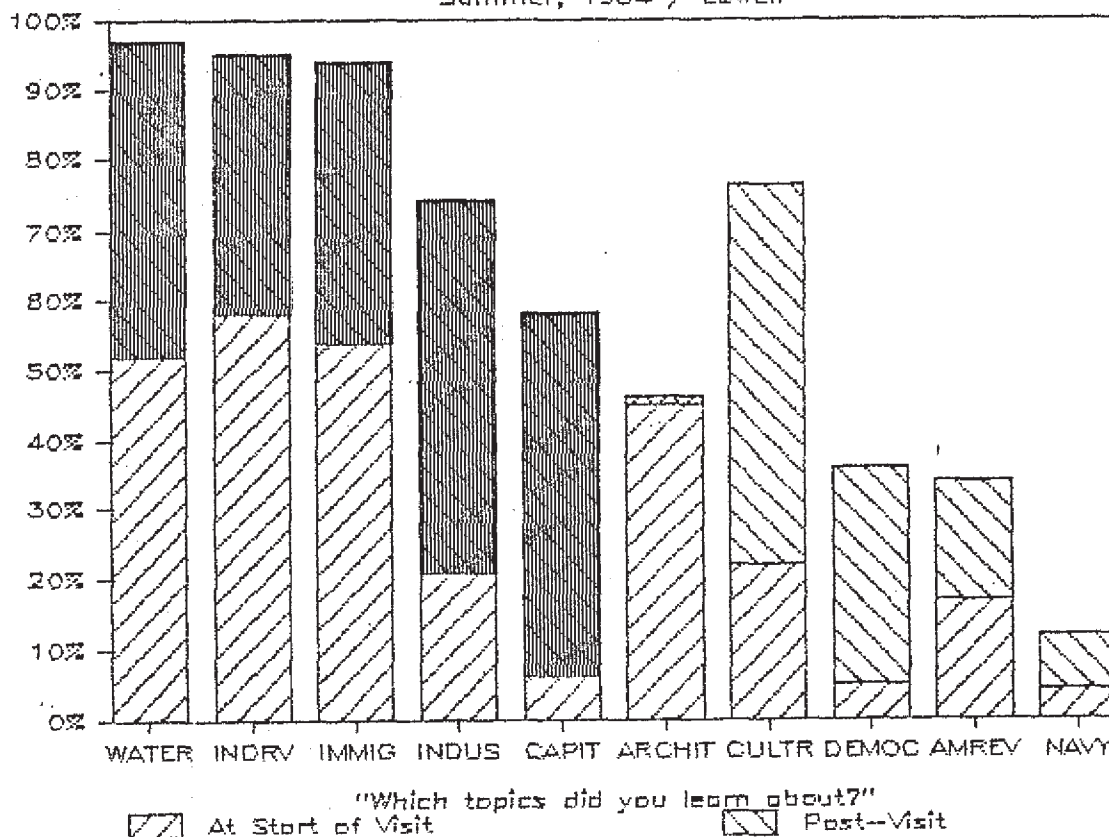
ADVANCE PLANNING, SUMMER Vs FALL

Less planning in the Summer



RECALL OF MAJOR INTERPRETIVE THEMES

Summer, 1984 / Lowell



Dark shading illustrates the increase in visitors' recognition of Lowell's major interpretive themes, due to the visit.

WATER = Use of Water Power

INDRV = Industrial Revolution

IMMIG = Immigrants as Workers in America

INDUS = Building & Planning Cities for Industry

CAPIT = Creation of Capital Investment Methods

ARCHIT = Historic Architecture

CULTR = City as Cultural/Economic Foundation

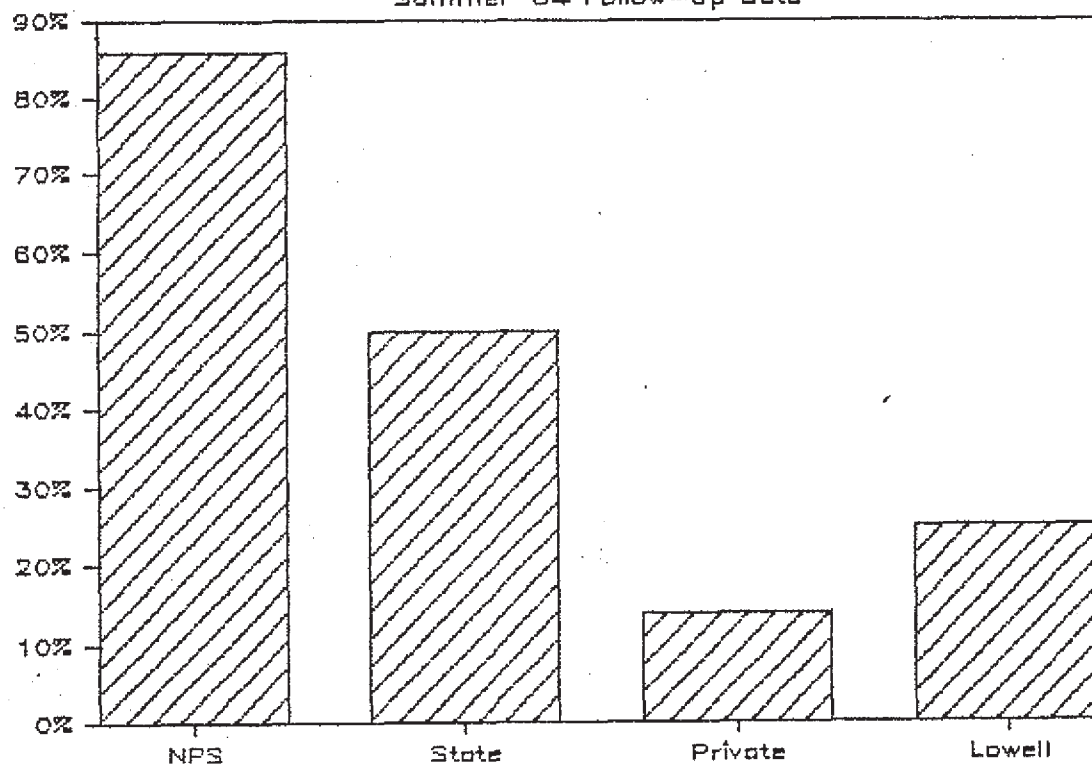
DEMOC = Development of Democratic Principles

AMREV = People and Events of the American Revolution

NAVY = Contributions of the Navy

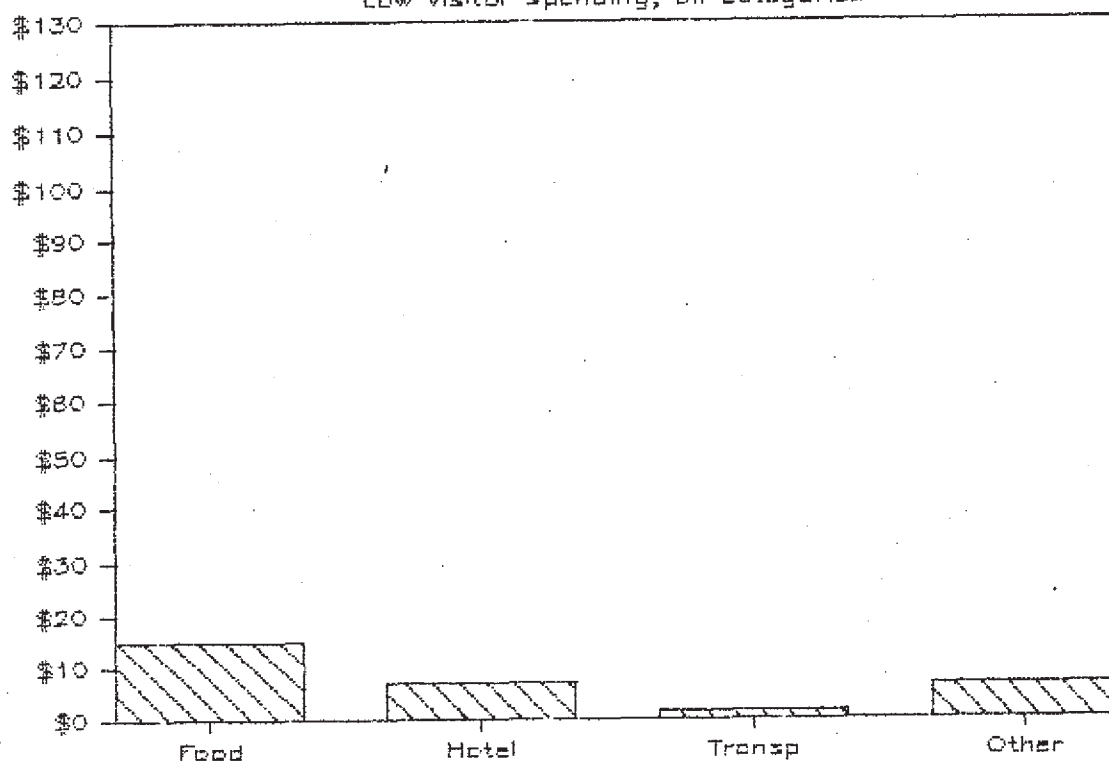
WHO DO YOU THINK RUNS THE PARK?

Summer '84 Follow-up Data



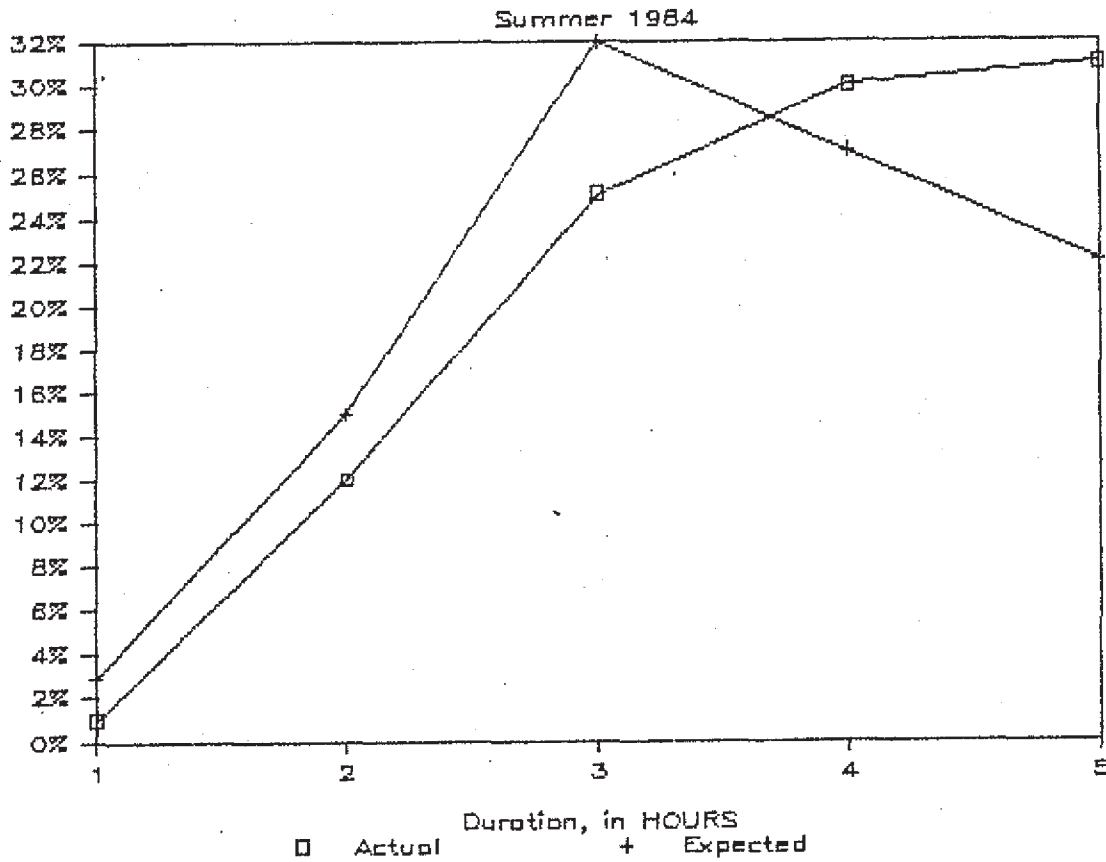
TYPES OF VISITOR EXPENSES

Low visitor spending, all categories



Average Group Expenditure, Summer '84

EXPECTED Vs. ACTUAL DURATION OF VISIT



EXPECTED DURATION: SUMMER Vs. FALL

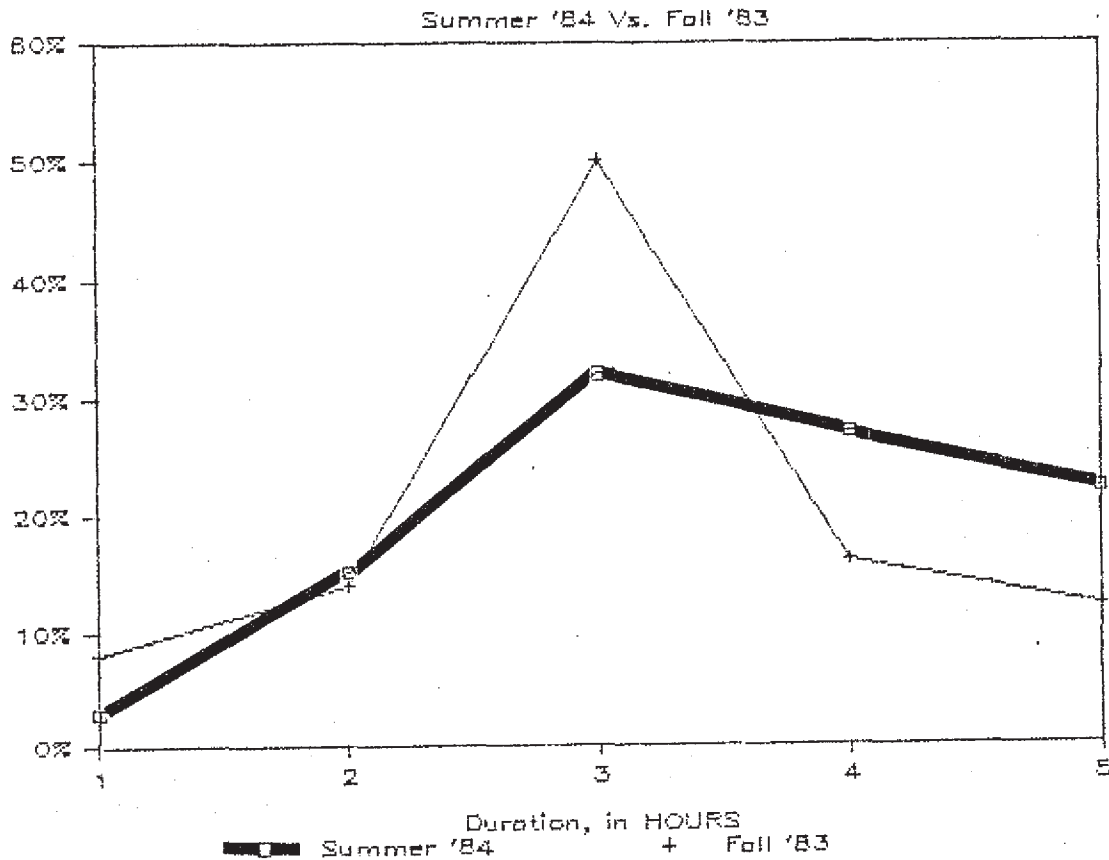


Table 1. PROFILE OF VISITORS TO LOWELL

Most visitors to Lowell come in adult groups (64%), have not visited the historical park before (73%), and have come from the Greater Lowell area or nearby counties (50% come from 25 miles or less, 50% come from farther away); groups of 2 or 4+ are most common.

Compared to the fall season (1983), these data indicate that the summer season (1984) is likely to have more families (37% compared to 22%). There is little or no difference in how far visitors travel. The similarity of data across Study 1 and Study 2 indicates a favorable degree of reliability in this research.

<u>Visitor Characteristics</u>	<u>Study 1: VISITOR EXPERIENCE Summer 1984</u>	<u>Study 2: VISITOR CENTER EVALUATION Summer 1984</u>
Visitor Group with Children	37%	34%
Visitor Group without Children	63%	66%
First Time at Sites or Center	74%	72%
Repeat Visitor	26%	28%
From Lowell or Adjacent Towns	19%	44% ¹
From Elsewhere in Massachusetts	46%	27%
From Elsewhere in New England	9%	14%
From Elsewhere in United States	26%	15%
Foreign Visitors	1%	1%
(median distance travelled)	30 miles	20 miles
Group Size: 1	8%	18% ¹
Group Size: 2	35%	30%
Group Size: 3	17%	15%
Group Size: 4 or more	<u>40%</u>	<u>37%</u>
	100%	100%
Sample Size	N = 338	N = 221

Note 1: The Visitor Center sample shows a higher percentage of visitors from Lowell and its suburbs, and a larger percentage coming alone. This is due to the fact that local residents may visit the center for advance information (while not going on a tour that day), and to use facilities such as water fountains and restrooms. This pattern is found in the Boston and Lowell data for both 1983 and 1984.

Table 2. VISITOR EXPECTATIONS

Why do people come to Lowell? In the summer, it's "something to do." Although there is also a core of people who come because of the reputation of the park (the historical importance, and the tours), this reason is less significant in the summer than it is in the fall season. This is a part of a pattern of data indicating that the summer visitor tends to be a more "casual" visitor, while the off-season visitor tends to be more "intentional".

MAIN REASONS FOR VISITING¹

It's Something To Do	25%
Historical Importance of the Sites	17%
Personal Interest in Lowell	13%
Tours & NPS Reputation	10%
It's Educational	8%
Architecture & Urban Revitalization	6%
Personal Interest in Textile Industry	2%
Other	19%
	1.0 answers per person

("Other" reasons included: friends recommended it, saw an ad in the newspaper, read a brochure, other comments where visitors referred to their general awareness of the park rather than specific reasons about its content or qualities.)

(Table 2 continues on the next page)

(Table 2 continued)

WHAT WILL YOU LEARN ABOUT?¹

* Industrial Revolution	58%
* Immigrants as Workers in America.	54%
* The Use of Water Power.	52%
Historic Architecture	46%
This City as a Cultural & Economic Foundation for U.S	22%
* Building and Planning Cities for Industry	21%
People and Events of the American Revolution.	17%
* Creation of Capital Investment Methods	6%
Development of Democratic Principles in America	5%
Contributions of the Navy.	4%
	2.9 answers per person

(* Note: Themes marked with an asterisk indicate the five major interpretive themes of Lowell; the other five themes were designed to represent Boston; all were shown to visitors to help them articulate their answers to this question. When they were reluctant to choose answers, we asked them to pick "up to three" topics that they might learn about; this resulted in some wild guesses such as "contributions of the Navy.")

EXPECTED DURATION OF VISIT¹

One hour	3%
Two hours	15%
Three hours	32%
Four hours	27%
Five or more hours	22%

1. These data are taken from the results of the first part of the Visitor Experience study, when visitors (N = 338) were interviewed about their expectations before arriving at the Visitor Center.

Table 3. ADVANCE INFORMATION

Over half of the visitors sampled heard about the historic sites via "word of mouth"; one third cited newspapers. There was a clear increase in the number of "spontaneous" visits, i.e., those that had little prior planning. For example, in the fall of 1983, 11% of our sample planned the trip "hours" in advance; in the present study, that figure has risen to 33%. This reinforces the conclusion that "casual" visitors are more common in the summer.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND AWARENESS¹

Friends or Relatives	51%
Newspapers	34%
Brochures	9%
Radio	6%
Television.	5%
Road Signs or Street Signs.	5%
Travel Guides	4%
Other	21%
	1.4 answers per person

("Other" includes a variety of sources of information such as word of mouth, prior visits, college classes, books, AARP and other organizations, plus general awareness due to living or working in Lowell.)

ADVANCE PLANNING¹

How long in advance did you plan this visit?

Hours	33%
Days	35%
Weeks	20%
Months	9%
Year	3%
	100%

1. These data are taken from the first part of the Visitor Experience study, when visitors (N=338) were interviewed about their expectations before arriving at the Visitor Center.

Table 4. EFFECTIVENESS OF SPATIAL ORIENTATION

Few visitors had trouble finding their way around in Lowell, probably because 87% of them were taken on a guided tour. Still, people came away with a reasonable sense of spatial orientation which they attributed mainly to directions from staff or guides. To a lesser extent, the large map of Lowell on the wall of the Visitor Center, the brochures and the film were also cited as useful aids in understanding the layout of the city.

USE OF VISITOR CENTER (Exhibits and Services)¹

What did people do in the Visitor Center?

Spoke with a staff person	74%
Went to the Information Desk.	72%
Picked up brochures	70%
Went to restrooms	69%
Saw one or more exhibits	60%
Used the Map of the City.	60%
Saw the film (slide presentation)	52%
Used the water fountain	49%
Visited bookstore	40%
Average time in visitor center = 29 minutes	5.5 answers
(median = 28 minutes)	per person

(Table 4 continues on the next page)

(Table 4 continued)

SPATIAL ORIENTATION²

What's helpful in finding your way around Lowell?

Talking with staff	65%
Seeing the map on the wall	39%
Brochures	33%
The film (slide presentation)	18%
Exhibits	6%
Books	1%
1.6 answers per person	

Did you have any trouble finding your way around?

No	88%
Yes	12%

In general, was it easy or hard to find out
what to see and do in Lowell?

Easy	82%
Hard	4%
In between	14%

-
1. These data from Visitor Center Evaluation, N=221
 2. These data from follow-up portion of Visitor Experience study, N=212

Table 5. EFFECTIVENESS OF THEMATIC ORIENTATION

Visitors seemed to have no trouble discerning the main interpretive themes of Lowell, and recalling them a week or two later. Substantial improvements are noted from the sample's previsit level of knowledge. The tour guides were a primary and significant source of information, followed by the slide show in the visitor center.

<p>AWARENESS AND RECALL OF MAJOR INTERPRETIVE THEMES¹</p>
--

Which of these topics did you learn about?

	POST-VISIT <u>FOLLOW-UP</u>	COMPARISON TO <u>EXPECTATIONS</u>
*Use of Water Power	97%	52%
*Industrial Revolution	95%	58%
*Immigrants as Workers in America	94%	54%
City as Cultural/Economic /Foundation	76%	22%
*Building and Planning Cities for Industry	74%	21%
*Creation of Capital Investment Methods	58%	6%
Historic Architecture	45%	46%
Development of Democratic Principles	36%	5%
People and Events of American Revolution	34%	17%
Contributions of the Navy	12%	4%

(* Note: Themes marked with an asterisk indicate the five major interpretive themes of Lowell; the other five themes were intended to primarily describe Boston; in call-back interviews or mail-back questionnaires visitors were asked "yes" or "no" whether they learned something about these topics.)

(Table 5 continues)

(Table 5 continued)

RECALL OF EXHIBITS IN VISITOR CENTER²

Which exhibits did you see here? (recall)

Labor.	36%
Power.	34%
Machines	33%
Industrial City	29%
Capital.	29%

(Overall, 60% of the visitor center sample said they saw one or more exhibits; see Table 4.)

OVERALL CONCEPTUAL ORIENTATION¹

Most helpful in understanding what the whole park was about:

Tour guides	51%
Visitor Center Slide Show	22%
Maps	10%
Visitor Center (unspecified)	6%
Tour	3%
Other or No Answer	<u>4%</u>
	100%

-
1. These data from follow-up portion of Visitor Experience study, N=212
 2. These data from Visitor Center Evaluation, N=221

Table 6. PATTERNS OF PARK USE

The Visitor Center, and the Mill and Canal Tour lead the list of Lowell activities recalled a week or so after the visit. The Gatehouses were also recalled, and had a 30 percentage-point lead over the next most remembered site, which was the Suffolk Mill.

SITES VISITED (recalled)¹

Visitor Center	88%
One or Both Gatehouses	67%
Suffolk Mill	35%
Swamp Locks.	34%
Agent's House	30%
St. Ann's Church	20%
Lawrence Mill.	17%
Boott Mill Boarding House	16%
Old City Hall	12%
Boott Mill	11%

TOURS TAKEN¹

Mill and Canal Tour	69%
Pawtucket Canal Tour	32%
Mill and Trolley Tour.	31%
Water Power Tour	17%
Other (Special Interest Tour).	6%

DURATION OF VISIT¹

	Post-Visit Follow-up	Comparison to Expectations
One hour	1%	3%
Two hours	12%	15%
Three hours	25%	32%
Four hours	30%	27%
Five or more hours	31%	22%
Median duration of visit	3.8 hours	3.5 hours

1. These data from follow-up portion of Visitor Experience study, N=212

Table 7. VISITOR ENJOYMENT AND DISAPPOINTMENTS

In general, visitors seemed to have very positive experiences in Lowell. As in the Fall of 1983, the Gatehouses emerged as the most-liked site, but there were noticeable increases in the popularity of the canals, the swamp locks, and the trolley.

Overall, 98% said they enjoyed their visit. However, when compared with the fall season, more people in the summer found fault with some aspect of the visit, complaining about noise, the organization of tours, or individual sites.

MOST-LIKED SITE¹

A Gatehouse	24%
Canals.	18%
A Mill (especially the loom).	11%
Visitor Center.	11%
Swamp Locks	7%
Trolley	5%
Other/Can't Decide	10%

Reasons: Role playing (19%), educational (14%), guide (13%), interesting sites (12%), water power (10%), film (7%), fun (7%), personal interest (6%).

DISAPPOINTMENTS AND PROBLEMS¹

Noise/ Organization.	26%
Sites.	23%
No Disappointments/Nothing Detracted	21%
City of Lowell	6%
Navigation	3%

Reasons: Too hot and stuffy, need air conditioning, large visitor groups ie. preschoolers and senior citizens, need more advance information about tour details.

(Table 7 continues)

(Table 7 continued)

WHAT WOULD YOU TELL SOMEONE ELSE TO PREPARE THEM FOR A VISIT?¹

Specific Tour/Site Recommendations	33%
Directions, Information Sources, Visitor Center	32%
Wear Comfortable Shoes/Clothes	25%
Preparation ("read about history", etc.)	25%
General Advice ("enjoy yourself", etc.)	23%
Make Reservations (hotel, food, tours)	19%
Allow Enough Time	18%
Other	6%
Don't Know, No Idea	3%
None	2%

1. These data from follow-up portion of Visitor Experience study, N=212

Table 8. PATTERNS OF VISITOR SPENDING

Visitors to Lowell spend very little money, an average of \$26.65 per group. Food is the primary category of expense, as it was in the fall season. Spending for souvenirs/shopping and local transportation remained low.

Hotel expenditures, however, increased from an average of .38 cents in the fall of 1983, to \$7.10. This indicates a seasonal influx of overnight guests, most likely traditional vacationing families.

TYPES OF TRIPS¹

Day Trips (One day in Lowell)	89%
Overnight Trips (multiple days in Lowell)	11%
Median distance travelled	30 miles

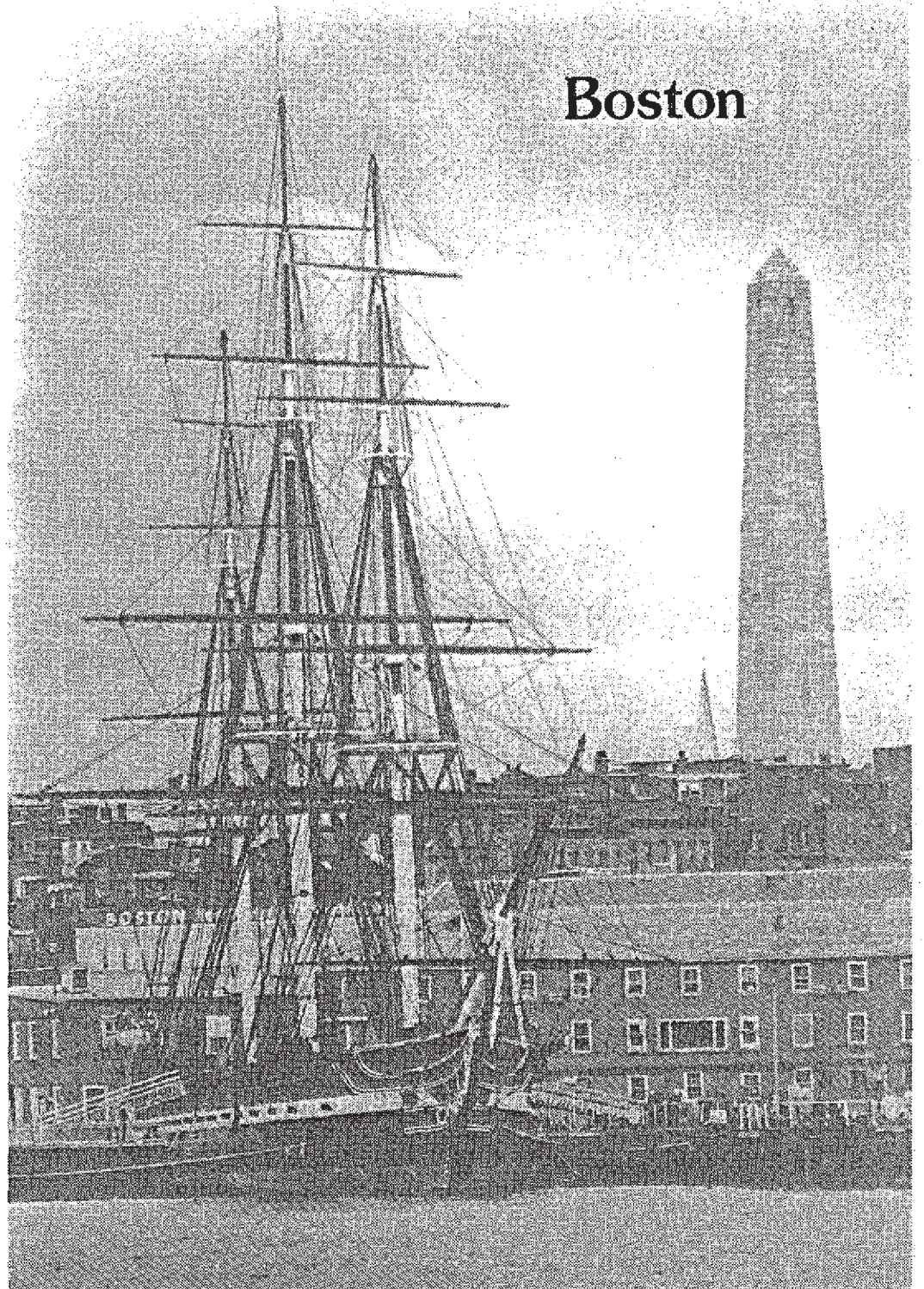
TYPES OF EXPENSES¹

	<u>Average Per Group</u>	<u>Range Per Group</u>	<u>% of People Who Spent Anything</u>
Food	\$14.98	\$0-400	77%
Hotel	7.10	0-35	7%
Local transportation	1.21	0-30	8%
Other (souvenirs, etc.)	6.20	0-125	35%
Total Expenses	\$26.65	\$0-440	85%

(Note 2: Average group size =3.9 persons; median = 2.9 persons)

1. These data from follow-up portion of Visitor Experience study, N = 212.

Boston



1. WHY STUDY BOSTON'S VISITORS?

This research was conducted to create a systematic foundation for planning at the Boston National Historical Park. Among many aspects of planning and development, this work focuses on planning for visitors — who they are, what they want to see, and how they perceive the experience of a visit to Boston's historic sites.

The Boston National Historical Park is a collection of nationally significant historical sites in and around Boston. Its most prominent feature is the Freedom Trail, linking sixteen sites from the Boston Common to the Charlestown Navy Yard. As the mission of the National Park Service has expanded to include urban parks, this site raises important planning and management questions: How do visitors experience a loosely-connected series of sites in an urban context? Does the park and its interpretive program offer adequate orientation for visitors? How many sites do people see, considering the fact that they are "on their own"? What can we learn about the management and interpretation of this urban park which could also be applied to other National Historical Parks?

This visitor research was conducted simultaneously in Boston and Lowell as an opportunity to compare different styles of operation and interpretation. In Boston, there were no immediate, urgent planning questions when this research began in 1983; however, it was recognized that new developments were likely to occur in the future, and the research would provide a foundation for such actions. In fact, during the period of this project — 1983 to 1985 — a new Interpretive Prospectus was developed, including recommendations for many of the sites in the park. It is expected that the systematic analysis of visitor experiences reported here can serve to inform such ongoing planning for visitor services and interpretation.

Based on questions and priorities of representatives of the National Park Service, this research was designed to be used for the following types of applications:

Interpretive Strategy: guided tours vs. self-guided walks, priorities for interpretive message

Visitor Centers: location, effectiveness

Exhibit Planning: visitor interests, current evaluations

Promotion: visitor profiles, identifying target markets, image

Operations: relationship among sites, general admission fee?

Although these various applications are quite different and may be carried out by different people, they rely on similar types of information about visitors. Therefore, the extent and depth of information in this report should serve to assist each of these topic areas, and improve present and future planning for Boston.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

One of the major challenges of this research was to represent visitors' experience of Boston, ranging from their image and expectations as well as their degree of learning and satisfaction at the end of a visit. Consequently, the research strategy called for contacts with visitors before, or at the beginning of, their visit and follow-up contact after a visit. Also, since the scope of work required visitor samples to be small and efficient, a strategy had to be developed to provide accurate demographic and behavioral profiles, capable of representing the entire population of visitors to the Freedom Trail.

Direct visitor contact was needed to obtain data about visitor experiences, perceptions, and knowledge. The following methods were developed to accomplish this purpose:

Study # 1: Visitor Experience

Randomly selected visitors were interviewed near the beginning of their visit, at locations including Park Street, Granary Burying Ground, Old South Meeting House, and Charlestown Navy Yard. Interviewers selected the adult who was physically closest as they approached each visitor group, and administered an interview about their expectations and knowledge about the park. At the completion of the interview, the visitor was asked to cooperate in a follow-up contact, alternately selected for a "call-back" telephone interview or a "mail-back" post-visit questionnaire. Both methods of follow-up contact asked identical questions but the use of two methods served to (a) reduce the potential bias from any one method, (b) reduce the cost of follow-up contacts, and (c) increase the response rate by offering an alternative to visitors who did not want to be (or who could not be) contacted by mail/phone. In Boston, 506 visitors were interviewed at the beginning of their visit, and follow-up contacts were completed with 288 of those visitors, a response rate of 57%.

Study # 2: Visitor Center Evaluation

To assess the pattern of use and effectiveness of the visitor center, randomly-selected visitors were interviewed as they exited from the State Street Visitor Center. These people were asked about their activities in the visitor center, expected use of the park, and various demographic questions. In Boston, 281 of these interviews were completed.

Sampling

To ensure an adequate representation of the visitor population, this study was first conducted in the Fall of 1983 (see earlier report by Hayward & Zeff) and again in the Summer of 1984. During the 1984 season, three sampling weeks were distributed over the summer (late June, mid-July, and late August). Visitors were interviewed on weekdays and weekends, mornings as well as afternoons (with an emphasis on mornings, reflecting visitor counts). Comparisons of visitor characteristics between study #1 and study #2, as well as comparisons of the different sampling weeks, supported the reliability and adequacy of the research procedures, and the data are considered to represent the broad range of independent visitors to the Freedom Trail (including distant visitors as well as local residents, but not including school groups or other large tour groups).

3. AUDIENCE ANALYSIS

Who are our visitors?

The Freedom Trail has the distinction of being a large and priceless piece of American heritage. However, its historical sites are scattered throughout the heart of a modern city, which is a severe challenge to interpretive coherence. In fact, the mix of tourists, local residents and working people makes it hard to identify who is visiting the Freedom Trail, and who is not. Consequently, one of the first priorities for research was to identify actual visitors to the Freedom Trail (defined as anyone who entered any of the sites where interviewing was being conducted, including the State Street Visitor Center).

Why should we be concerned with who our visitors are? The more we know about our visitors, the better we can address their needs and interests. Knowing who uses the site, and who does not, helps to inform promotional efforts and planning. We need to know who our visitors are to successfully execute the mandate to maintain and interpret a valuable historic and cultural resource.

This entire report addresses questions about our visitors. Here we begin with the most basic characteristics:

A) The Freedom Trail is a national and international attraction. More than 80% of its visitors live outside New England, including approximately 10% foreign visitors. In the summer, there is a slightly higher percentage of New England visitors (19% compared to 13% in the Fall); the median distance travelled (50th percentile) is 900 miles in the summer and 1500 miles in the fall. (Table 9)

B) Adult couples are the most common type of visitor group (44%) but groups of 4 or more are also common (26% of the visitor groups, approximately 43% of the visitor count). In the summer, about 25% of all visitor groups contain children, up from only 7% in the Fall of 1983. (Table 9)

C) Boston draws visitors of all ages, but primarily attracts adults between 21 and 55. There are slightly more young adults (20's) and fewer older adults (60+) compared to the general population. According to the visitor center study (study #2), there are more men than women visiting the park. However, it's possible that this is a sampling error; there are no data in study #1 to confirm or deny the reliability of this finding.

D) In the summer, more than half of the visitors were in Boston "on vacation" (67%). The remaining visitors were in town on business or attending a convention (19%), visiting friends (12%), or because they lived or worked in Boston (8%).

Three Types of Visitors

Beyond these broad descriptions of the demographics of visitors to Boston, it is helpful to define and describe the major "user groups" — the most common "types" of visitors. In Boston, the data suggest three principal types: intentional tourists, wandering tourists, and locals. Understanding these types, and the differences between them, will help to guide future planning and management decisions.

"INTENTIONAL TOURISTS" are visitors from out of the area who know about and intend to see the Freedom Trail. They've planned their visit farther in advance, and they are interested in the subject matter (as a reason for coming, they are more likely to cite "historical importance of the sites" and "it's educational"). They have obtained slightly more information about visiting Boston, and allowed more time in their schedule to see the Freedom Trail.

"WANDERING TOURISTS" are visitors from out of the area who did not know about or expect to see the Freedom Trail specifically. Many of these visitors have planned in advance for their visit to Boston, but for a shorter time and with less information. Although their stay in Boston averages the same as "intentional tourists," these wandering tourists have allowed less time in their schedule for visiting the Freedom Trail.

"LOCAL VISITORS" visit the Freedom Trail too, but represent a smaller portion of the audience. Some locals (defined as living in Boston or its suburbs) are specifically interested in the historical sites, and many of them are browsing the attractions of downtown Boston. It is common for locals to be "showing the town" to visiting relatives or friends.

Some analyses about these groups indicate that:

* Intentional tourists are the most common type of visitors to the Freedom Trail. They are likely to be in Boston on vacation (80%) although some of these tourists are visiting the Freedom Trail as part of a business trip (15%). Despite their tendency to plan farther in advance (46% decided to come at least "months" in advance, compared to only 32% of wandering tourists who decided that far in advance), and despite the fact that intentional tourists have heard about the Freedom Trail from slightly more sources of information (especially "friends" and "guide books"), they are not more informed about the interpretive themes here. Apparently, the advance information only served to let people know of the existence of the Freedom Trail, without helping to communicate a specific interpretive message; considering the variety and quality of competing

brochures and advertising about Boston, perhaps this is a modest achievement. In the summer season, approximately 51% of the visitors to the Freedom Trail can be described as "intentional tourists;" the majority of adult couples and families are in this group.

* Wandering tourists are also a common type of visitor to the Freedom Trail. Even without specific intentions to see the Trail, many visitors are aware of the historical overtones to Boston, and do spend time seeing several sites. However, this visitor-type is more likely to have an impulsive and unplanned experience (35% decided to visit Boston only "days" or "hours" in advance, compared to 24% of the intentional tourists who came on such short notice). Travelers on business or attending a convention were more significant in this wandering tourist group (23%) and people visiting relatives or friends were also more prominent (18%, compared to only 8% of intentional tourists). People visiting alone are more likely to be wandering tourists (60%) rather than intentional tourists (34%); this finding parallels the frequency of business travelers in this group. In the summer season, 40% of visitors to the Freedom Trail can be considered "wandering tourists."

* Local visitors are not very common on the Freedom Trail. Perhaps this is the pattern of not visiting major attractions when they're in your own back yard, or perhaps it's just that the locals are far outnumbered by out of town tourists. In any case, slightly less than half of the locals say they planned to see the Freedom Trail specifically while more than half just wandered onto it. Locals are somewhat more likely to be repeat visitors, but they appear to be no more informed than tourists. Overall, "locals" represent about 9% of Freedom Trail visitors.

Considering these patterns, the following implications or suggestions are offered:

Intentional tourists are extremely important: they plan in advance and allow time in their schedules to see the Freedom Trail. Their expectations are appropriate to the experience ("historical" and "educational") and they have already obtained some information in advance. Unfortunately, they are unable to recognize interpretive themes any more than "wandering tourists," and one must wonder whether publicity about the Trail could be better at informing people's expectations. A goal of marketing and promotion efforts should be to create more intentional tourists.

Business and convention visitors are more likely to be "wandering tourists," with little advance recognition or information about the Trail. Targeting this audience should be a major goal. Even though some of these visitors may stay for shorter periods of time, it is worth trying to attract them to historical sites. Many do have some extra time with which to see the sites of Boston, but few of them are well-informed about the Freedom Trail.

Local visitors are not a strong segment of the visitor audience, but this doesn't mean that they should be ignored. An obvious goal of publicity should be to encourage local residents and businesses to bring their visitors to the Freedom Trail. In addition, you could develop incentives for repeat local visitation (information about upcoming events, coupons or discounts on purchases for repeat visitors, a newsletter for locals, perhaps as part of "Friends of" organizations, explicit appreciation of businesses or groups who bring out-of-town visitors to the Trail).

4. CONCLUSIONS: EFFECTIVENESS OF INTERPRETATION

How effective is the Boston National Historical Park in communicating its message to visitors? Do people understand what they see? What parts of the interpretive system are most effective, and what elements need improvement?

Assessing the effectiveness of interpretation on the Freedom Trail has been a major concern of this project. There was great value in having comparative data from more than one season, and from more than one city (i.e., Lowell). Highlights of the data analysis reveal some "solid" conclusions on this topic:

A. Visitors to the Freedom Trail are treated to a wide-ranging interpretive experience, focusing on historically significant places. Specifically, visitors enjoy feeling a sense of the past — especially at sites which offer a strong connection with well-known events and personalities. Visitors also enjoy the intertwining of "old" and "new," seeing authentic history right in the middle of downtown Boston.

B. Despite a generally positive experience — the powerful sense of history as well as the excitement of Boston — there are disappointments and problems. Getting around downtown is reasonably easy, but there are typical urban problems of traffic and construction. The Trail also requires a lot of walking, and many people are unprepared for this. Spatial orientation is greatly facilitated by the red line, but it is hard to follow in some places. Amenities are perceived to be sparse or non-existent, especially rest rooms and water fountains.

C. There are two principal interpretive themes here: people and events of the American Revolution, and Boston as a cultural and economic foundation ("birthplace") of the nation (a recent Interpretive Prospectus, given to us after visitor interviewing was completed, also emphasized a third theme: the development of democratic principles in America). Although these themes seem so basic that people should remember them from general history, and be able to pick them out of a list, few visitors can do so at the beginning of their visit. Only "Revolution" is recognized by a majority of visitors (75%), while "foundation"/birthplace is recognized by 43% and "democracy" by 28%. Again, this indicates that visitor expectations are essentially uninformed about the interpretive message here. If such expectations could be more informed and more accurate, the interpretation on site could be richer and more rewarding. At present, considerable effort must be spent to help people find their way, and communicate at a very BASIC level of interpretation.

D. The overall experience of the Freedom Trail is moderately effective in terms of visitors' increasing recognition of interpretive themes. After returning home from their visit, for example, most visitors were able to discriminate themes pertinent to Boston from other closely related topics (themes of Lowell were mixed in with the list): recognition of the "American Revolution" theme increased to 91%, and other themes demonstrated a significant rise of at least 30 percentage points: "foundation"/birthplace was cited by 74% of the visitors, and "democracy" and "contributions of the Navy" were recognized by 65% and 62% respectively (see Table 13 for wording of the themes). This increase in recognition of interpretive themes is impressive; it may be due, in part, to the first-hand experience of historic buildings and their relationship to each other, but it must also be due to the interpretation offered at the various sites.

Despite this tangible evidence that people recognize interpretive themes, the conceptual thrust of the Freedom Trail needs considerable improvement. When visitors were asked "What was most helpful in understanding what the Freedom Trail was about?" the most common answer was "maps and guide materials"! If a map is the best aid to CONCEPTUAL orientation, it's likely that 'interpretive staff' and 'orientation programs' at visitor centers are not so effective (by comparison, these aids were commonly mentioned in Lowell). Remember, other data suggest that interpretive staff must communicate with people on a very basic level (e.g., how to get around, what to see) because of visitors' lack of information; this finding seems to confirm the fact that overall conceptual understanding suffers without personal interpretation or effective orientation exhibits. A bolder effort to communicate spatial orientation (a large map exhibit, or an easily-readable model) would free the visitor center staff from some mundane direction-giving and perhaps give them more of an opportunity to render conceptual orientation.

E. There are many questions about whether guided tours are effective and whether they would be popular among visitors. Unfortunately, the present system of such tours is inappropriate to the pattern of visitor use, and we found so few visitors who had taken a guided tour that we were unable to investigate this issue. The subject is an important one and should be studied directly using visitors who did take a guided tour.

F. The visitor centers on the Freedom Trail are not very effective. They attract a small proportion of visitors, and are rarely cited as aids to conceptual or spatial orientation. For example, only the Park Street information center (includes the Chamber of Commerce center) is visited by more than a third of the visitor groups. The State Street visitor center was visited by only 32% of the samples. The Navy Yard Visitor Center and Bunker Hill Pavillion at the Navy Yard were visited by only 27% and 25% of the visitor groups, respectively, despite the fact that 64% visited the U.S.S. Constitution and must have walked by one or both of these orientation facilities. With a specific focus on the State Street Center, this research discovered that the duration of use averages 12 minutes (28 minutes in Lowell), and more people used the rest rooms and water fountain than the number who saw the slide show and the mezzanine exhibit!

G. Interpretation at the State Street Visitor Center is only partially effective. Many visitors obtain brochures and a map, and speak with a staff person; this opportunity for an information desk in the middle of an unfamiliar city is quite welcome and seems to be a boon for spatial orientation. However, "having a map" is the best benefit of this center to most visitors (#1 answer, 58%). Only 38% cite the effectiveness of talking with a staff person. For conceptual orientation, the visitor center is rarely mentioned as an aid in understanding the overall message of the Freedom Trail.

5. CONCLUSIONS: VISITOR BEHAVIOR

Are there identifiable patterns of visitor behavior? If we understand what people do when they're here, and how they use the park, can it help guide management and planning? For example, how much time do people spend visiting the Freedom Trail? How much time did they EXPECT to spend here? What sites did they see? How much money did they spend?

Analysis of visitor use patterns on the Freedom Trail indicates:

A. The Freedom Trail is most often experienced as a multi-day visit. The majority of visitors to Boston are overnight tourists -- the median visit is approximately 2.2 days (50% longer, 50% shorter). About one-third of visitor groups (32%) spend one day or less in Boston, but since only 20% of the visitors live in New England, it's reasonable to assume that some of these "day-trippers" are also on a multi-day trip, of which only one day is spent in Boston. At the other end of the spectrum, 24% of the visitors spend 4 or more days in Boston. (Table 16)

B. Visitors EXPECT to spend an average of 5.8 hours seeing Boston's historical sites, but afterwards say they spent an average of 7.4 hours. This amount of time is considerably longer than many other historical attractions in New England (3.8 hours in Lowell, 4.0 hours at Old Sturbridge Village, 3.5 hours at Historic Deerfield); the extra time may be due to the time spent walking the Trail (eating and shopping, although the question asked specifically about historic sites), and the fact that some people are spending parts of several days seeing the Trail, which may mean they can sustain their interest longer than they could in a one day visit.

C. The overwhelming majority of visitors experience the Freedom Trail as a self-guided walk. A small proportion of people take mini-bus tours, but very few are aware of ranger-led tours. Despite the lack of guided tours, visitors cover a considerable portion of the Trail, indicated by the fact that more than half of the visitors see sites at both ends and the middle of the Trail! The U.S.S. Constitution is visited (recalled) by 64% of the sample, and the Park Street Information Center is visited (recalled) by 59%. The most-visited sites were "in the middle": Old North Church, Faneuil Hall and the Old State House. There are two types of sites which are underused: visitor centers (State Street, the Navy Yard Visitor Center, and Bunker Hill Pavillion), and secondly, sites which are "off the Trail," not directly connected to the red line (Dorchester Heights, Bunker Hill Monument). (Table 14)

When comparing visitor recall of sites ("Yes I saw the Paul Revere House") with actual visitor counts, sites with an admission fee show a discrepancy compared to the overall pattern. Apparently, fees restrict admissions. A much higher proportion of people recall the Old State House, for example, than the proportion who actually entered it.

D. Use of the State Street Visitor Center averages 12 minutes, which is hardly adequate to accomplish the goal of informing and orienting visitors (half spend more time than this, half spend less time). The main activity is picking up brochures and stopping at the information desk (78% and 72% respectively);

people also browse the book racks (51%). Use of amenities is common: 60% use the rest rooms, 43% use the water fountain. Unfortunately, exposure to interpretive exhibits is extremely low: only 29% see the mezzanine exhibit, and 25% see the slide presentation (45% say they were aware of the exhibit or slide show). There is virtually NO REPEAT USE of interpretive exhibits on the mezzanine; for example, only 5% of repeat visitors (compared to 28% of first-time visitors) reported seeing the slide show on this visit.

E. Visitors spend a considerable amount of money during their stay in Boston. The average spending is \$239.89 PER GROUP (mean = 2.58 persons, median = 2.16 persons). The median spending (50th percentile) is \$158. The principal expenditures are for hotel accommodations (average of \$101.36) and food (\$82.87 per group). Only 51% of the visitors spend money on a hotel, while 93% spend for food; 75% spend money on local transportation (averaging \$21.64) and other items such as shopping and entertainment (\$42.38 per group). (Table 16)

6. CONCLUSIONS: IMAGE AND EXPERIENCE

What do visitors think of Boston? Does their image and experience of the city affect their experience of the Freedom Trail?

Image factors are important in people's perception and behavior; the image provides an overall conceptual framework which influences a person's decision to visit, summarizes their reaction to the place, and affects how they describe the place to others. Among the data on visitor experiences, these findings provide a perspective on the image of Boston and the Freedom Trail.

A. Visitors come to Boston with vague expectations about a sense of history. They've heard about the Freedom Trail from friends or relatives, travel guides, and brochures, but many have rudimentary expectations based on history books or general education. Some think they will see a collection of old buildings on a plot of land with a fence around them, and some expect to see an "old town" section of Boston. Consequently, these visitors are surprised by the fact that "old" and "new" are so intertwined; this bothers some people but others find it interesting.

B. Despite some complaints about typical urban problems and high prices, most visitors have a very positive evaluation of their trip to Boston. They have enjoyed a first-hand look at famous sites and historic architecture, and enjoyed easy access to eating and shopping too.

C. The most-liked sites are the U.S.S. Constitution, Quincy Market, and the Paul Revere House, based on the sense of history communicated by these sites, an appreciation of ships, and the sense of activity and excitement in the Quincy Market/Faneuil Hall area.

D. As a self-guided walking experience, the Trail works well. However, there is considerable room for improvement concerning visitor services and operations: better orientation is needed, as well as opportunities for personal interpretation (walking tours, role playing, more conceptual interpretation in the visitor centers, more effective and interesting exhibits).

E. Some of the problems perceived by visitors are predictable and typical for an urban location. For example, "mobility" (e.g., getting around downtown Boston) was the number one problem, and complaints about the environment of the city were also common (traffic, street people, lack of rest rooms); the stark contrast of the historic and the modern was also a problem for some visitors. Beyond these predictable problems, however, were others which warrant action on the part of NPS: people complained about the need for more information (brochures, etc.), losing the Trail (poor signage, hard to see or follow the red line), the need for better upkeep or maintenance of the sites, and crowds (especially, waiting in line). (Table 15)

F. People in our samples were asked to give advice to future visitors. In general, their comments indicate a strong need to inform visitor expectations. At the top of their list is advice about the pedestrian nature of the Trail: "don't drive," "do it on foot," and "take the T." Apparently, there are plenty of people who don't understand the close proximity of the sites and the difficulty of driving in downtown Boston; if possible, the image of walking the Trail should be communicated more strongly to potential visitors. A second category of advice focused on advance information: getting maps or guidebooks, and brushing up on American history to prepare for the visit. This advance information would be useful to inform people's expectations as well as to help people decide what to see. A third category emphasized the need to "allow enough time," which parallels our finding that people spend more time than anticipated visiting these historic sites. Finally, people would advise other visitors to wear comfortable clothing and shoes, reinforcing the casual atmosphere and the extent of walking that they do. Visitors may not be prepared for this casual style if their image of Boston is the conventional "formal and reserved" image, or if they are dressed only for business.

G. The complex environment of the city apparently dilutes people's awareness of who is responsible for the interpretation and management of the Trail. The City of Boston gets the majority of credit for the Freedom Trail (cited by 62% of these samples), followed by the National Park Service (35%, including any references to the federal government). Private non-profit organizations were also thought to be involved (30%), almost to the same level of awareness as the Park Service. The State of Massachusetts was also given some credit for the operation of the Trail (21%).

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout this report, there are results and data which can be used to sharpen the picture of visitors to Boston, as well as to inform planning and management decisions faced by NPS and the private non-profit organizations which operate some of the sites along the Freedom Trail. In this section, some of these findings are synthesized and highlighted. All recommendations are solidly based on the data, analysis and interpretation of visitor knowledge and behavior, including both quantitative and qualitative data.

Recommendation # 1: CONTINUE TO IMPROVE SPATIAL ORIENTATION ON THE TRAIL

Visitors to Boston face a complex environment: streets are not named in a logical order and their layout is confusing. Important historic sites are interspersed in a modern downtown, making them more difficult to find compared to cities where there is an "old town" section. Visitors' spatial orientation is greatly aided by the Freedom Trail's red line, and it is critical that all parts of this line are obvious and easily perceived. The few weaknesses are: street intersections between Park Street and State Street (the Trail makes several turns, not always recognizable, and the line is not painted on the street); the area around the Old State House, where the blue line joins the red line without identification of either color; the Faneuil Hall area where the line is sometimes lost on the brick surface and the turns heading to the North End are not obvious; and other places where the painted red line is replaced by brick courses (sometimes bricks embedded in concrete, sometimes bricks on a brick sidewalk).

Spatial orientation should also be improved by signage around Faneuil Hall (especially the link to the North End), and the relationship between the North End and the Navy Yard. In brochures and publicity material, people should be encouraged to start the Trail at one end or the other (the Common, or the Constitution), which would improve their understanding of its spatial organization.

Recommendation # 2: PARK STREET VISITOR CENTER

Establish a visitor center at the Boston Common/Park Street location. Ideally, this could be a walk-in facility, but a staffed information counter may be sufficient. As people begin to walk the Trail from this end, they are seeking advice about how to identify sites, how long it takes, and other practical questions. This is a prime opportunity to aid their SPATIAL orientation, introduce CONCEPTUAL orientation, and increase their awareness of the role of the National Park Service and private non-profits in the operation and interpretation of the Freedom Trail. As we interviewed visitors who used the State Street Visitor Center, quite a number of them complained about the "commercial" information center at the Common (feeling "ripped off" that they bought a map/guide when they are free elsewhere); certainly, there could be a role for both an NPS visitor information facility as well as a Chamber of Commerce one. A final reason for this recommendation is an operational one: as the park programming expands to include more guided walking tours (recommendation #6), and eventually considers any kind of general admission ticket (recommendation #8), this staffed facility will be a tremendous aid to promote visitor awareness of these options.

Recommendation # 3: NAVY YARD VISITOR CENTER

Despite recent construction around the Charlestown Navy Yard and its effect on visitor activity, it's obvious that the visitor center there is underused. From the absence of visitor recall or comments about it, the center also seems to be ineffective. Considering the fact that some people start their visit at this end of the Trail, and that the Navy Yard itself is underused and unappreciated, a more serious orientation effort seems warranted. Reorganizing the existing visitor facilities could include combining the visitor center with the Bunker Hill Pavillion, or creating a structure in the space between the visitor center building and the U.S.S. Constitution, or sharing the "plaza" in front of the Bunker Hill Pavillion with a separate visitor center across from it. In any case, the goals should be to provide an obvious orientation to the Navy Yard and the opportunities which are available to visitors (the image of guard booths and a military facility lead people to think that the Navy Yard is "off limits" to the public), to encourage an awareness of this site as one end of the Freedom Trail, and to provide visitor amenities such as a sales area for books/souvenirs, and rest rooms (or information about nearby rest rooms).

Recommendation # 4: STATE STREET VISITOR CENTER

The current visitor center is underused and only partially effective. Visitors appreciate the amenities and the staff's assistance with spatial orientation, but their duration of use is short and the center accomplishes little if any CONCEPTUAL orientation. There are three areas of impact: the entrance, ground floor, and mezzanine. The entrance lacks a strong visual image; people say it looks like a bank or an office building. Even though there is a prominent label on the window, it isn't obvious that this is a visitor center. A RADICAL change is needed outside, such as a different sidewalk surface, a group of benches, small scale landscaping, a freestanding sign, and interpretive graphics. The ground floor is satisfactory, with minor exceptions (see recommendation #5). It is devoted to spatial orientation, printed material, and visitor amenities; this level needs little or no change if a revised entrance succeeds in making these services more available to the public. The mezzanine is a wasted investment. Few people use it and fewer still get any value out of it. UNLESS it can receive major new investment for a dynamic audio visual presentation (e.g., with an effectiveness such as the one in Lowell), and an exhibit with much more appeal than the present one, then the mezzanine might as well be closed to visitors and used for some other purpose.

Recommendation # 5: MAPS ARE CRITICALLY IMPORTANT

The research indicates that maps are the single most important aid to orientation on the Freedom Trail. They are important for both SPATIAL and CONCEPTUAL orientation. (In some sense, it is disappointing that maps are so important in conceptual orientation, because it probably means that other sources of interpretation are not as effective as they should be.) Therefore, all sites of visitor information should continue to give out hand-held maps. Maps should also be distributed through other sources such as hotels and conventions. In addition to hand-held maps and brochures, a large wall map or model of the Freedom Trail should be created for all visitor centers. At State Street, for example, a prominent map or model might reduce the demand for practical information at the information desk, allowing the interpretive staff

more freedom to introduce topics of conceptual orientation. It is interesting that in Lowell, a large wall map in the visitor center is recalled and cited as a useful piece of orientation by 39% of the visitors, even though hand-held maps/brochures are also available.

Recommendation # 6: INCREASE WALKING TOURS

Few visitors are aware of the opportunities for ranger-led walking tours, and when they are aware of them, it may not be convenient to fit them into the visitor's schedule (for example, finding out at 10:00 in the visitor center that there's a ranger-led tour at 11:00 presents a dilemma: kill an hour of time, or keep going on the Trail and see things yourself). This recommendation covers both "awareness" and "operations". Visitor awareness of the opportunity for ranger-led walking tours must be increased if this activity has any chance of being a success. To increase awareness, people must be contacted BEFORE they arrive at the State Street Visitor Center; some strategies include an event board at hotels, a well-publicized telephone number for the schedule of tours/events, and information distributed at both ends of the Trail so people can adjust their schedules to fit the tour times. Lowell's strategy of requiring reservations for tours has a number of advantages, but it may not work as well in Boston, where tourists have little advance information and are squeezing many sights into their schedule. In terms of the operation of walking tours, it's important to remember that many people are not prepared for the extent of walking required and that their "attention span" may not be very long (one of the major user groups is called "wandering tourist"!). Therefore, a reasonable strategy is to arrange guided tours for only some parts of the Trail: starting at Faneuil Hall and going as far as the Old North Church, starting at State Street and going as far as the Granary Burying Ground, for example. Tour length should be limited to about an hour (or 90 minutes if there are stops inside key sites such as the Paul Revere House or Old South Meeting House); evaluating the practical experience with such tours may lead to revisions in these estimates.

Recommendation # 7: INFORM VISITOR EXPECTATIONS

Visitors arrive with little or no advance information about the Freedom Trail, as well as a mixture of images about its size, content, and mode of transportation. Publicity and promotion about this park must attempt to do a better job of informing visitors about practical matters, such as the fact that it's a walking experience (wear comfortable shoes, don't drive), that there are visitor centers at both ends and the middle of the Trail, that visitors spend an average of 7 to 8 hours seeing the historical sites along the Trail (although they only expected to spend about 5 hours), and that some people divide this time across more than one day. Although half of the visitors intended to see the Freedom Trail specifically, the other half just "wandered" onto it or were vaguely aware of it but didn't know what it meant. Important steps in this strategy are to clarify the messages in existing promotional literature, and work with existing sources of publicity (visitor bureau, hotels, convention planners, etc.) to help distribute information.

Recommendation # 8: ADDITIONAL FEES ARE PREMATURE

Everyone knows that there is a great pressure to charge fees — visitors know this too, and it eventually affects their expectations and behavior. Currently, the admission fees at some sites along the Trail reduce the numbers of visitors entering those sites (such control is sometimes desirable to reduce visitor impact and protect the quality of the experience). However, fees increase expectations. If a site charges \$2.50 for admission, it should be "worth it"; disappointments lead to complaints and a bad reputation. (If a free site is disappointing, people say "you get what you pay for.") Although it may be easy enough to charge fees for admissions and tours on the Freedom Trail, there ought to be improvements in interpretation and operations to warrant such fees. People will expect a reliable tour schedule, lively interpretation, admission to sites without waiting in line, and good spatial orientation. Complaints will multiply if people pay for tours which are too long and not interesting enough, or if they don't think the admission was worth the money. In sum, develop successful programs first (e.g., walking tours); then, if necessary, add a fee.

A general admission ticket ("strip ticket" for all sites, some free, some not) would increase visitor traffic at paid sites ... is that desirable, and are those sites prepared for it? A free "strip ticket" for the Trail, simply identifying all sites but not guaranteeing admission to paid sites, could be very effective in promoting more extensive use of the Trail while having a smaller impact on paid sites (if this idea is implemented, be clear that some sites have an admission fee; otherwise, the strip ticket will have some people thinking that they are entitled to free admission).

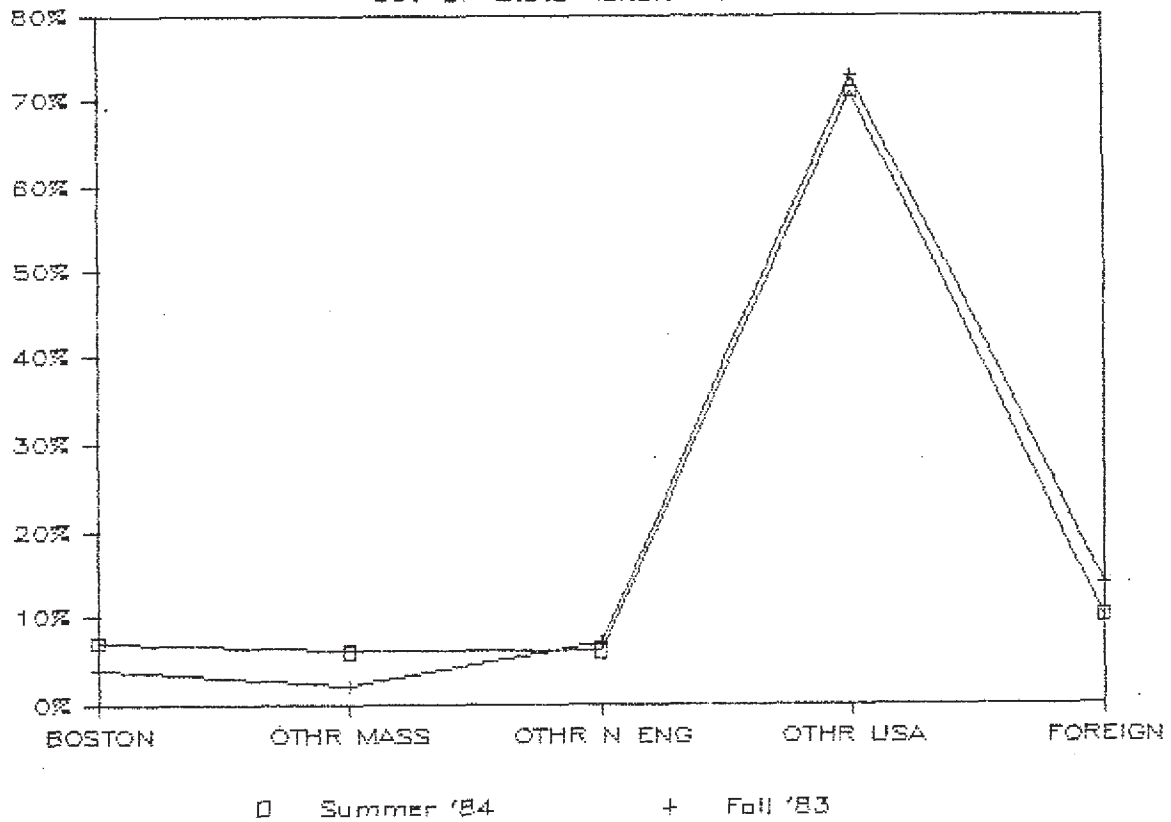
Recommendation # 9: DEVELOP A MODEST RESEARCH PROGRAM

To aid in implementing these recommendations, and to assist with ongoing planning and management, an NPS person should be assigned to the task of coordinating research about visitors. Research and data-gathering should focus on two topics: (a) general profiles of the visitor audience, and (b) evaluations of specific programs and exhibits. Profiles of the audience: As far as we know, there is no continuing effort to record visitor characteristics, patterns of use, or effectiveness of interpretation. Some of this information could be collected using simple procedures, for example: interpreters at the State Street information desk could ask people to identify their home state, and whether they knew before arriving that they would visit the Freedom Trail. These broad profiles of the audience, together with visitor counts, could be used to measure the effects of changes in facilities or program offerings, as well as changes in attendance due to publicity or promotion efforts. Evaluations: Feedback about new and existing programs can be obtained through short-term, efficient evaluation projects. For example, the idea that advance information distributed at hotels could be effective for visitors, can be tested by placing map pads (the type used at visitor center information desks) in hotel lobbies (the registration counter or concierge desk); if this were implemented for one week, and if the maps were printed in a different color, the effects could be measured in terms of the number of maps taken, evidence of the colored maps among visitors at selected sites, and the effect on visitor counts for that week. Other evaluations could focus on the effectiveness of ranger-led walking tours, a new entrance design for the State Street Visitor Center, and patterns of visitor behavior at the Charlestown Navy Yard. In addition to these

"targeted" research strategies, a thorough analysis of the visitor population should be conducted in 1990, six years after the data were collected for this study.

VISITOR ORIGINS, SUMMER '84 Vs FALL '83

Out-of-State visitors dominate



ADVANCE PLANNING, SUMMER Vs FALL

Fall trips planned farther in advance

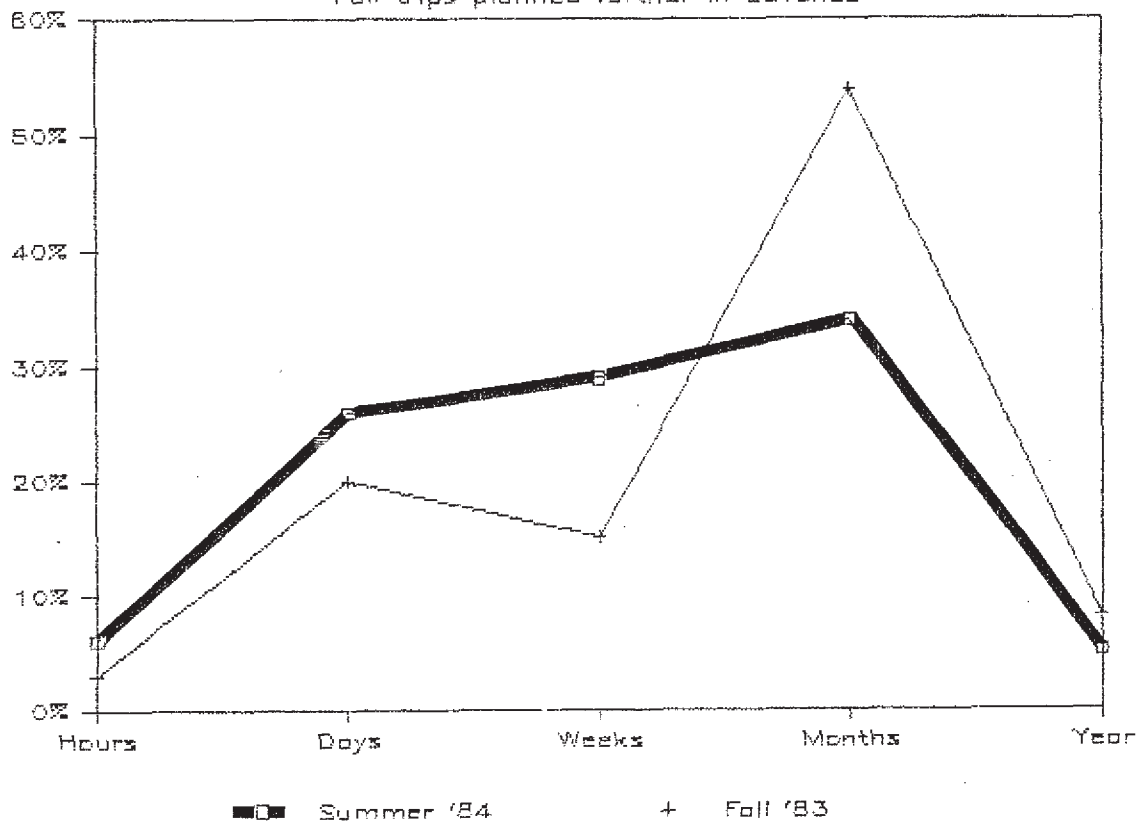
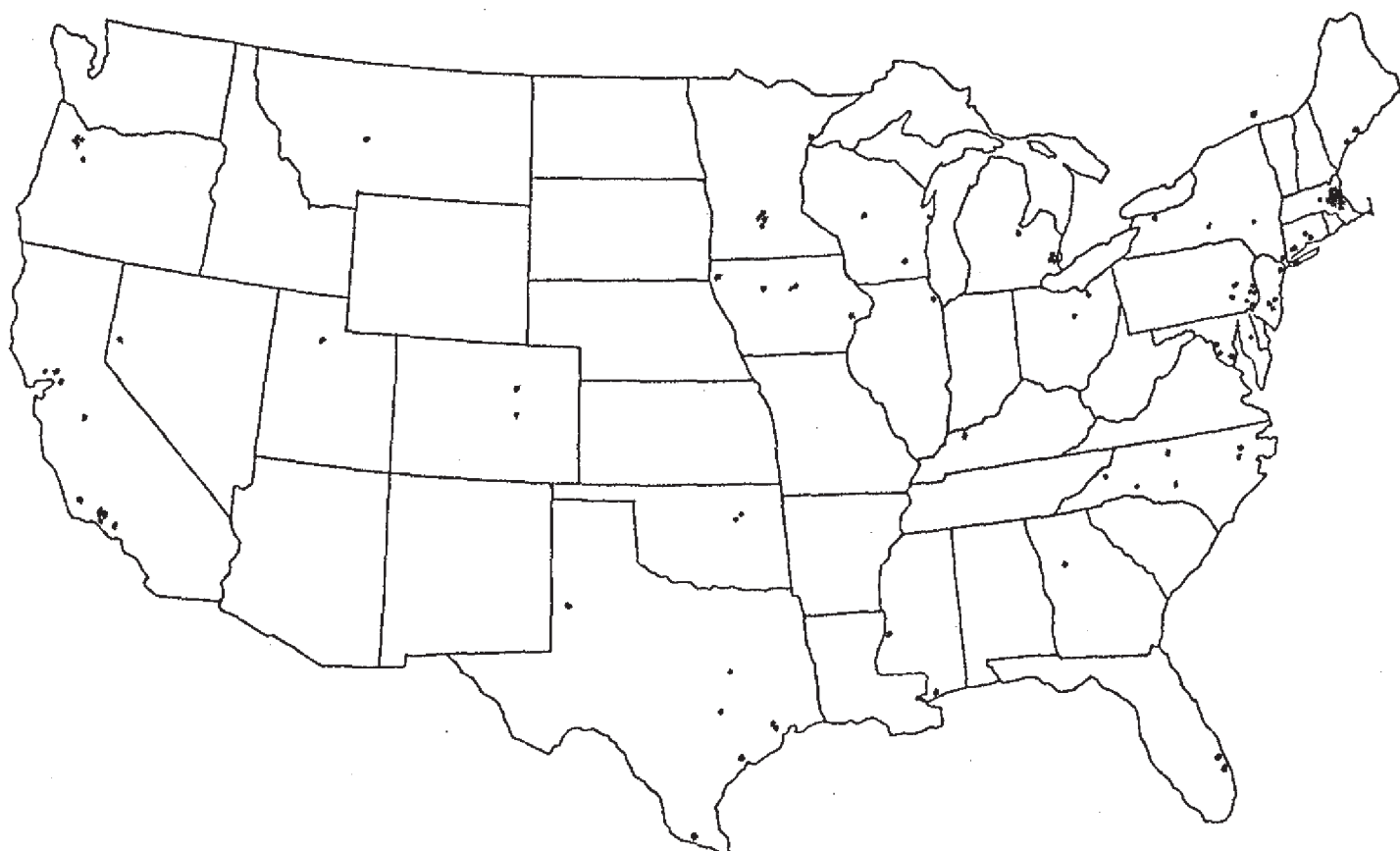


Figure 12. Map of Where Visitors Come From

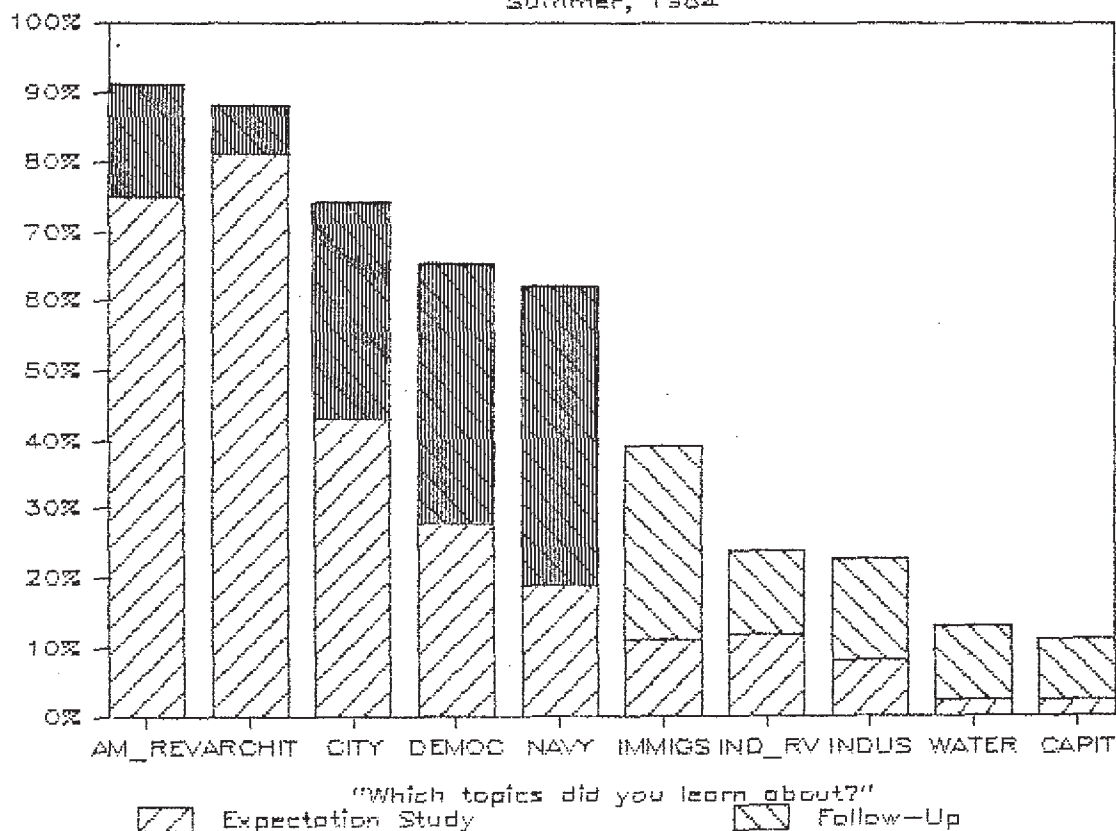
Summer visitors to Boston's Freedom Trail come from a national and international audience. The median distance travelled was 900 miles, and only 13% of the visitors are residents of Massachusetts.



Foreign visitors: 10%

RECALL OF MAJOR INTERPRETIVE THEMES

Summer, 1984

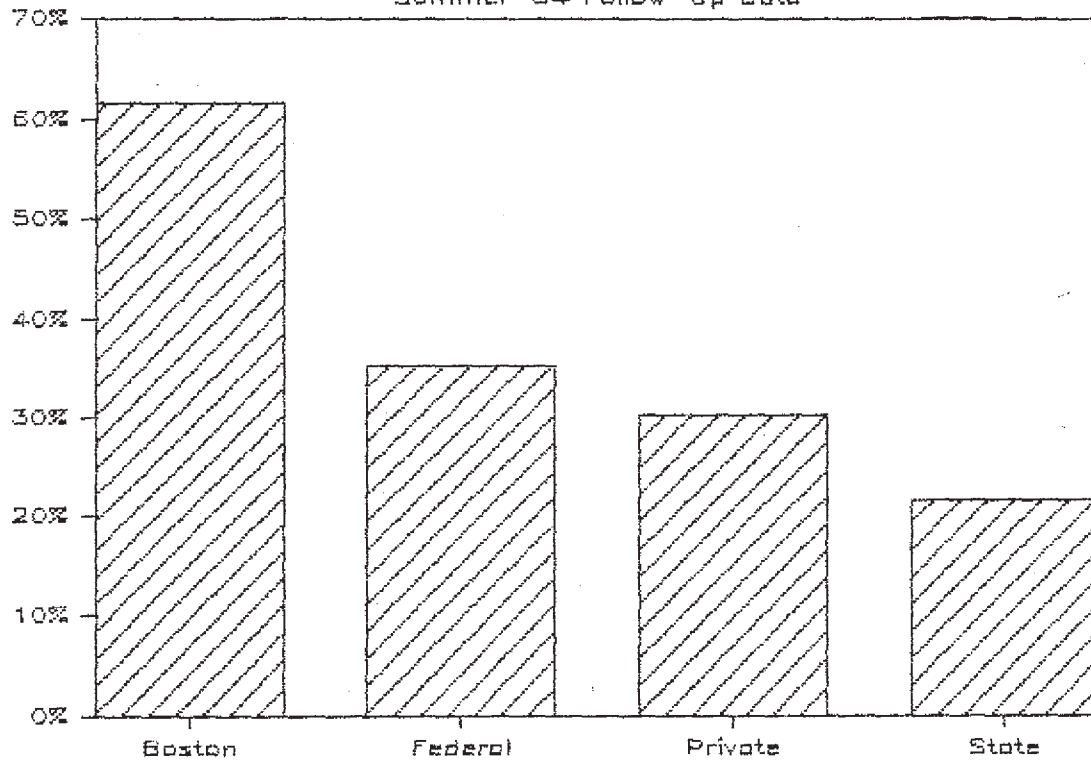


Dark shading illustrates the increase in visitors' recognition of Boston's major interpretive themes, due to the visit.

- AM_REV = People and Events of the American Revolution
- ARCHIT = Historic Architecture
- CITY = City as Cultural/Economic Foundation
- DEMOC = Development of Democratic Principles
- NAVY = Contributions of the Navy
- IMMIGS = Immigrants as Workers in America
- IND_RV = Industrial Revolution
- INDUS = Building & Planning Cities for Industry
- WATER = Use of Water Power
- CAPIT = Creation of Capital Investment Methods

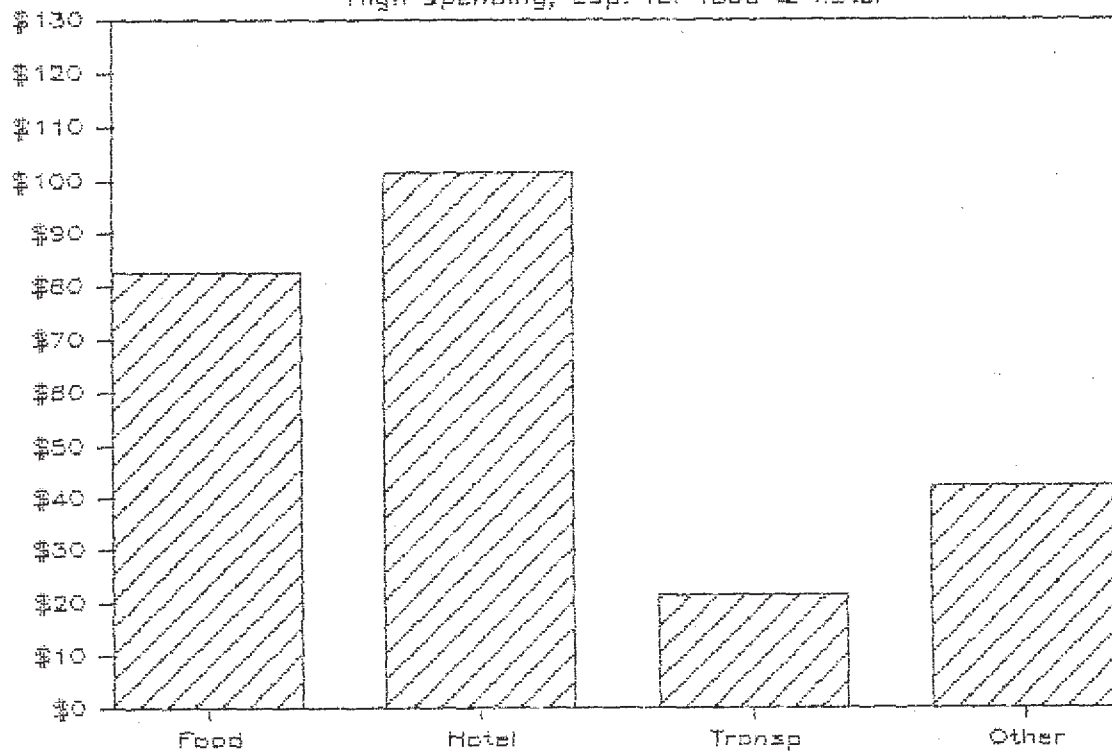
WHO DO YOU THINK RUNS THE PARK?

Summer '84 Follow-up Data



TYPES OF VISITOR EXPENSES

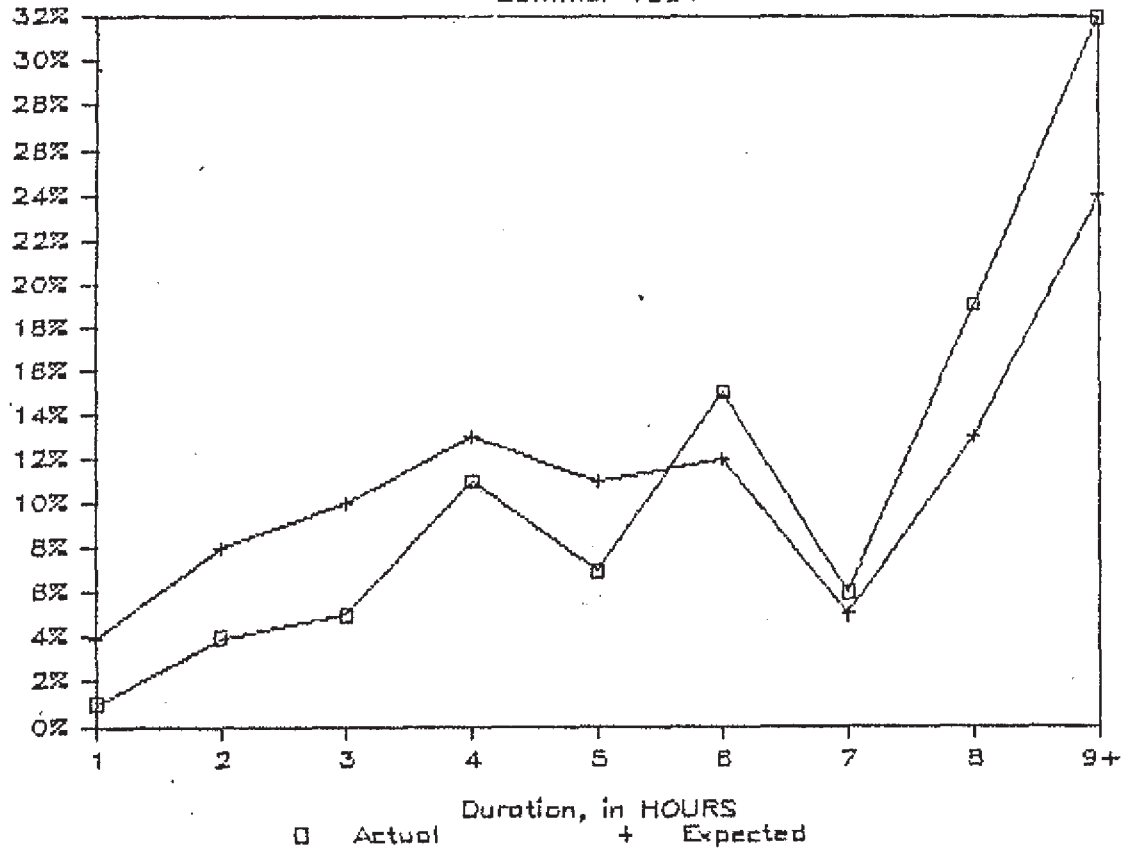
High spending, esp. for food & hotel



Average Group Expenditure, Summer '84

EXPECTED Vs. ACTUAL DURATION OF VISIT

Summer 1984



EXPECTED VISIT DURATION

Summer '84 Vs. Fall '83

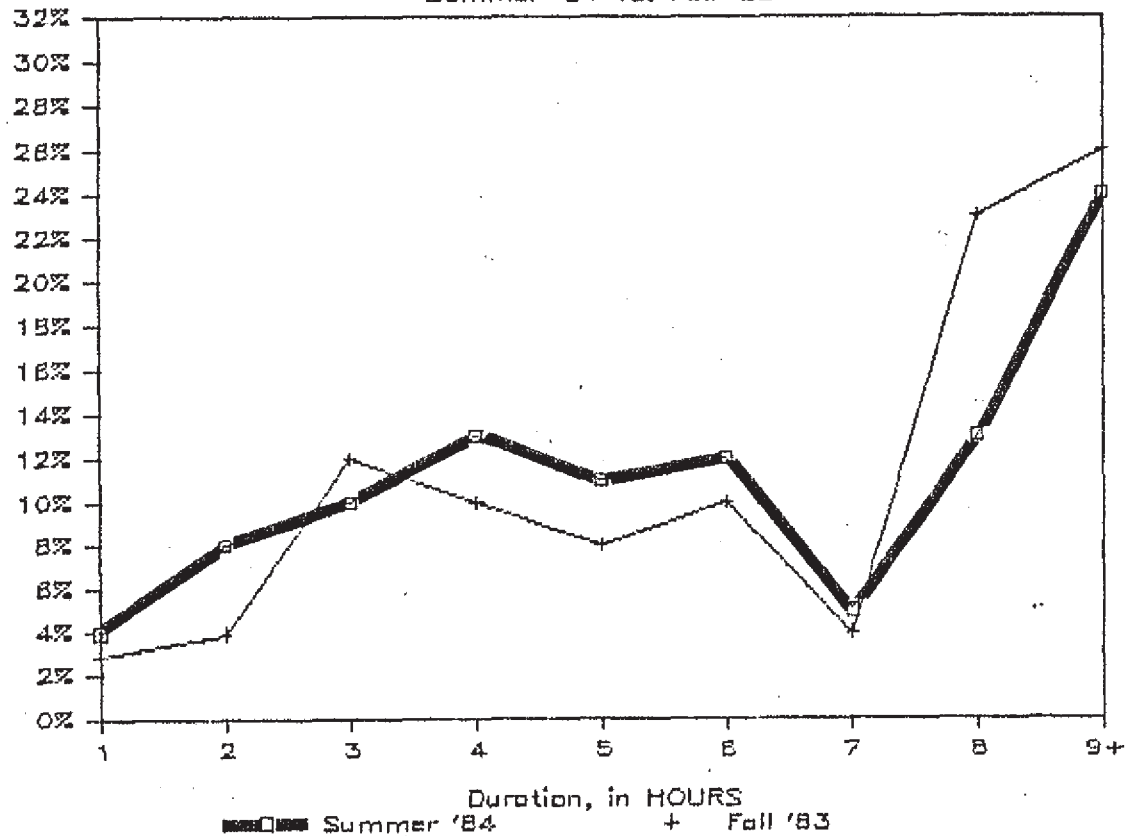


Table 9. PROFILE OF VISITORS TO BOSTON

Demographic characteristics of visitor groups were obtained from two samples: Study 1, the "Visitor Experience" study; and Study 2, "Visitor Center Evaluation".

During the Summer of 1984, visitors to the Freedom Trail typically: came from outside New England; came in groups of 2; and came without children (although considerably more children were evident than the 7% in the Fall of 1983). The median distance travelled was between 900 and 800 miles. These figures are lower than the previous Fall (1500 and 1200 miles), indicating a greater national draw during the fall season, typical of other major New England attractions.

<u>Visitor Characteristics</u>	<u>Study 1: VISITOR EXPERIENCE</u>	<u>Study 2: VISITOR CENTER EVALUATION</u>
Visitor Group with Children	25%	25%
Visitor Group without Children	75%	75%
First Time at Sites or Center	70%	87%
Repeat Visitor	30%	13%
From Boston or Adjacent Towns	7%	13% ¹
From Elsewhere in Massachusetts	6%	4%
From Elsewhere in New England	6%	2%
From Elsewhere in United States	71%	68%
Foreign Visitors	10%	13%
(median distance travelled)	900 miles	800 miles
Group Size: 1	16%	26% ¹
Group Size: 2	44%	37%
Group Size: 3	14%	13%
Group Size: 4 or more	26%	24%
	100%	100%
Sample Size	N = 506	N = 281

Note 1: The Visitor Center sample (Study 2) shows a higher percentage of local visitors and a higher percentage of visitors coming alone; this finding reflects the fact that local residents use the visitor center to obtain information about attractions outside of Boston, and are not necessarily walking the Trail that day. This pattern was also found in Lowell.

Table 10. VISITOR EXPECTATIONS

Boston's reputation as a treasure house of American History seems to be the best advertisement for the Freedom Trail. In fact, many visitors are already familiar with the major interpretive themes of the Trail before they arrive. Visitors expect to spend a median of 5.8 hours visiting the historical sites on the Trail, with 76% expecting to spend 8 hours or less.

MAIN REASONS FOR VISITING¹

Historical Interest	51%
Vacationing.	16%
Something To Do.	14%
It's Educational	8%
Show Visitors	6%
Recommended.	1%
Other.	4%
	1.0 answer per person

("Other" reasons included: just walking through the city, found the trail accidentally, looking at the colleges and universities)

(Table 10 continues on the next page)

(Table 10 continued)

WHAT WILL YOU LEARN ABOUT?¹

* Historic Architecture	81%
* People and Events of the American Revolution.	75%
* This City as a Cultural & Economic Foundation for U.S.	43%
* Development of Democratic Principles.	28%
* Contributions of the Navy	19%
Industrial Revolution	12%
Immigrants as Workers in America	11%
Building and Planning Cities for Industry	8%
Use of Water Power	2%
Creation of Capital Investment Methods	2%
	2.8 answers per person

* Note: Themes marked with an asterisk indicate interpretive themes about Boston, phrased in consultation with NPS staff; the other themes apply to Lowell. All ten themes were in mixed order and shown to visitors to help them articulate their answers to this question. We asked them to pick "up to three" topics that they might learn about.

EXPECTED DURATION OF VISIT¹

One hour	4%
Two hours	8%
Three hours	10%
Four hours	13%
Five hours	11%
Six hours	12%
Seven hours	5%
Eight hours	13%
Nine or more hours	24%
	100%

1. These data are taken from the results of the first part of the Visitor Experience study, when visitors (N = 506) were interviewed about their expectations before arriving at the Visitor Center.

Table 11. ADVANCE INFORMATION

Word of mouth, travel guides and brochures are the most popular ways of getting information about the Freedom Trail. Trips were planned either days, weeks or months in advance - indicating that both long and short perspective planning can bring a visitor to the Trail.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND AWARENESS¹

Friends or Relatives	37%
Travel Guide	26%
Brochures	23%
Newspaper or Magazine	3%
Road Signs	1%
Television	3%
Radio	0%
Other	53%
	1.5 answers per person

("Other" includes: "knew from living in city", general education, history books)

ADVANCE PLANNING¹

How long in advance did you plan this visit?

Hours	6%
Days	26%
Weeks	29%
Months	34%
Year	5%
	100%

1. These data are taken from the first part of the Visitor Experience study, when visitors (N=506) were interviewed about their expectations before they had seen much of the Freedom Trail.

Table 12. EFFECTIVENESS OF SPATIAL ORIENTATION

Use of the visitor center falls into three categories, listed in descending importance: gathering practical information, using personal facilities, and participating in interpretive activities. All of these seem to be important, although the first category is clearly dominant.

Picking up a brochure was the most popular Visitor Center activity. However, brochures ranked only third behind "having a map" and "talking to staff" for usefulness in navigating the Trail. The data indicate that greater disbursement of maps may be very useful in helping visitors find their way around.

USE OF VISITOR CENTER (Exhibits and Services)¹

What did people do in the Visitor Center?

Picked up brochures	78%
Went to Information Desk.	72%
Spoke with a staff person	65%
Went to restrooms	60%
Looked at the books	51%
Used the water fountain	43%
Visited upstairs exhibits	29%
Saw the slide presentation	25%
Other	8%
	4.3 answers per person
Average time in visitor center = 12 minutes (median = 11 minutes)	

(Table 12 continues)

(Table 12 continued)

SPATIAL ORIENTATION²

What's helpful in finding your way around Boston?

Having a map	58%
Talking with staff	38%
Brochures (some also include a map)	26%
Slide presentation	18%
Book rack	6%
Upstairs exhibits	3%
	1.5 answers per person

Did you have any trouble finding your way around?

No	78%
Yes	22%

In general, was it easy or hard to find out
what to see and do in Boston?

Easy	68%
Hard	20%
In between	12%

1. These data from Visitor Center Evaluation, N = 281
2. These data from follow-up portion of Visitor Experience study, N=288

Table 13. EFFECTIVENESS OF THEMATIC ORIENTATION

Visitors showed excellent recall of major interpretive themes, weeks after their visits. Before arriving, they expected to learn about Historic Architecture and the American Revolution. After their visit, they accurately perceived the additional themes of Boston as a Cultural/Economic Foundation for the country, the Development of Democratic Principles, and the Contributions of the Navy.

<p>AWARENESS AND RECALL OF MAJOR INTERPRETIVE THEMES¹</p>
--

Which of these topics
did you learn about?

	POST-VISIT <u>FOLLOW-UP</u>	COMPARISON TO <u>EXPECTATIONS</u>
*People and Events of the Revolution	91%	75%
*Historic Architecture	88%	81%
*City as Cultural/Economic Foundation	74%	43%
*Development of Democratic Principles	65%	28%
*Contributions of the Navy	62%	19%
Immigrants as Workers in America	39%	11%
Industrial Revolution	24%	12%
Building and Planning Cities for Industry	23%	8%
Use of Water Power	13%	2%
Creation of Capital Investment Methods	<u>11%</u>	<u>2%</u>
	4.9	2.8 answers per person

(* Note: Themes marked with an asterisk indicate the five major interpretive themes of Boston; the other five themes were intended to primarily describe Lowell; in call-back interviews or mail-back questionnaires visitors were asked "yes" or "no" whether they learned something about these topics.)

(Table 13 Continues)

(Table 13, Continued)

OVERALL CONCEPTUAL ORIENTATION¹

Most helpful in understanding what the whole park was about:

Maps and guide materials.	41%
Tour/ Guide	19%
Past Knowledge.	15%
Information at Sites.	11%
Don't Know.	3%
Slides/ Film.	3%
Nothing	3%
Other	6%
	100%

1. These data from follow-up portion of Visitor Experience study, N=288

Table 14. PATTERNS OF PARK USE

As in the Fall 1983 study, it's obvious that visitors see a considerable portion of the Freedom Trail, from the Old North Church to The Constitution to Park Street. However, Bunker Hill, the Visitor Centers and Dorchester Heights are relatively under-used.

The median expectation for length of time on the trail was 5.8 hours. In fact, visitors spent an average of 7.4 hours, considerably more than anticipated.

SITES VISITED (recalled)¹

Old North Church	76%
Old State House.	66%*
Faneuil Hall	66%
U.S.S. Constitution.	64%
Park Street Info. Center	59%
Paul Revere House	56%*
Old South Meeting Hall	56%*
Bunker Hill Monument	35%
State St. Visitor Center	32%
Charlestown Navy Yard V.C.	27%
Bunker Hill Pavillion.	25%
Dorchester Heights	6%

* These sites have an admission charge. Actual attendance is much lower than visitors' recall of the sites.

(Table 14 Continues)

(Table 14, Continued)

DURATION OF VISIT ¹		
	<u>Post-Visit Follow-up</u>	<u>Comparison to Expectations</u>
One hour	1%	4%
Two hours	4%	8%
Three hours	5%	10%
Four hours	11%	13%
Five hours	7%	11%
Six Hours	15%	12%
Seven Hours	6%	5%
Eight Hours	19%	13%
Nine or More Hours	32%	24%
Median duration of visit	7.4 hours	5.8 hours

1. These data from follow-up portion of Visitor Experience study, N=288

Table 15. VISITOR ENJOYMENT AND DISAPPOINTMENTS

Overall, the most-liked sites for this sample were quite similar to those reported in the Fall of 1983, except for the stronger showing for Quincy Market/Faneuil Hall, which increased from 4% to 13%.

In the Fall of 1983, more than half (51%) of the sample reported no significant disappointments or problems. In this sample, that figure dropped to 36%. Part of the reason for this is probably the general bustle of the summer season, and the heat. Also, when compared with the Fall sample, the Summer sample had a great proportion of "spontaneous" visits, that is, visits that were not planned long in advance. Perhaps the size and nature of the Trail mean that more advanced planning is needed. Also, "mobility" is a real issue here - negotiating a long trail, with a red line that is sometimes hard to follow, through traffic, to sites that are reported to be occasionally poorly labelled.

Advice to future visitors suggests that people may have arrived with inappropriate expectations, since two of the top three types of advice are: "don't drive" and "allow enough time." Visitors' comments also reflected the critical importance of maps, made positive recommendations about sites to see, and urged future visitors to wear comfortable shoes for walking.

MOST-LIKED SITE¹

U.S.S. Constitution	30%
Quincy Market/ Faneuil Hall	13%
Paul Revere House	10%
Old North Church.	8%
Old State House	6%
Old South Meeting House	4%
Bunker Hill	3%
Graveyards.	3%
Something else, not on the Freedom trail.	7%

Reasons why sites were liked included: beautiful architecture, like seeing the ships, impressive presentation, "...like stepping back in time", liked walking through the ethnic areas.

(Table 15 Continues)

(Table 15, Continued)

DISAPPOINTMENTS AND PROBLEMS¹

No Disappointments/Nothing Detracted	36%
Mobility	14%
Problems with the city's environment	12%
Information.	9%
Lost the Trail	6%
Maintenance.	5%
Crowds	5%
Not Enough Time	3%
Fees	3%
Rest areas	2%
Other.	6%

- a. "City environment" problems included traffic, graffiti, construction, bums begging, a lot of walking, some things were closed, lack of public restrooms, expensive hotels, conflict between historic buildings and modern city.

WHAT WOULD YOU TELL SOMEONE ELSE TO PREPARE THEM FOR A VISIT?

Don't Drive	34%
Get Maps and Information	34%
Allow Enough Time	30%
Preparation ("read about history" etc.)	27%
Specific Sites to See	21%
Wear Comfortable Shoes/Clothes	18%
It's a Long Walk	9%
Go to the Visitor Center	7%
Get Information about Accommodations	3%
Other	15%
Don't Know	2%

1. These data taken from follow-up portion of Visitor Experience Study, N=288.

Table 16. PATTERNS OF VISITOR SPENDING

As in the Fall of 1983, most visitors to the Trail are "overnight" visitors, and are generally from out of town. They spent an average of \$101 on hotels, and \$83 on food. The average total expense is \$240 per group.

The vast majority of visitors are on vacation (67%); others are on a business trip (15%), visiting friends or relatives (12%), or attending a convention (4%).

TYPES OF TRIPS¹

Day Trips (One day in Boston)	32%
Two days.	26%
Three days.	18%
Four or more days	24%
Median distance travelled	800 miles

TYPES OF EXPENSES¹

	Average Per Group	Range Per Group	% of People Who Spent Anything
Food	\$ 82.87	\$0- 520	93%
Hotel	101.36	0- 800	51%
Local transportation	21.64	0- 522	75%
Other (entertainment, shopping)	42.38	0-1000	74%
Total Expenses	\$239.89	\$0-2000	96%

(Average group size =2.58 persons; median = 2.16 persons)

1. These data from follow-up portion of Visitor Experience study, N = 288.