

Ground-Breaking This Week: Plan Common Tourist Booth

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pg. 38

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Plan Common Tourist Booth

By SARA DAVIDSON

An unusual ground-breaking ceremony is planned this week at the West Street M.B.T.A. exit on Boston Common.

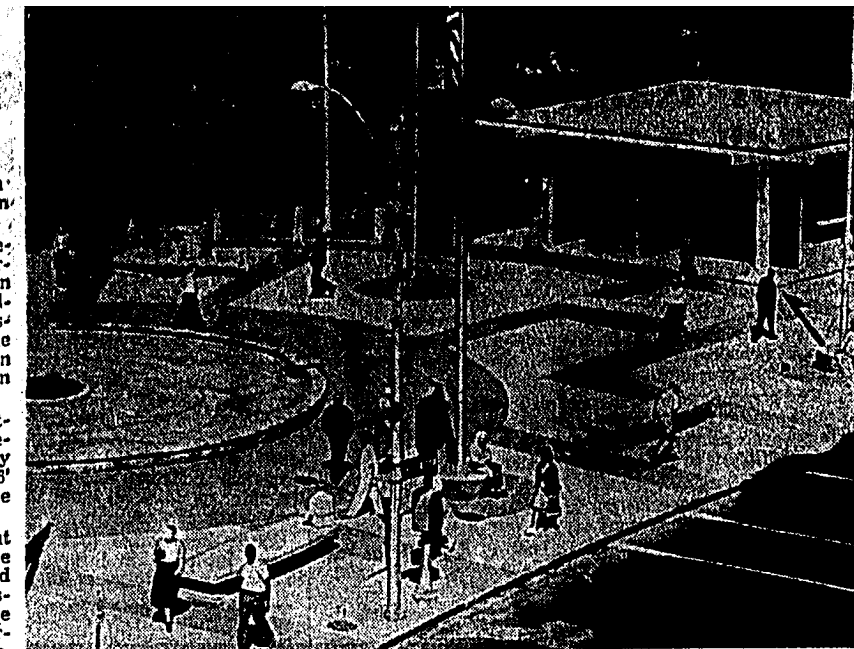
"Instead of breaking ground we may be breaking the exit booth," says Robert F. Friedmann, president of the Freedom Trail Foundation, which

has been the driving force in creating a tourists' information booth on the Common. The ground-breaking ceremony will inaugurate the tearing down of what Friedmann calls "an unattractive, old-fashioned structure—the present M.B.T.A. exit" and the building of a new combination subway exit and information office.

The building, financed jointly by the M.B.T.A. and a special city fund administered by the Dept. of Parks, will be 26' by 26' and will stand near the fountain on Tremont Street.

While Bostonians hurry out of the M.B.T.A. on one side of the building, visitors and students on the trail of Boston's historical heritage will be asking questions at the information booth on the other side.

The information seekers will be given Freedom Trail booklets describing the 15 historical sites organized into a 1½ mile walking tour. Nearly two million copies of the booklet, which outlines the way from Boston Common to Old North



ARTIST'S CONCEPTION OF TOURIST BOOTH ON BOSTON COMMON

Church, have been printed since 1958 when the Freedom Trail project was initiated by the Chamber of Commerce and Advertising Club of Greater Boston.

The visitors' information booth has been a community effort run by voluntary contributions of time and money. Ironically, one of the most enthusiastic workers — Freedom Trail Foundation president Friedmann—is an "import." He was born in Czechoslovakia and settled in Boston in 1947.

"When I came here I was amazed that the community didn't make much fuss about its historical treasures," Friedmann told *The Globe* recently. "Most of the sites were in disrespectful anonymity. I had a hard time even finding them."

He said tourist attendance has grown from about 40,000 a year to over 500,000 since

promotion of the Freedom Trail was started. "The big difference between walking the Freedom Trail and making the museum circuit is that it's a living trail, the sites are not roped off, they're still used," Friedmann said. "You can go and worship at North Church where the lanterns were hung for Paul Revere, and Old Ironsides is still used as a navy training headquarters."

Friedmann said he hopes the information booth will encourage visitors by making them feel "more welcome." Besides material on the Freedom Trail, the booth will provide information on hotels, restaurants and entertainment activities.

The Freedom Trail Foundation hopes to have the name of the new M.B.T.A. exit changed from West Street to Freedom Trail. They are also

working on installing broadcast units at each site. This would allow visitors to deposit a coin in a sound box, dial a language and then hear a pre-recorded tape describing the history of the monument.

But the next important project after the booth is built, Friedmann said, is standardization of the hours the sites are open. At present, many open and close at different hours. This is because some are privately owned, others are government operated and some are "just there," Friedmann said.