Meanings Lost in Time and Messages Easy to Miss

The city of Boston has a wealth of history stored within its borders. Filled with numerous memorials and artwork representing integral events in both Boston and the nation’s history, it’s difficult to walk through this city without seeing a monument pretty much everywhere you look. Each and every monument, statue, or memorial that Boston exhibits is uniquely important in elucidating the history of this famed city and the life-altering events that took place within it. Yet, many memorials are so old that they inevitably change over time, be it by location, meaning, or understanding, creating an underlying difficulty in truly comprehending the statues and monuments that flourish on Boston streets.

The Boston Massacre was one very important event in this city that changed the course of history. This massacre of innocent civilians was a horrific incident that occurred in 1770, when tensions rose immensely between British soldiers and the crowd that they were sent to control.¹ During this turbulent time when the American colonies were still under British rule, many colonists began protesting against their government and gaining the strength to defend the nation that they wanted to create. This slaughter burst into action after the British soldiers kept getting different things, like snowballs and rocks, thrown at them from the crowd of civilians, causing the soldiers to eventually fire on the crowd, killing five people, and marking the first casualties

---

¹ “Boston Massacre Site,” Boston Sightseeing Tours, [https://www.trolleytours.com/boston/massacre-site](https://www.trolleytours.com/boston/massacre-site)
of the American Revolution. These five men, Crispus Attucks, Patrick Carr, Samuel Gray, Samuel Maverick, and James Caldwell, became inspirations to others upon their deaths, leading the surge to revolution from beyond the grave. This bloody massacre was most definitely an essential part in sparking the Revolutionary war, with its importance seen throughout history, and the five men who died becoming martyrs for the cause of freedom.

The Boston Massacre Site is a cobblestone medallion found along the Freedom Trail, created to mark the exact place that this historic massacre took place in, so that no one could forget the location of this deadly event. The site specifically marks the place in which Crispus Attucks, a victim of the Boston Massacre, was the first to fall after being shot by one of the soldiers. Or at least, it did, before it was moved 1904 to the nearby site where another person died in the massacre, so that construction for the Boston subway could take place underneath. This relocation only lasted a couple of decades before the memorial was moved again in the 1960s because of constant urban renewal to a spot right in front of the Old State House. Finally, the stones were removed once again in 2011 so that the subway station underneath could be upgraded, and it was finally placed at its current location. It now stands a few yards away from where the massacre took place, no longer an exact marker for the site of the Boston Massacre, losing the initial intentions that its creators had, and leaving the site no longer able to express the same message of undeserved loss and great passion for freedom that it once did.

---

5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
This site isn’t only disenchanting because of its lost original placement and consequential story, but it is also incredibly easy to miss. Simply lying on the floor, the site marker is not something that many people stop to look at, because it isn’t much to look at. In fact, most people just walk right over it, not paying close enough attention to the story being told underneath them and the pain and suffering that it is supposed to represent. If it were eye level, or even raised from the ground more than probably a centimeter, people would be much more inclined to interact with it, and much more likely to learn the story that the monument desperately wants to tell, instead, it’s easily one of the least interesting monuments along the Freedom Trail. The importance of monuments and memorials comes from their ability to bring a story to life, to introduce the passerby to each individual person that was involved and what place they have in history. The monument should be as dramatic as the actual event was. Without this, the memorial fails in bringing meaning to the location and the deaths of the individuals involved. This monument doesn’t quite inspire any type of interaction from passersby, and it hardly represents the tragic deaths of five people who fought for their cause until their deaths. Without being able to truly convey the importance of the event that occurred near the site marker, is it really a memorial? Instead, it seems to be more simply a flag in the ground claiming that area for an event that happened centuries ago, an arrow pointing to nothing but a title of the event, leaving behind a story that the memorial should be telling to each person that even glimpses it. Memorials shouldn’t just give information, they should weave a story of the time and immerse the onlooker into their true meaning and message.

The downfall of this memorial comes from its inability to connect with and inspire emotion in the passerby, leaving them only with the simple facts of when, what, and where, and depriving them of almost all knowledge of what actually happened that night. We must ensure
that the past isn’t only remembered in facts, but in feelings as well. People can understand facts, they can comprehend them and memorize them for future use, but simple facts don’t tell stories; simple facts don’t explain the importance of the people that died and what they were fighting for. Simple facts will never be able to inspire an onlooker to empathize with the determination and passion that the civilians had, or even the confusion and fear that the British soldiers could have carried. Memorials that humanize events and tell stories right in front of our eyes are the best at conveying the true message of the event, while simple facts can only tell people so much.