

Time Machine (1770): The Boston Massacre

By Boston Gazette, adapted by Newsela staff on 05.12.16

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Paul Revere's 1770 engraving "The Bloody Massacre perpetrated in King Street" Paul Revere

This article appeared in the March 12, 1770, edition of The Boston Gazette, and described the events of the March 5th "massacre." The soldiers were defended in court by Boston lawyer John Adams, the eventual second President of the United States. He argued they acted in self defense. Captain Preston and most of the others were found not guilty. Two soldiers were found guilty of manslaughter. Their hands were branded. They did not go to jail.

The town of Boston has seen a tragic example of the destructive consequences of quartering soldiers, or letting them live in peoples' homes in a time of peace. This is done, they say, to keep law and order and protect the public. Troubles from quartering have been growing upon us: there have been fights between the people and the soldiers, but mostly with clubs, in which the soldiers have been wounded. From what has happened, we could say, that it appears that the soldiers' conduct is aimed to draw and provoke the townsmen into fights; and that they then intended to make use of other weapons than canes or clubs.

On the evening of Monday, being the 5th of March, several soldiers of the 29th Regiment were seen parading in the streets with their drawn swords and bayonets, abusing and wounding numbers of the inhabitants.

A few minutes after 9 o'clock four youths, named Edward Archbald, William Merchant, Francis Archbald, and John Leech Jr., came down Cornhill together, but separated at Doctor Loring's corner. Archibald and Merchant walked by the narrow alley leading to Mr. Murray's barrack, where some soldiers were living. A soldier was swinging a broad sword of great size against the walls. There were many sparks. A person of mean looks armed with a large club stood next to him. Edward Archbald warned Mr. Merchant to take care of the sword, on which the soldier turned round and struck Archbald on the arm, then stabbed at Merchant. He pierced through his clothes inside the arm close to the armpit and grazed the skin. Merchant then struck the soldier with a short stick he had; and the other person ran to the barrack and brought with him two soldiers, one armed with a pair of tongs, the other with a shovel. He with the tongs pursued Archbald back through the alley, collared and laid him over the head with the tongs. The noise brought people together; and John Hicks, a young lad, coming up, knocked the soldier down but let him get up again; and more lads gathering, drove them back to the barrack where the boys stood some time as it were to keep them in. In less than a minute 10 or 12 soldiers came out with swords, clubs, and bayonets and attacked the unarmed boys. The young folk who stood them a little while but, finding the inequality of their weapons, ran off.

On hearing the noise, one Samuel Atwood came up to see what was the matter; and entering the alley from dock square, heard the last part of the combat; and when the boys had run off he met the 10 or 12 soldiers rushing down the alley toward the square and asked them if they intended to murder people? They answered Yes, definitely, by God, root and branch! With that, one of them struck Mr. Atwood with a club which was repeated by another; and being unarmed, he turned to go off and received a wound on the left shoulder which reached the bone and gave him much pain. Retreating a few steps, Mr. Atwood met two officers and said, gentlemen, what is the matter? They answered, you'll see by and by. Immediately after, those soldiers appeared in the square, asking where were the trouble makers? Where were the cowards? But showing their fierceness to unarmed men, one of them advanced toward a youth who had a thin stick in his hand and said, damn them, here is one of them.

But the young man seeing a person near him with a drawn sword and good cane ready to help him, held up his stick to challenge him; and the soldiers quietly passed by him up the little alley by Mr. Silsby's to King Street where they attacked single and unarmed persons. They raised much clamor and then turned down Cornhill Street, insulting all they met in like manner and pursuing some to their very doors. Thirty or 40 persons, mostly lads, gathered in King Street. Capt. Preston with a party of men with charged bayonets, came from the main fort. The soldiers pointed their bayonets, crying make way! They continued to push to drive the people off and stabbed some in several places, which caused loud shouting and, it is said, they threw snow balls. On this, the Captain commanded them to fire; and more snow balls coming, he again said, damn you, fire! One soldier then fired, and a townsman with a club struck him over the hands with such force that he dropped his rifle; and, rushing forward, aimed a blow at the Captain's head which grazed his hat and fell pretty heavy upon his arm. However, the soldiers continued the fire one after the other, till seven or eight or, as some say, 11 guns were fired.

Three Died Immediately, Others Were Mortally Wounded

Three men were laid dead on the spot and two more struggling for life; but what showed a degree of cruelty unknown to British troops, was an attempt to fire upon or stab with their bayonets the persons who tried to remove the slain and wounded!

Mr. Benjamin Leigh, now manager in the Delph factory, came up and after some conversation with Capt. Preston relative to his conduct in this affair, advised him to draw off his men, with which he complied. The dead are Mr. Samuel Gray, killed on the spot, the ball entering his head and beating off a large portion of his skull.

A mulatto man named Crispus Attucks, who was born in Framingham, but lately belonged to New-Providence and was here in order to go for North Carolina, also killed instantly, two balls entering his breast, one of them in special goring the right lobe of the lungs and a great part of the liver most horribly.

Mr. James Caldwell, mate of Capt. Morton's vessel, in like manner killed by two balls entering his back.

Mr. Samuel Maverick, a promising youth of 17 years of age, son of the widow Maverick, and an apprentice to Mr. Greenwood, ivory dice-maker, mortally wounded; a ball went through his belly and was cut out at his back. He died the next morning.

A lad named Christopher Monk, about 17 years of age, an apprentice to Mr. Walker, shipwright, wounded; a ball entered his back about four inches above the left kidney near the spine and was cut out of the breast on the same side, so they say he will die.

A lad named John Clark, about 17 years of age, whose parents live at Medford, and an apprentice to Capt. Samuel Howard of this town, wounded; a ball entered just above his groin and came out at his hip on the opposite side, so they say he will die.

Mr. Edward Payne of this town, merchant, standing at his entry door received a ball in his arm which shattered some of the bones.

Mr. John Green, tailor, coming up Leverett's Lane, received a ball just under his hip and lodged in the under part of his thigh, which was extracted.

Mr. Robert Patterson, a seafaring man, who was the person that had his trousers shot through in Richardson's affair, wounded; a ball went through his right arm, and he suffered a great loss of blood.

Mr. Patrick Carr, about 30 years of age, who worked with Mr. Field, leather breeches-maker in Queen Street, wounded; a ball entered near his hip and went out at his side.

A lad named David Parker, an apprentice to Mr. Eddy, the wheelwright, wounded; a ball entered his thigh.

The people were immediately alarmed with the report of this horrid massacre, the bells were set a-ringing, and great numbers soon assembled at this tragic scene. Their feelings were deeply felt but could not be expressed; and while some were taking care of the dead and wounded, the rest were talking about what to do next.

The regiment under arms was ordered to their barracks, which was insisted upon by the people. They then separated and returned to their dwellings by 1 o'clock. At 3 o'clock Capt. Preston was arrested, as were the soldiers who fired, a few hours after him.

Tuesday, the inhabitants met at Faneuil Hall and chose a committee of 15 respectable gentlemen to wait upon the lieutenant-governor in Council to request of him to issue his orders for the

immediate removal of the troops.