**THE BOSTON MASSACRE**

The Boston Massacre, known as “The Incident on King Street” by the British, occurred on March 5, 1770. The British Army soldiers killed five male civilians and injured six others. The incident was heavily propagandized by leading Patriots, such as Paul Revere and Samuel Adams, to fuel animosity toward the British authorities.

British troops had been stationed in Boston, capital of the Province of Massachusetts Bay, since 1768 in order to protect and support crown-appointed colonial officials attempting to enforce unpopular Parliamentary legislation. Amid ongoing tense relations between the population and the soldiers, a mob formed around a British sentry, who was subjected to verbal abuse and harassment. He was eventually supported by eight additional soldiers, who were subjected to verbal threats and thrown objects. They fired into the crowd, without orders, instantly killing three people and wounding others. Two more people died later of wounds sustained in the incident.

The crowd eventually dispersed after Acting Governor Thomas Hutchinson promised an inquiry, but reformed the next day, prompting the withdrawal of the troops to Castle Island. Eight soldiers, one officer, and four civilians were arrested and charged with murder. Defended by the lawyer and future American president, John Adams, six of the soldiers were acquitted, while the other two were convicted of manslaughter and given reduced sentences. The men found guilty of manslaughter were sentenced to branding on their hand. Depictions, reports, and propaganda about the event, notably the colored engraving produced by Paul Revere, further heightened tensions throughout the Thirteen Colonies

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

In 1768, the Townshend Acts were placed upon the colonists, by which a variety of common items that were manufactured in Britain and exported to the colonies were subjected to import tariffs. Colonists objected that the Townshend Acts were a violation of the natural, charter, and constitutional rights of British subjects in the colonies. The Massachusetts House of Representatives began a campaign against the Townshend Acts by sending a petition to King George III asking for the repeal of the law. The House also sent what became known as the Massachusetts Circular Letter to other colonial assemblies, asking them to join the resistance movement, and called for a boycott of merchants importing the affected goods.

In Great Britain, Lord Hillsborough, who had recently been appointed to the newly created office of Colonial Secretary, was alarmed by the actions of the Massachusetts House. In April 1768 he sent a letter to the colonial governors in America, instructing them to dissolve the colonial assemblies if they responded to the Massachusetts Circular Letter. He also ordered Massachusetts Governor Francis Bernard to direct the Massachusetts House to rescind the letter. The house refused to comply.

Boston's chief customs officer, Charles Paxton, wrote to Hillsborough, asking for military support because

*"…the Government is as much in the hands of the people as it was in the time of the Stamp Act."*

Commodore Samuel Hood responded by sending the fifty-gun warship HMS Romney, which arrived in Boston Harbor in May 1768.

On June 10, 1768, customs officials seized the *Liberty*, a ship owned by leading Boston merchant John Hancock, on allegations that the ship had been involved in smuggling. Bostonians, already angry because the captain of the Romney had been impressing local sailors, began to riot. Customs officials fled to Castle William for protection.

Given the unstable state of affairs in Massachusetts, Hillsborough instructed General Thomas Gage, Commander-in-Chief, North America, to send "such Force as You shall think necessary to Boston".

On October 1, 1768, the first of four British Army regiments began disembarking in Boston. Two regiments were removed from Boston in 1769, but the 14th and the 29th Regiments of Foot remained.

The Journal of Occurrences, an anonymously written series of newspaper articles, chronicled clashes between civilians and soldiers while troops were stationed in Boston, feeding tensions with its sometimes exaggerated accounts of the events. Tensions rose markedly after Christopher Seider, "a young lad about eleven Years of Age", was killed by a customs employee on February 22, 1770. Seider's death was glorified in the Boston Gazette, and his funeral was described as one of the largest of the time in Boston. The killing and subsequent propaganda inflamed tensions, with gangs of colonists looking for soldiers to harass, and soldiers also on occasion looking for confrontation.

**CLOSELY EXAMINING THE INCIDENT**

On the evening of March 5, Private Hugh White, a British soldier, stood on guard duty outside the Custom house on King Street, today known as State Street.

A young wigmaker's apprentice named Edward Garrick called out to a British officer, Captain-Lieutenant John Goldfinch, that Goldfinch had not paid a bill due to Garrick's master. Goldfinch had in fact settled his account and ignored the insult.

Private White called out to Garrick that he should be more respectful of the officer. Garrick exchanged insults with Private White, who left his post, challenged the boy, and struck him on the side of the head with his musket. As Garrick cried in pain, one of his companions, Bartholomew Broaders, began to argue with White. This attracted a larger crowd.

Henry Knox, a 19-year-old bookseller (who would later serve as a general in the revolution), came upon the scene and warned White, "if he fired he must die for it."

As the evening progressed, the crowd around Private White grew larger and more boisterous. Church bells were rung, which usually signified a fire, bringing more people out. Over fifty Bostonians pressed around White, led by runaway slave named Crispus Attucks, throwing objects at the sentry and challenging him to fire his weapon. White, who had taken up a somewhat safer position on the steps of the Custom House, sought assistance.

Runners alerted the nearby barracks and Captain Thomas Preston, the officer of the watch. According to his report, Preston dispatched a non-commissioned officer and six privates of the 29th Regiment, with fixed bayonets, to relieve White. The soldiers Preston sent were Corporal William Wemms, Hugh Montgomery, John Carroll, William McCauley, William Warren, and Matthew Kilroy. Accompanied by Preston, they pushed their way through the crowd.

En route, Henry Knox, again trying to reduce tensions, warned Preston, "For God's sake, take care of your men. If they fire, you must die."

Captain Preston responded "I am aware of it." When they reached Private White on the custom house stairs, the soldiers loaded their muskets, and arrayed themselves in a semicircular formation. Preston shouted at the crowd, estimated to number between three and four hundred, to disperse.

The crowd continued to press around the soldiers, taunting them by yelling, "Fire!", by spitting at and throwing snowballs and other small objects at them.

Richard Palmes, a local innkeeper who was carrying a club, came up to Preston and asked if the soldiers' weapons were loaded. Preston assured him they were, but that they would not fire unless he ordered it, and that he was unlikely to do so, since he was standing in front of them.

A thrown object then struck Private Montgomery, knocking him down and causing him to drop his musket. He recovered his weapon, and was thought to angrily shout "Damn you, fire!", then discharged it into the crowd although no command was given. Palmes swung his club first at Montgomery, hitting his arm, and then at Preston. He narrowly missed Preston's head, striking him on the arm instead.

There was a pause of uncertain length (eyewitness estimates ranged from several seconds to two minutes), after which the soldiers fired into the crowd. Rather than a disciplined volley (Preston gave no orders to fire), a ragged series of shots was fired, which hit eleven men.

Three Americans—rope-maker Samuel Gray, mariner James Caldwell, and Crispus Attucks—died instantly. Samuel Maverick, an apprentice ivory turner of seventeen, was struck by a ricocheting musket ball at the back of the crowd, and died a few hours later, in the early morning of the next day. An Irish immigrant, Patrick Carr, died two weeks later. Christopher Monk, another apprentice, was one of those seriously wounded in the attack. Although he recovered to some extent, he was crippled and eventually died in 1780, purportedly due to the injuries he had sustained in the attack.

The crowd moved away from the immediate area of the custom house, but continued to grow in nearby streets. Captain Preston immediately called out most of the 29th Regiment, which adopted defensive positions in front of the state house. Acting Governor Thomas Hutchinson was summoned to the scene, and was forced by the movement of the crowd into the council chamber of the state house. From its balcony he was able to minimally restore order, promising there would be a fair inquiry into the shootings if the crowd dispersed.

**INVESTIGATION**

Governor Hutchinson immediately began investigating the affair, and by morning, Preston and the eight soldiers had been arrested. In a meeting of the governor's council held late the morning after the shootings, Boston's selectmen asked Hutchinson to order the removal of troops from the city while a town meeting at Faneuil Hall met to discuss the affair.

The governor's council was at first opposed to ordering the troop withdrawal, but under an imminent threat of further violence, the council changed its position, and unanimously "under duress", (according to Hutchinson's report) agreed to request the troops. This decision left the governor without effective means to police the town.

On March 27 the eight soldiers, Captain Preston, and four civilians who were in the Customs House and were alleged to have fired shots, were all indicted for murder.

Bostonians continued to be hostile to the troops and their dependents. General Gage, convinced the troops were doing more harm than good, ordered the 29th Regiment out of the province in May. Governor Hutchinson took advantage of the ongoing high tensions to orchestrate delays of the trials until later in the year.