

10 MASSACRE OR RIOT?

Most people in America were delighted when the Stamp Act was repealed. But in 1767 the British government passed new laws to try to get money from the colonists. Customs commissioners were appointed to make sure the new laws were kept.

The commissioners were very unpopular, and found their job very difficult. They were threatened and their premises were ransacked and burnt. They asked for troops to be sent to Boston to protect them. In 1768, on 23 September, British Redcoats landed in Boston. This pleased the commissioners, but annoyed many Boston citizens. Things between townsfolk and soldiers went from bad to worse, until 5 March 1770.

That night, soldiers opened fire on a crowd of Boston citizens, killing five of them. Furious town leaders forced the Governor to jail the soldiers. Preparations were made for a trial.

A In 1835, Benjamin Thatcher, a journalist, interviewed George Hewes, aged at least 92, about his memories of 5 March 1770. Here is Thatcher's account of the interview:

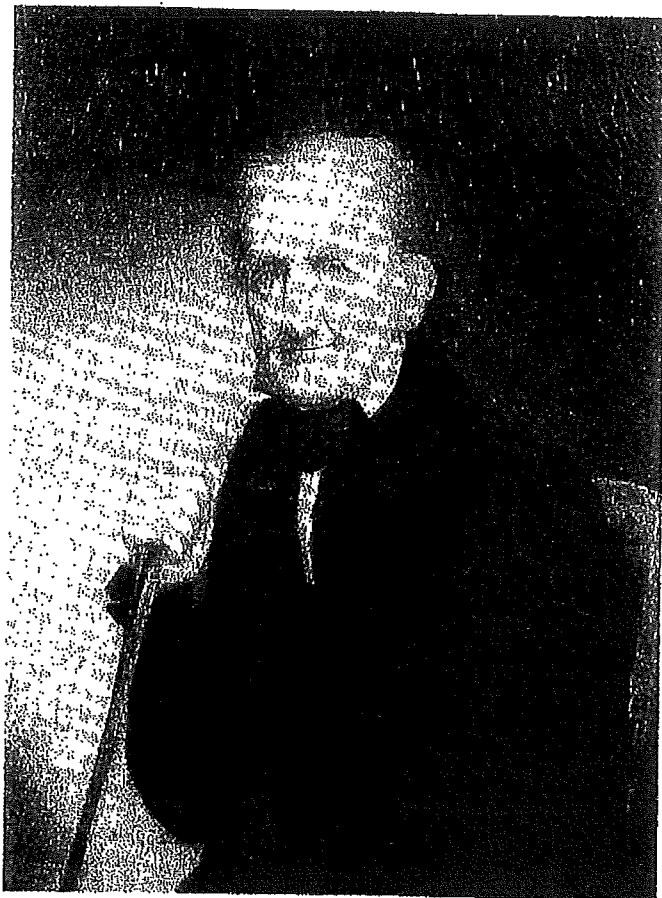
It had all started when a barber's apprentice tried to collect an overdue bill from a British officer. The sentry at the barracks swore at the boy and would not let him through. The boy brought his friends to annoy the sentry, who called out the guard under Captain Preston.

Hewes said he was on the scene early as he heard the noise. He was not part of a [plot]. He was unarmed, although he did see some others carrying clubs and [sticks]. He saw snow, ice and 'missiles' thrown at the soldiers. When the main guard rushed out in support of the sentry, a Private Kilroy struck Hewes (who was only 5ft 1in. tall) on the shoulder with his gun.

Preston ordered the townspeople to disperse. Hewes said they had a right to refuse as 'they were in the King's highway and had as good a right to be there' as Preston.

The five men killed were all working men. Hewes knew four: Samuel Gray, Samuel Maverick, aged 17, Patrick Carr, and James Caldwell.

Hewes said he did not know Christopher Attucks, a black man who was killed. Caldwell was shot in the back standing next to Hewes, who said he caught him in his arms as he fell. Hewes said that he later testified at Preston's trial that it was Preston who gave the order to fire. However, he admitted that he could not see the captain's lips when the order to fire was given.



B Mr George Hewes in 1835. A very healthy old gentleman and a keen Methodist.

C Captain Preston's account, written in a Boston jail:

Several disputes have happened between the Towns- People and Soldiers. [Two soldiers were] going through Gray's ~~Rope-Walk~~ [when] the Rope-makers insultingly asked them if they would empty a [lavatory drain]. This [angered] the soldiers, and from Words they went to Blows.

On Monday night about nine of the Guard came and informed me the Town-Inhabitants were assembling to attack the Troops. I saw the People [very upset] and heard them use the most cruel and horrible threats. [The people] surrounded the Sentry with Clubs and other weapons.

The Mob still increased . . . calling out, 'come on you rascals, you ~~bloody backs~~, you Lobster Scoundrals; fire and be damned; we know you dare not.'

One of the Soldiers, having received a severe Blow with a stick, stept a little on one Side, and instantly fired; [as I asked] him why he fired without Orders I was struck

with a Club on my Arm. On this a general Attack was made on the Men by a great number of heavy Clubs and Snow-Balls being thrown, some Persons at the same Time from behind calling out, 'Damn your Bloods, why don't you fire?'

Instantly three or four of the soldiers fired . . . and directly after three more in the same confusion and hurry. [Later] two witnesses swore that I gave the Men orders to fire; the one [said] he was within two Feet of me.

D From John Rowe's diary for 1770.

Mar. 3: A quarrel between some of the 29th Regiment and the Ropemakers -- yesterday & today.

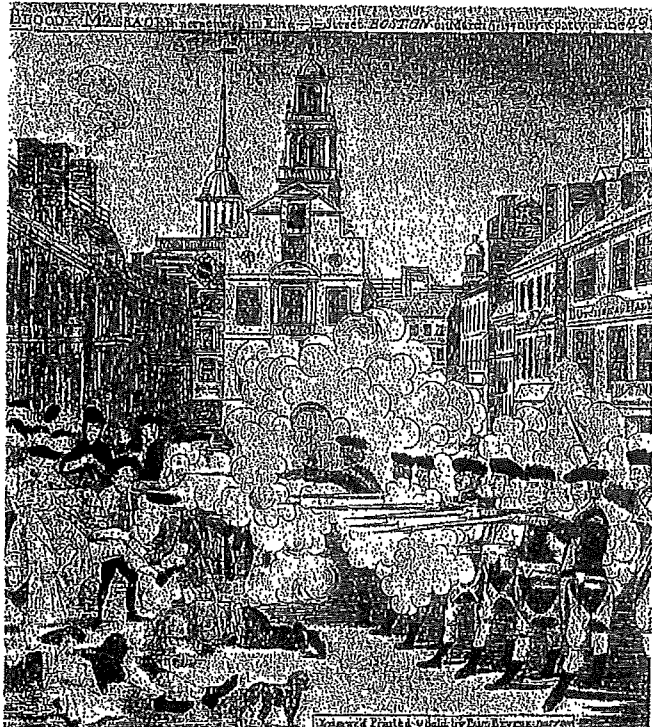
Mar. 5. This night the 29th Regimt. on Duty. A Quarrel between the soldiers and Inhabitants. The Bells Rung. A Great Number Assembled in King Street. A Party of the 29th under the Command of Capt Preston fired on the People -- they killed five -- wounded several others. Capt Preston bears a good Character -- he was taken [to jail] in the night, also seven more of the 29th -- the inhabitants are greatly [upset] & not without reason.

Mar. 8. I attended the funeral of four [of the] unhappy People that were killed on Monday last. Such a [gathering] of people I never saw before -- I believe Ten or Twelve thousand.

E Part of a poster published in 1772. The picture is from an engraving by Paul Revere, whose shop was in Cornhill, just around the corner.



A Grenadier in his high bearskin cap, with fixed bayonet.



← Image also on page 304 of your textbook.

[Small, illegible text at the bottom of the engraving, likely a title or description.]