

Witnesses

Patrick Walker
Edward Gerrish (Garrick)
Private Hugh White
Daniel Calef
Jane Whitehouse
William Green
Nathaniel Fosdick
Private James Hartegan
James Murray
Benjamin Burdick
Private William Warren
Joseph Hinkley
Benjamin Davis
Theodore Bliss
Captain Thomas Preston
Richard Palmes
Private Montgomery
Corporal William Wemms
Christopher Monk
Robert Patterson
Lieutenant Governor Hutchinson
Private Killroy
John Cole
Edward Langford
Private John Carroll (Carroll)
Edward Payne
Captain James Gifford
Robert Goddard
Diman Morton

Trial Testimony

PATRICK WALKER

I am a British soldier with the rank of private attached to the 29th regiment. On March 2 around 2 P.M. I was walking past a group of rope makers. Suddenly one of them, a William Green, yelled out to me asking if I wanted work. When I said that I did, he insulted me saying that I should clean his outhouse. The other rope makers swore at me. I had done nothing to make them angry. I went back to the barracks and rounded up about 40 soldiers. We went back to teach them a lesson. We had no guns nor bayonets, only clubs. There was a big fight. After a while we were out numbered so we ran away. British soldiers should not have to put up with that kind of treatment. It is for this reason I believe that the events of March 5th were an act of revenge on the part of certain colonists who wished to provoke British soldiers.

EDWARD GERRISH (Garrick)

I am a wig maker's apprentice. On the evening of March 5th I saw a British soldier at his sentry post beside the Custom House near the corner of King Street and Royal Exchange Lane. I decided to give him a good-natured teasing but when I did, he struck me in the face with the butt of his musket. I ran, but another soldier, a sergeant, ran after me and would have stabbed me with his bayonet if I had not ducked. Then Private White caught up with me and together they beat me up. I cried for help and two of my friends came. They began to yell and within fifteen minutes, other citizens arrived. Shortly after that a crowd of maybe 50 people gathered and began to yell at him and throw snowballs at him. He pointed his musket at them but did not shoot. Soon more and more citizens came. They were very angry and began to throw snowballs, ice chunks and pieces of tile at him. After about 30 minutes or so, a squad of soldiers marched through the crowd. Shortly after that shots rang out and I ran away. I later learned that some citizens had been killed.

PRIVATE HUGH WHITE

I am a private of the 29th Regiment in His Majesty's service. On the night of March 5th, 1770, I was a sentry on duty at the corner of King Street and Royal Exchange Lane near the Custom House. The Officer of the Day was Captain Thomas Preston who I knew to be a sober, honest man and a good officer. My duty was to protect the Common House from vandalism which had occurred regularly over the past weeks.

Just after dark several wig maker's apprentices began to insult me and my fellow soldiers. One, an Edward Gerrish, was especially insulting. I decided to teach him a lesson so I told him to step closer and repeat his insult. When he did, I struck him in the face with the butt of my musket. He squealed and ran away. Another soldier, a sergeant, ran after him, caught him and began to rough him up a bit. I went to the scene as well. I thought that if we taught him a lesson, he would leave us alone. Instead, he yelled and others came. I ran back to my post to protect the Custom House, but a crowd gathered and began to threaten me and throw ice and snow. I warned them that I would shoot, but they only yelled more. After half an hour, Captain Preston came with a squad to rescue me. They could hardly get through the crowd and when they did, the crowd closed around them and would not let us pass. They were screaming and throwing snow, ice and bricks. Captain Preston ordered them to go home but they jeered at him. Some of the crowd were so close that they pressed against our bayonets. Suddenly I saw Private Montgomery go down, get back up and fire into the crowd. I assumed that in the confusion and noise that the order to fire had been given so I fired into the crowd. After a moment the crowd fell back. I was very nervous when I saw some of them coming back. To my relief, they were only coming back to retrieve bodies. Captain Preston then ordered us back to the barracks.

DANIEL CALEF

I was there when the shooting occurred. I was about thirty feet away when I heard the officer who I recognized to be Captain Preston give the orders to fire twice. I looked him in the face when he gave the word and saw his mouth move. It was moonlight and I could see well enough. I ran after I heard the word fire.

JANE WHITEHOUSE

I went to the Custom House after the crowd had gathered. They were yelling at the soldiers and the soldiers were pointing their muskets at the crowd. Suddenly Private White recognized me and shouted to me, "Go home or you will be killed!" but I stayed on. I saw a man in the crowd knock down a soldier with a chunk of wood. Then I saw a man dressed in dark colored clothing, not an officer, tell one of the soldiers to fire and slapped him on the shoulder. The soldier fired immediately. I am sure that the Captain gave no orders to fire.

WILLIAM GREEN

I am a rope maker. On Friday, March 2nd, I was busy with my fellow workers, about ten of us, when a British soldier walked by. I asked him if he wanted a job. He answered that he did so I offered him one and he got very angry. (The job that I offered was to clean my outhouse.) He said that he'd be back so I got together some of the workers and waited. Sure enough, after about an hour, he came back with about 40 soldiers. There were armed with clubs so we grabbed some clubs of our own. There was a big fight and when it was done, the soldiers ran away but they swore that they'd get even with us.

I later learned of the events of March 5th. I guess they finally got even.

NATHANIEL FOSDICK

I heard bells ringing and thinking there was a fire, I followed the sound of the alarm. I saw no fire, only a crowd. I was standing in the middle of the street watching the riots from a distance. I was pushed by a British soldier when I refused to move out of the way. I stood my ground. I admit that I am hot tempered when it comes to British soldiers. Later at the Custom House I tried to strike down a soldier's bayonet with a stick. The soldier struck me in the chest and arm hard enough to draw blood. A stick is not match for bayonets. I recognized the officer in charge by his wig and drawn sword. I do not believe that he gave the order to fire but rather one of the soldiers. First one shot went off, then several others about two minutes later.

PRIVATE JAMES HARTEGAN

Before we marched to the Custom House, I remember Captain Preston ordering us not to load our muskets unless there was a clear threat and, that under no circumstances, were we to fire without his orders. When the squad reached the Custom House, we were ordered to load our weapons. The crowd jeered and threw stones and ice at us. I heard the

word "fire" and amid the confusion assumed that the command came from Captain Preston. I then fired into the crowd. The crowd fell back after a moment as if they were stunned by what was happening. After a few minutes, some of them came back. Thinking that they were going to attack, we raised our weapons but Captain Preston ordered us to shoulder arms and march back to the barracks about six blocks away.

JAMES MURRAY

I am the Justice of the Peace. I appeared on the scene as Captain Preston was urging the crowd to go home. I tried to read the crowd the Riot Act which warned the crowd that they could be arrested if they did not go home. I was not able to finish reading because the crowd was shouting at me and throwing snowballs. I had to step aside and finally left the scene. This was before the shots were fired. The crowd was angry and unruly. Nothing good could come of such a situation.

BENJAMIN BURDICK

I am a landlord. Many rope makers stay at my boarding house. Earlier in the week of March 2nd, I had to chase a soldier away from my boarding house with a stick. On March 5th, in the evening around nine o'clock, I was present when shots were fired by British soldiers into a crowd of Bostonians. I asked one of the soldiers if he was going to fire and he said, "yes", then threatened me with his bayonet. I had a broad sword with me and would have killed the man had he threatened me again.

After the shooting, I went up to Captain Preston and his squad to get a better look at their faces. I told Preston that I wanted a closer look at each soldier so that I could testify against them later. Preston said, "Perhaps, sir, you may". The soldiers then left.

PRIVATE WILLIAM WARREN

I swear I heard Captain Preston give the order to fire. The crowd was threatening us. I could hear some of them crying, "Kill the Bloody Backs". I admit that I was afraid and felt that I had to fire but I would not have fired without hearing orders. All in all, it was a dark, noisy and confusing time. It is now difficult to recall the sequence of events that led to the shooting.

JOSEPH HINKLEY

I wanted to leave and go home when a drunken man named Sam Gray said, "Do not run. They dare not shoot." I stayed and when the shooting started I thought the soldiers were firing blanks. It was dark and there was much confusion. I didn't realize that anyone had been killed until after the shooting was over. I then saw some of the citizens going back to pick up bodies. The soldiers at first aimed their muskets, but then shouldered their weapons and marched back toward their barracks.

BENJAMIN DAVIS

I heard a great commotion and someone yelling, "Fire!" so I hurried toward the noise which was in the direction of the Custom House. But there was no fire. There was a crowd. Then I saw a friend of mine, Sam Gray. He was equipped for fire fighting! When I told him it was a soldier fighting, he said that he was glad because he wanted to bash in a few heads. I suppose he was referring to the soldiers since Sam has always been outspoken about British soldiers being in Boston.

THEODORE BLISS

I worked my way through the crowd to Captain Preston when the soldiers were pressed against the wall of the Custom House by the crowd. I asked Captain Preston if the soldiers' muskets were loaded. Preston said that they were loaded. I then asked Preston if his men were going to fire. Preston answered that the soldiers could not fire without his orders. I was somewhat relieved although the crowd was growing more agitated by the moment. Minutes later, British soldiers fired into the crowd and I retreated as quickly as I could.

CAPTAIN THOMAS PRESTON

I was Officer of the Day on March 5th. When word got to me that Private Hugh White was surrounded by an angry crowd in front of the Custom House, I decided to form a squad of seven men to go and rescue him. The men were ordered not to shoot unless I so ordered them. When we started out for the Custom House, we were at fixed bayonets but the muskets were not loaded. When the squad reached the Custom House, I ordered Private White to fall in and go back to the barracks. The crowd would not allow the Squad through. I then ordered my men to load their muskets. I told several people in the crowd that I would not order the troops to fire. I even put myself in front of the Squad to prevent the soldiers from firing. When shots were fired, I tried to stop further shooting but I could not be heard amid all the noise. Finally when the colonists came back to pick up the dead and wounded, I was able to restore order and lead my troops back to the barracks.

My Squad consisted of Corporal William Wemms, Private John Carroll, Matthew Killroy, William Warren, Hugh Montgomery, James Hartegan and William McCauley.

RICHARD PALMES

I heard of a rumpus on King Street and went there. I saw a large crowd in front of a group of soldiers by the Custom House. I made my way through the crowd. I, with Theodore Bliss, stood next to Captain Preston and asked if he intended to fire on the crowd. Preston answered, "By no means, by no means!" Shortly after that I saw Private Montgomery getting up off the ground, swore and said, "Fire". Montgomery fired and I hit his arm with a stick. I then tried to hit Captain Preston in the head in order to prevent him from giving further orders to fire, but I slipped and only struck his arm. Suddenly more muskets went off and I

scrambled off to the side of the soldiers and to safety. As I spoke with Captain Preston before the shooting, I felt that I was in no danger of being shot. After the first shot, then I heard someone yell, "Fire". Maybe it was the Captain.

PRIVATE MONTGOMERY

I was ordered by Captain Preston to fall into a squad, march to the Custom House and save Private White. We kept our muskets unloaded until we were almost to the Custom House and then the whole squad loaded. After we got to Private White, the crowd would not let us leave. They were yelling and throwing things at us. I was angry and frightened. Suddenly a heavy club struck me in the shoulder and knocked me down. I got up and fired into the crowd missing everyone. At that point a man struck me on the arm with a club. A moment later, Private Killroy fired into the crowd and a man went down. I reloaded as I heard other shots being fired. If I had not fired, the crowd might have killed us. The crowd retreated after a moment but some came back to retrieve bodies. We then marched back into the barracks.

CORPORAL WILLIAM WEMMS

I knew that Private White was in trouble down near the Custom House and was anxious to go to his aid. I hoped that show of force would disperse the mob. I was given orders to fix bayonets by Captain Preston but not the load my weapon unless necessary. On the way to the Custom House, I pushed a man who was in the way but did not otherwise harm him. After struggling through the crowd in order to rescue Private White, I was pelted with ice, snow and sticks. My bayonet was struck by men with clubs but I held my fire until I heard Captain Preston yell, "Fire". When I heard two shots, I opened fire as well. I am a good soldier. I fired only because I was obeying orders.

CHRISTOPHER MONK

I was in the middle of the crowd of 300-400 people when two shots were fired. Then after a brief pause, several more were fired. I thought that I had been hit but discovered that it was only fright. I did not believe that the soldiers would fire and I heard no one give the order to fire. The crowd noise was very loud. From where I stood, I could barely see the soldiers, or for that matter, even move. I recall the moon being out and a few torches flickering. It was a picture of confusion.

ROBERT PATTERSON

No one in the crowd expected the soldiers to fire. The crowd was teasing them and throwing snowballs. There was, I believe, no reason to shoot. Then Captain Preston must have given the word to fire because the soldiers started to shoot and I was hit in the wrist. Over the past few months, many citizens teased soldiers and even fought with them with their fists or clubs, but never did we believe that British soldiers would fire on British subjects.

LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR HUTCHINSON

I have the right to call out British troops if I believe that government property is being threatened. I did not call out the soldiers on the evening of March 5th. I asked Captain Preston why he called out the guard without my permission. Preston told me that he was trying to save his sentry, Private White. Later that evening I pleaded with the crowd to go home, which they did after much persuasion and a promise that justice would be done. I knew the 29th Regiment to be an especially tough lot and feared the worst if they were pushed too far.

PRIVATE KILLROY

I was standing next to Private Montgomery in front of the Custom House when he was struck by a club thrown from the crowd. The next thing that I heard was the word "fire" and then a shot rang out. I assumed that the order had been given to fire so I aimed and fired. There was so much noise and confusion and it was so dark that I couldn't see whether or not I hit anything. I then reloaded as other members of the squad fired. The crowd looked like they were going to attack again, but they were coming to pick up bodies. Captain Preston then ordered us to march back to the barracks.

JOHN COLE

I saw the Captain clearly. I was within four feet of him. He became angry with the crowd, swore at them, then ordered his men to fire. He was wearing a red coat with a rose on his shoulder. He wore no surtout. I saw people in the crowd moving their arms, but no sticks.

EDWARD LANGFORD

I was near the front of the crowd near the soldiers. After the first shot didn't hit anyone, I saw a soldier, Private Killroy I believe, raise his weapon and aim it in my direction. I warned Killroy not to shoot but Killroy fired anyway. The bullet struck the man next to me in the head. That man's name was Sam Gray. I didn't expect the soldier to shoot since I had heard no order from Captain Preston to fire. I then heard a very loud explosion and saw a black man fall. I learned that the man's name was Crispus Attucks. After that I ran with the rest of the crowd. I can't believe that this terrible event could happen in a city like Boston!

PRIVATE JOHN CARROLL

By the time we got to Pvt. White, the crowd was very angry. They would not let us pass. Captain Preston told them to go home but they continued to curse at us and throw ice, snow and clubs. I heard the word "fire" and assumed that it came from Captain Preston so I fired as well. I believe that the mob would have killed us if we had not fired. Even Just of the Peace Murray, who had arrived earlier in the evening, was not allowed to read the Riot Act because the crowd pelted him with snowballs and drove him away.

EDWARD PAYNE

I was standing in my doorway across from the Custom House watching the wild scene. I heard some of the crowd daring the soldiers to shoot and I saw a muzzle flash when the first shot was fired. The crowd stepped back. I could not hear Captain Preston but I knew that the muskets did not all go off at once. While watching from the doorway, a musket ball struck me in the right arm. It is a careless thing when orders are given to fire into a crowd while all around innocent bystanders watch. I meant no harm to the soldiers but was wounded anyway.

CAPTAIN JAMES GIFFORD

I am a British officer currently posted in Boston and very aware of military procedures. From what I understand, the soldiers at the Custom House were at fixed bayonets. I have never known an officer to give the order to fire from charged bayonets. Besides, if the soldiers had been ordered to fire, they would all have fired at once. A soldier at charged bayonet stands with his rifle directed straight out from the height of his hip. This is not a firing position.

ROBERT GODDARD

The soldiers came up to the sentry and their officer told them to form a half moon in front of the sentry box. He then told the boys to go home or they might be shot. The boys stayed and threw snowballs at the soldiers. The Captain was behind the soldiers. One gun went off. Then the Captain was struck by one of the crowd. The Captain cursed and gave the order to fire. The soldiers all fired one after another. I was so near the officer when he gave the word to fire that I could have touched him. His face was towards me. He never moved from behind his men.

DIMAN MORTON

Between nine and ten o'clock I heard the cry of fire so I left my house and headed toward the noise coming from King Street. When I arrived I saw a crowd, mostly boys, throwing snowballs at a group of seven or eight soldiers. I recognized Captain Preston as we had met before. He was standing in front of the soldiers so that the guns reached beyond him. The Captain was not wearing a red uniform but had a Surtout on. I was standing on the opposite corner of Exchange Lane when I heard the Captain give the order for the soldiers to load their guns.

Wheeler and Becker, *Discovering the American Past - A Look at the Evidence. Vol. 1 to 1877, Second Edition* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1990), pp. 73-85.
Page Smith, *A New Age Now Begins, Vol. 1* (New York: McGraw-Hill Company), pp. 319-363.