

Nonfiction Excerpts

Nonfiction Excerpt 1: “The Boston Massacre” (as told by John Tudor)

John Tudor was a merchant who observed many of the dramatic events that happened in Boston between 1732 and 1793. He provided an eyewitness account of the Boston Massacre. As a result of this event, the soldiers who opened fire on the crowd stood trial for murder. They were defended by John Adams. The soldiers were found not guilty. Here is John Tudor’s description of what happened on that fateful evening long ago.

March 5, 1770

On Monday evening the 5th current, a few minutes after 9 o’clock a most horrid murder was committed in King Street before the Customhouse door by eight or nine soldiers, under the command of Captain Thomas Preston, drawn from the main guard on the south side of the Townhouse.

This unhappy affair began by some boys and young fellows throwing snow balls at the sentry placed at the Customhouse door, upon which eight or nine soldiers came to his assistance. Soon after a number of people collected, when the Captain commanded the soldiers to fire, which they did and three men were killed on the spot and several mortally wounded, one of which died next morning. The Captain soon drew off his soldiers up to the main guard, or the consequences might have been terrible, for on the guns firing the people were alarmed and set the bells a-ringing as if for fire, which drew multitudes to the place of action. Lieutenant Governor Hutchinson, who was Commander in Chief, was sent for and came to the Council Chamber, where some of the magistrates attended. The Governor desired the multitude about 10 o’clock to separate and go home peaceably and [said] he would do all in his power that justice should be done etc. The 29th Regiment were then under arms on the south side of the Townhouse. But the people insisted that the soldiers should be ordered to their barracks first before they would separate, which being done the people separated about 1 o’clock. Captain Preston was taken up by a warrant given to the High Sheriff by Justice Dana and Tudor and came under examination about 2 o’clock and we sent him to jail soon after 3 o’clock, having evidence sufficient to commit him, on his ordering the soldiers to fire. So about 4 o’clock the town became quiet. The next forenoon the eight soldiers that fired on the inhabitants were also sent to jail.

Tuesday a.m. The inhabitants met at Faneuil Hall and after some pertinent speeches, chose a committee of fifteen gentlemen to wait on the Lieutenant Governor in council to request the immediate removal of the troops. The message was in these words: That it is the unanimous opinion of this meeting, that inhabitants and soldiery can no longer live together in safety; that nothing can rationally be expected to restore the peace of the town and prevent blood and carnage, but the removal of the troops; and that we most fervently pray his honor that his power and influence may be exerted for their instant removal.

His honor's reply was: Gentlemen I am extremely sorry for the unhappy difference and especially of the last evening and signifying that it was not in his power to remove the troops etc., etc.

The above reply was not satisfactory to the inhabitants, as but one regiment should be removed to the castle barracks. In the afternoon the town adjourned to Dr. Sewall's Meetinghouse, for Faneuil Hall was not large enough to hold the people, there being at least 3,000, some supposed near 4,000, when they chose a committee to wait on the Lieutenant Governor to let him and the council know that nothing less will satisfy the people, than a total and immediate removal of the troops out of the town.

His Honor laid before the Council the vote of the town. The Council thereon expressed themselves to be unanimously of opinion that it was absolutely necessary for his Majesty's service, the good order of the town etc., that the troops should be immediately removed out of the town.

His honor communicated this advice of the council to Colonel Dalrymple and desired he would order the troops down to Castle William. After the Colonel had seen the vote of the Council he gave his word and honor to the town's committee that both the regiments should be removed without delay. The committee returned to the town meeting and Mr. Hancock, chairman of the committee read their report as above, which was received with a shout and clap of hands, which made the Meetinghouse ring. So the meeting was dissolved and a great number of gentlemen appeared to watch the center of the town and the prison, which continued for eleven nights and all was quiet again, as the soldiers were all moved off to the castle.

(Thursday) Agreeable to a general request of the inhabitants, were followed to the grave (for they were all buried in one) in succession the four bodies of Messrs.

Samuel Gray, Samuel Maverick, James Caldwell and Crispus Attucks, the unhappy victims who fell in the bloody massacre. On this sorrowful occasion most of the shops and stores in town were shut, all the bells were ordered to toll a solemn peal in Boston, Charleston, Cambridge and Roxbury. The several hearses forming a junction in King Street, the theater of that inhuman tragedy, proceeded from there through the main streets lengthened by an immense concourse of people, so numerous as to be obliged to follow in ranks of four and six abreast and brought up by a long train of carriages. The sorrow visible in the countenances, together with the peculiar solemnity, surpass description. It was supposed that the spectators and those that followed the corps amounted to 15,000, some supposed 20,000.