

EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS: Boston Citizens

Daniel Usher, Boston citizen

Saw several persons, mostly young folks, gathered between the Town House and Coffee House, some of whom were talking to the sentinel at the Commissioners" or Custom-house. After some time, the boys at a distance began to throw light snow-balls at him, which he seemed much enraged at and... appeared to have charged his gun, giving it a heavy stamp upon the door step, as if to force down the lead... and swore to the boys if they came near him he would blow their brains out.

About ten minutes after this, the deponent saw Captain Preston leading seven or eight men from towards the Town House, and placed them between the Custom-house door, and the sentinel box. About four or five minutes after they were posted, the snowballs now and then coming towards the soldiers, the Captain commanded them to fire. Upon this, one gun quickly went off; and afterwards he said "Fire by all means!" others succeeding, and the deponent being utterly unarmed, to avoid further danger, went up round the Town House till the fray was over.

William Sawyer, Boston citizen

The people kept huzzaing. Damn" em. Daring" em to fire. Threw snow balls. I think they hit „em. As soon as the snow balls were thrown, and a club, a soldier fired. I heard the club strike upon the Gun and the corner man next the lane said fire and immediately fired. This was the first gun. As soon as he had fired he said "Damn you, fire". I am so sure that I thought it was he that spoke. That next gun fired and so they fired through pretty quick.

Daniel Cornwall, Boston citizen

Captain Preston was within two yards of me and before the men and nearest to the right and facing the Street. I was looking at him. Did not hear any order. He faced me. I think I should have heard him. I directly heard a voice say "Damn you, why do you fire? Don"t fire". I thought it was the Captain"s then. I now believe it.

EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT: British Soldier

Captain Thomas Preston, British soldier

The mob still increased and were outrageous, striking their clubs or bludgeons one against another, and calling out "Come on you rascals, you bloody backs, you lobster scoundrels, fire if you dare, God damn you, fire and be damned, we know you dare not", and much more such language was used. At this time I was between the soldiers and the mob, parleying with and endeavouring all in my power to persuade them to retire peaceably, but to no purpose.

They [the civilians] advanced to the points of the bayonets, struck some of them and even the muzzles of the pieces, and seemed to be endeavouring to close with the soldiers. On which some well behaved persons asked me if the guns were charged. I replied yes. They then asked me if I intended to order the men to fire. I answered no, by no means, observing to them that I was advanced before the muzzles of the men's pieces, and must fall a sacrifice if they fired; that the soldiers were upon the half cock and charged bayonets, and my giving the word fire under those circumstances would prove me to be no officer.

While I was thus speaking one of the soldiers, having received a severe blow with a stick, stepped a little to one side and instantly fired... On this a general attack was made on the men by a great number of heavy clubs and snowballs being thrown at them, by which all our lives were in imminent danger... 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... On my asking the soldiers why they fired without orders, they said they heard the word „fire" and supposed it came from me. This might be the case as many of the mob called out fire, fire, but I assured the men that I gave no such order... that my words were "don't fire, stop your firing"...