



SECTION 1

The Lexington Affair

On the eighteenth of April, 1775, General Thomas Gage, Commander of the British Occupation Force in Massachusetts Colony, issued what were supposed to be secret orders to a select portion of his Boston-based troops. The troops were to steal out of town under the cover of night, march to the town of Concord some sixteen miles west of Boston, and destroy the colonial military stores that had been gathered there. Despite all efforts at stealth, however, spying colonial eyes discovered these movements almost immediately. William Dawes, Paul Revere, and, later, Dr. Samuel Prescott rode out ahead of the main body of British marchers, alerting the countryside to the British action.

As the British traveled the road between Charlestown and Lexington, gunshots, ringing bells, and fleeting figures made it clear that their movements had hardly gone undetected. Their advance party did, however, capture a number of the colonial scouts and couriers, among them Paul Revere. British troops arrived at Lexington, therefore, before the colonial Minutemen were fully informed of their numbers or prepared to deal with them.

The statements in this section come from a wide variety of historical sources, and in this respect the evidence is the same as that which would be dealt with by a professional historian. On the basis of such material, what can safely be said about what happened at Lexington on the morning of April 19, 1775? What are the facts of that situation?

A. SETTING THE SCENE

The first four documents have to do with the background of the battle at Lexington and what led to it. What facts are clear from the evidence presented in this section?

1. *The Massachusetts Spy*, a newspaper published in Worcester, Massachusetts, presented the following account of the events at Lexington two weeks after the occurrence:¹

Account of an Attack on the Inhabitants of
Massachusetts by the British Troops.
Acting Under the Orders of General Gage
on the 19th of April, 1775.

Worcester, Massachusetts,
May 3, 1775.

A few days before the battle, the Grenadier and Light-Infantry Companies were all drafted from the several Regiments in Boston, and put under

¹Peter Force, ed., *American Archives* (Washington, Clarke and Force, 1839), Fourth Series, II, pp. 437-438.

the command of an Officer, and it was observed that most of the transports and other boats were put together, and fitted for immediate service. This manoeuvre gave rise to a suspicion that some formidable expedition was intended by the soldiery, but what or where, the inhabitants could not determine; however, the town-watches in Boston, Charlestown, Cambridge, &c., were ordered to look well to the landing places. About ten o'clock on the night of the 18th of April, the Troops in Boston were discovered to be on the move in a very secret manner, and it was found they were embarking in boats (which they privately brought to the place in the evening) at the bottom of the Common; expresses set off immediately to alarm the country, that they might be on their guard. When the expresses got about a mile beyond Lexington, they were stopped by about fourteen officers on horseback, who came out of Boston in the afternoon of that day, and were seen lurking in by-places in the country till after dark. One of the expresses immediately fled, and was pursued two miles by an officer, who, when he had got up with him, presented a pistol, and told him he was a dead man if he did not stop; but he rode on until he came up to a house, when, stopping of a sudden, his horse threw him off. Having the presence of mind to halloo to the people in the house, "Turn out! turn out! I have got one of them," the officer immediately retreated as fast as he had pursued. The other express, after passing through a strict examination, by some means got clear.

The body of the Troops in the mean time, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Smith, had crossed the river, and landed at Phipp's farm. They immediately, to the number of one thousand, proceeded to Lexington, six miles below Concord, with great silence. A Company of Militia, of about eighty men, mustered near the meeting-house; the Troops came in sight of them just before sunrise. . . .

2. Colonial Thomas Willard gave the following sworn testimony before three of the Justices of Peace of Middlesex County, Massachusetts, the county in which Lexington is located:²

Lexington, April 23, 1775.

I, Thomas Price Willard, of lawful age, do testify and declare, that being in the house of Daniel Harrington, of said Lexington, on the nineteenth instant, in the morning, about half an hour before sunrise, looked out of the window of said house and saw (as I suppose) about four hundred of Regulars, in one body coming up the road, and marched toward the north part of the common, back of the meeting-house of said Lexington; and as soon as said Regulars were against the east end of the meeting-house; the commanding officers said something, what I know not; but upon that the Regulars ran till they came within about eight or nine rods³ of about a hundred of the Militia of Lexington, who were collected on said common. . . .

Thomas Price Willard.

²*Ibid.*, pp. 489-490.

³A measure of length of 5½ yards.

Middlesex, ss., April 23, 1775:

The within named Thomas Price Willard personally appeared, and after due caution to testify the whole truth and nothing but the truth, made solemn oath to the truth of the written deposition by him subscribed.

Before us,

Wm. Reed,
Jona. Hastings,
Duncan Ingraham,
Justices of the Peace.

Province of Massachusetts-Bay,
Charlestown, ss.)

I, Nathaniel Gorham, Notary and Tabellion Publick, duly admitted and sworn, do certify that Wm. Reed, Jona. Hastings, and Duncan Ingraham, Esquires, are three of His Majesty's Justices for the County of Middlesex, and that full faith and credit is to be given to their transactions as such. In witness whereof I have hereunto affixed my hand and seal this twenty-sixth of April, one thousand seven hundred and seventy-five.

Nathaniel Gorham, Notary Publick.

3. On June 17, 1826, Sylvanus Wood gave this sworn testimony of his recollections of Lexington.⁴

I, Sylvanus Wood, of Woburn, in the county of Middlesex and Commonwealth of Massachusetts, aged seventy-four years, do testify and say, that on the morning of the 19th of April, 1775, I was an inhabitant of Woburn living with Deacon Obediah Kendall; that about an hour before the break of day on said morning, I heard the Lexington bell ring; and fearing there was difficulty there I immediately arose, took my gun, and with Robert Douglass went in haste to Lexington, which was about three miles distant. When I arrived there, I inquired of Captain Parker, the commander of the Lexington company, what was the news. Parker told me he did not know what to believe, for a man had come up about half an hour before, and informed him that the British troops were not on the road. But while we were talking, a messenger came up and told the Captain that the British troops were within half a mile. Parker immediately turned to his drummer, William Diman, and ordered him to beat to arms,—which was done. Captain Parker then asked me if I would parade with his company. I told him I would. Parker then asked me if the young man with me would parade. I spoke to Douglass, and he said he would follow the Captain and me. By this time many of the company had gathered around the Captain at the hearing of the drum, where we stood, which was about half way between the meeting-house and Buckman's tavern. Parker says to his men, 'Every man of you, who is equipped, follow me,—and those of you who are not equipped, go into the meeting-house and furnish yourselves from the magazine, and immediately join the company.' Parker led those of us who were equipped to the north end of Lexington Common, near the Bedford road,

⁴Ezra Ripley, *A History of the Fight at Concord* (Concord: Herman Atwill, 1832), pp. 35-36.

and formed us in single file. I was stationed about in the centre of the company. While we were standing, I left my place, and went from one end of the company to the other, and counted every man who was paraded, and the whole number was thirty-eight and no more.⁵ . . .

4. Nathaniel Parkhurst and thirteen other Lexington militia-men gave testimony before three Justices of the Peace in Middlesex County.⁶

Lexington, April 25, 1775.

We, Nathaniel Parkhurst, Jonas Parker, John Munroe, Jun., John Winship, Solomon Peirce, John Muzzy, Abner Mead, John Bridge, Junior, Ebenezer Bowman, William Munroe 3d, Micah Hagar, Samuel Sanderson, Samuel Hastings, and James Brown of Lexington, in the County of Middlesex, and Colony of Massachusetts Bay, in New-England, and all of lawful age, do testify and say, that on the morning of the nineteenth of April instant, about one or two o'clock, being informed that a number of Regular Officers had been riding up and down the road, the evening and night preceding, and that some of the inhabitants as they were passing had been insulted by the officers, and stopped by them; and being also informed that the Regular Troops were on their march from Boston, in order as it was said, to take the Colony Stores then deposited at Concord, we met on the parade of our Company in this Town; and after the Company had collected we were ordered by Captain John Parker, who commanded us, to disperse for the present, and to be ready to attend the beat of the drum; and accordingly the Company went into houses near the place of parade. We further testify and say, that about five o'clock in the morning, we attended the beat of our drum, and were formed on the parade. We were faced towards the Regulars, then marching up to us, and some of our Company were coming to the parade with their backs towards the Troops, and others on the parade began to disperse. . . .

B. A SHOT RANG OUT: EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS

The first shot in any major conflict is usually an event of great significance. That action alone is often used to establish who was the aggressor and who the innocent victim. The government of the United States has always taken great pains to be sure that it would not be the party to fire first, no matter how threatening the situation. Such widely separated events as Lincoln's maneuvering at Fort Sumter in 1861 or Kennedy's refusal to launch an offensive against Cuba during the missile crisis of 1962 both provide clear evidence of the great concern for the responsibility of firing the first shot. World opinion and future alliances during any ensuing conflict can well depend on the assessment of such responsibility.

In the spring of 1775 neither the British nor the colonists wanted to be adjudged the aggressor in any conflict. So careful was General Gage not to offend Massachusetts' sensibilities that his men came to feel that they could do no right and the irksome, heckling patriots, no wrong. On the other hand, the colonial leaders gathered in the Massachusetts Provincial Congress and the Massachusetts Committee of Public Safety made it quite clear that any military preparations they might undertake were

⁵This does not include those who went into the meeting-house and were "cut off." [Footnote in original text.]

⁶Peter Force, ed., *American Archives*, pp. 493-494.

completely of a defensive nature. Under no circumstances were the militia or the minutemen to take unprovoked, offensive actions.

No matter what the precautions on either side, shots were fired at Lexington on the morning of April 19, 1775. Shots were fired; men were wounded; and some men died. Who was responsible? Certainly neither side wanted to accept the blame.

The following statements were all made by men who were there. They are first-hand, eyewitness accounts. After weighing them, one against the other, who do you think fired first?

1. Thomas Fessenden, a colonial onlooker, gave this sworn testimony to the Justices of the Peace:

Lexington, April 23, 1775.

I, Thomas Fessenden, of lawful age, testify and declare, that being in a pasture near the meeting-house at said Lexington, on Wednesday, last, at about half an hour before sunrise, . . . I saw three officers on horseback advance to the front of said Regulars, when one of them being within six rods of the said Militia, cried out, "Disperse, you rebels, immediately;" on which he brandished his sword over his head three times; meanwhile the second officer, who was about two rods behind him, fired a pistol pointed at said Militia, and the Regulars kept huzzaing till he had finished brandishing his sword, and when he had thus finished brandishing his sword, he pointed it down towards said Militia, and immediately on which the said Regulars fired a volley at the Militia and then I ran off, as fast as I could, while they continued firing till I got out of their reach. I further testify, that as soon as ever the officer cried "Disperse, you rebels," the said Company of Militia dispersed every way as fast as they could, and while they were dispersing the Regulars kept firing at them incessantly, and further saith not.

Thomas Fessenden.

Middlesex, ss., April 23, 1775:

The within named Thomas Fessenden appeared, and after due caution to testify the whole truth and nothing but the truth, made solemn oath to the truth of the within deposition by him subscribed.

Before us,

William Reed,
Josiah Johnson,
William Stickney,
Justices of the Peace.

Province of the Massachusetts-Bay)
Charlestown, ss.)

I, Nathaniel Gorham, Notary and Tabellion Publick, by lawful authority duly admitted and sworn, hereby certify to all whom it may or doth concern, that William Reed, Josiah Johnson, and William Stickney, Esquires,

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 495-496.

are three of His Majesty's Justices of the Peace for the County of Middlesex, and that full faith and credit is to be given to their transactions as such. In witness whereof I have hereunto affixed my hand and seal this twenty-sixth day of April, *Anno Domini* one thousand seven hundred and seventy-five.

Nathaniel Gorham, Notary Publick.

2. The following version came from the personal diary of a young British officer, Lieutenant John Barker:^x

19th. At 2 o'clock we began our March by wading through a very long ford up to our Middles: after going a few miles we took 3 or 4 People who were going off to give intelligence; about 5 miles on this side of a Town called Lexington, which lay in our road, we heard there were some hundreds of People collected together intending to oppose us and stop our going on; at 5 o'clock we arrived there, and saw a number of People, I believe between 2 and 300, formed in a Common in the middle of the Town; we still continued advancing, keeping prepared against an attack tho' without intending to attack them; but on our coming near them they fired one or two shots, upon which our Men without any orders, rushed in upon them, fired and put 'em to flight; several of them were killed, we cou'd not tell how many, because they were got behind Walls and into the Woods; We had a Man of the 10th light Infantry wounded, nobody else hurt. We then formed on the Common, but with some difficulty, the Men were so wild they cou'd hear no orders; we waited a considerable time there, and at length proceeded on our way to Concord. . . .

3. The official deposition of a colonist, Simon Winship, reads as follows:⁹

Lexington, April 25, 1775.

Simon Winship, of Lexington, in the County of Middlesex, and Province of Massachusetts-Bay, New-England, being of lawful age, testifieth and saith, that on the nineteenth of April instant, about four o'clock in the morning, as he was passing the publick road in said Lexington, peaceably and unarmed, about two miles and a half distant from the meeting-house in said Lexington, he was met by a body of the King's Regular Troops, and being stopped by some officers of said Troops, was commanded to dismount. Upon asking why he must dismount, he was obliged by force to quit his horse, and ordered to march in the midst of the body; and being examined whether he had been warning the Minute-Men, he answered no, but had been out, and was then returning to his father's. Said Winship further testifies that he marched with said Troops until he came within about half a quarter of a mile of said meeting-house, where an officer commanded the Troops to halt, and then to prime and load. This being done, the said Troops marched on till they came within a few rods of Captain Parker's Company, who were partly collected on the place of

^x"A British Officer in Boston," *The Atlantic Monthly*, XXXIX (April, 1877), pp. 398-399.

⁹Peter Force, ed., *American Archives*, p. 490.

parade, when said Winship observed an officer at the head of said troops flourishing his sword, and with a loud voice giving the word fire; which was instantly followed by a discharge of arms from said Regular Troops. And said Winship is positive, and in the most solemn manner declares, that there was no discharge of arms on either side till the word fire was given by said officer as above.

Simon Winship

4. John Bateman, a British regular who was captured by the Colonists, swore to the following version four days after the battle:¹⁰

I, John Bateman, belonging to the Fifty-Second Regiment, commanded by Colonel Jones, on Wednesday morning on the nineteenth day of April instant, was in the party marching to Concord, being at Lexington, in the County of Middlesex; being nigh the meeting-house in said Lexington, there was a small party of men gathered together in that place when our Troops marched by, and I testify and declare, that I heard the word of command given to the Troops to fire, and some of said Troops did fire, and I saw one of said small party lay dead on the ground nigh said meeting-house, and I testify that I never heard any of the inhabitants so much as fire one gun on said Troops.

John Bateman.

5. On the 27th of April, Lieutenant William Sutherland, another British junior officer, wrote a letter to the secretary of the British commander in Massachusetts, General Gage, offering this view of the encounter:¹¹

We still went on further when 3 Shot more were fired at us, which we did not return, & this is sacred truth as I hope for mercy These 3 Shot were fired from a Corner of a large house to the right of the Church, when we came up to the main body which appeared to me to Exceed 400 in & about the Village who were drawn up in a plain opposite to the Church, several Officers Called out throw down your Arms & you shall come to no harm, or words to that effect which they refusing to do, instantaneously the Gentlemen who were on horseback rode in amongst them of which I was one, at which instant I heard Major Pitcairns voice Call out Soldiers dont fire, keep your Ranks, form & surround them, instantly some of the Villains who got over the hedge fired at us which our men for the first time returned, which sett my horse a going who Galloped with me down a road above 600 yards among the middle of them before I turned him & in returning a vast number who were in a Wood at the right of the Grenadiers fired at me, but the distance was so great that I only heard the Whistling of the Balls, but saw a great number of people in the Wood, in consequence of their discovering themselves by firing, our Grenadiers gave them a smart fire, I shall take the liberty of observing here that it is very unlikely our men should have fired for some time otherwise they must have hurt their own Officers who

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 496.

¹¹ Allen French, *General Gage's Informers* (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1932), pp. 58-61.

galloped in amongst this Arm'd Mob. Our men now kept up the fire and on my coming up Colonel Smith turned to me, asked me, do you know where a Drum is, which I found, who immediately beat to Arms, when the Men ceased firing, during this time there was 3 Shot fired at Col. Smith from the Gavel [gable] Garrett Window of a house within 50 yards of us, & it was from the end of that house the first 3 Shot were fired upon us. Col. Smith and Major Pitcairn regretted in my hearing the too great warmth of the Soldiers in not attending to their Officers & keeping their ranks & in recommending a more steady conduct to them for the future. Here we remained sometime & Col. Smith Ordered that the men should replenish the upper part of their Cartouch Boxes with Ammunition. Major Pitcairn, Major Mitchell, Capts. Lumm, Cochrane, Mr. Thorne of 4th Regiment, Mr. Adair of the Marines, Capt. Parsons of the 10th & Lieuts: Gould & Barker of the 4th. I believe will pretty nearly agree in most particulars of the above.

6. Nathaniel Mullekin and 33 other militiamen submitted this sworn deposition:¹²

Lexington, April 25, 1775.

We, Nathaniel Mullekin, Philip Russell, Moses Harrington, Junior, Thomas and Daniel Harrington, William Grimer, William Tidd, Isaac Hastings, Jonas Stone, Jr., James Wyman, Thaddeus Harrington, John Chandler, Joshua Reed, Jun., Joseph Simonds, Phineas Smith, John Chandler, Jun., Reuben Lock, Joel Viles, Nathan Reed, Samuel Tidd, Benjamin Lock, Thomas Winship, Simeon Snow, John Smith, Moses Harrington the third, Joshua Reed, Ebenezer Parker, John Harrington, Enoch Willington, John Hosmer, Isaac Green, Phineas Stearns, Isaac Durant, and Thomas Headly, Jun., all of lawful age, and inhabitants of Lexington, in the County of Middlesex, and Colony of the Massachusetts-Bay, in New-England, do testify and declare, that on the nineteenth of April instant, about one or two o'clock in the morning, being informed that several officers of the Regulars had, the evening before, been riding up and down the road, and had detained and insulted the inhabitants passing the same; and also understanding that a body of Regulars were marching from Boston towards Concord, with intent (as it was supposed) to take the stores belonging to the Colony in that town, we were alarmed; and having met at the place of our Company's parade, were dismissed by our Captain, John Parker, for the present, with orders to be ready to attend at the beat of the drum. We further testify and declare, that about five o'clock in the morning, hearing our drum beat, we proceeded towards the parade, and soon found that a large body of Troops were marching towards us. Some of our Company were coming up to the parade, and others had reached it; at which time the Company began to disperse. Whilst our backs were turned on the Troops we were fired on by them, and a number of our men were instantly killed and wounded. Not a gun was fired by any person in our Company on the Regulars, to our knowledge, before they fired on us, and they continued firing until we had all made our escape.

¹²Peter Force, ed., *American Archives*, pp. 492-493.

7. Lieutenant Edward Gould, a British officer, captured in the skirmish, offered this sworn testimony:¹³

Medford, April 25, 1775.

I, Edward Thoroton Gould, of His Majesty's own Regiment of Foot, being of lawful age, do testify and declare, that on the evening of the eighteenth instant, under the orders of General Gage, I embarked with the Light-Infantry and Grenadiers of the line, commanded by Colonel Smith, and landed on the marshes of Cambridge, from whence we proceeded to Lexington. On our arrival at that place, we saw a body of Provincial Troops armed, to the number of about sixty or seventy men; on our approach they dispersed, and soon after firing began; but which party fired first, I cannot exactly say, as our Troops rushed on shouting and huzzaing previous to the firing, which was continued by our Troops as long as any of the Provincials were to be seen. From thence we marched to Concord. . . .

8. George Leonard, a well-known Tory, as colonists who sympathized with the British were called, forwarded the following account to General Gage. Although it states that he "Deposes," this was not an officially sworn and notarized statement:¹⁴

George Leonard of Boston Deposes that he went from Boston on the nineteenth of april; with the Brigade commanded by Lord Percy upon their march to Lexington; that being on horse back and having no connexion with the army: he several times went forward of the Brigade; in one of which excursions he met with a Countryman who was wounded supported by two others who were armed; this was about a mile on this side of Lexington meeting House; that the Deponent asked the wounded person what was the matter with him, he answered that the regulars had shot him: the Deponent then asked what provoked them to do it—he said that Some of our pepol fired upon the Regulars; and they fell on us Like Bull Dogs and killed eight & wounded nineteen—he said further that it was not the Company he belonged to that fired but some of our Country pepol that were on the other side of the Road: the Deponent enquired of the other men if they were present; they answered, yes, and Related the affair much as the wounded man had Done; and all three Blamed the rashness of their own pepol for fireing first: and said they supposed now the Regulars would kill every Body they met with.

Boston May 4—1775

Geo: Leonard

9. The official deposition of commander of the colonial militia, John Parker, stated:¹⁵

Lexington, April 25, 1775

I, John Parker, of lawful age, and commander of the Militia in Lexington, do testify and declare, that on the nineteenth instant, in the morning,

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 500-501.

¹⁴ Allen French, *General Gage's Informers*, pp. 57-58.

¹⁵ Peter Force, ed., *American Archives*, p. 491.

about one of the clock, being informed that there were a number of Regular Officers riding up and down the road, stopping and insulting people as they passed the road, and also was informed that a number of Regular Troops were on their march from Boston, in order to take the Province Stores at Concord, ordered our Militia to meet on the common in said Lexington, to consult what to do, and concluded not to be discovered, nor meddle or make with said Regular Troops (if they should approach) unless they should insult us; and upon their sudden approach, I immediately ordered our Militia to disperse and not to fire. Immediately said Troops made their appearance, and rushed furiously, fired upon and killed eight of our party, without receiving any provocation therefor from us.

John Parker.

10. Major John Pitcairn, commander of the advanced British party that engaged the Lexington militia, sent the following official report of his activities to General Gage:¹⁶

I gave directions to the Troops to move forward, but on no account to Fire, or even attempt it without orders; when I arrived at the end of the Village, I observed drawn up on a Green near 200 of the Rebels; when I came within about One Hundred Yards of them, they began to File off towards some stone Walls on our Right Flank—The Light Infantry observing this, ran after them—I instantly called to the Soldiers not to fire, but to surround and disarm them, and after several repetitions of those positive Orders to the men, not to Fire &c—some of the Rebels who had jumped over the Wall, Fired Four or Five Shott at the Soldiers, which wounded a man of the Tenth, and my Horse was Wounded in two places, from some quarter or other, and at the same time several Shott were fired from a Meeting House on our Left—upon this, without any order or Regularity, the Light Infantry began a scattered Fire, and continued in that situation for some little time, contrary to the repeated orders both of me and the officers that were present—It will be needless to mention what happened after, as I suppose Col. Smith hath given a particular account of it. I am sir

Your most obedt
humble Servant,
John Pitcairn.

Boston Camp
26th April, 1775

C. A SHOT RANG OUT: EVIDENCE FROM CONTEMPORARIES

The following accounts of the Lexington incident come from a number of diverse sources: reminiscences of actual participants given many years after the fact, newspaper stories, "official" reports, personal diaries, and a version given by an interested citizen who did not happen to be there on that April morning in '75.

These all provide evidence of one sort or another. Again, much of it is conflicting. Does this additional material modify your view as to what happened at Lexington?

¹⁶Allen French, *General Gage's Informers*, pp. 53-54.

1. The following excerpt is drawn from an account written by General Gage on April 29, 1775, presumably based on the reports of his officers. This "Circumstantial Account" stood as the official statement of the British government in Massachusetts:¹⁷

A circumstantial Account of an Attack that happened on the 19th April, 1775, on His Majesty's Troops, by a number of the People of the Province of the Massachusetts-Bay.

The Major gave directions to the Troops to move forward, but on no account to fire, nor even to attempt it without orders. When they arrived at the end of the village, they observed about two hundred armed men drawn up on a green, and when the Troops came within one hundred yards of them, they began to file off towards some stone walls on their right flank; the Light-Infantry observing this, ran after them. The Major instantly called to the soldiers not to fire, but to surround and disarm them. Some of them who had jumped over a wall, then fired four or five shots at the Troops, wounded a man of the Tenth Regiment, and the Major's horse in two places, and at the same time several shots were fired from a meeting-house on the left. Upon this, without any order or regularity, the Light-Infantry began a scattered fire, and killed several of the country people, but were silenced as soon as the authority of their officers could make them.

After this, Colonel Smith marched up with the remainder of the detachment, and the whole body proceeded to Concord. . . .

2. One kind of colonial reaction is typified by this "Letter to a Gentleman Near Philadelphia," dated Boston, April 20, 1775:¹⁸

Yesterday produced a scene the most shocking that New-England ever beheld. Last Saturday P.M., orders were sent to the several Regiments quartered here, not to let their Grenadiers or Light-Infantry do any duty till farther orders; upon which the inhabitants conjectured that some secret expedition was on foot, and, being upon the look-out, they observed those bodies on the move between ten and eleven o'clock on Tuesday night, observing a perfect silence in their march, towards the point opposite to Phipps's farm, where boats were in waiting, that conveyed them over. The men appointed to alarm the country on such occasions got over by stealth as early as the Troops, and took their different routes.

The first advice we had was about eight o'clock in the morning, when it was reported that the Troops had fired upon and killed five men in Lexington. . . . About twelve o'clock it was given out by the General's Aid-de-Camp that no person was killed, and that a single gun had not been fired, which report was variously believed; but, between one and two o'clock certain accounts came that eight were killed outright, and fourteen wounded of the inhabitants of Lexington. Those people, it seems, to the number of about forty, were drawn out early in the morning near the Meeting-House to exercise; upon which the party of Light-Infantry and Grenadiers, to the number of about eight hundred, came up to them, and ordered them to disperse. The commander replied that they were innocently amusing themselves with exercise, that they had not any ammunition with

¹⁷ Peter Force, ed., *American Archives*, p. 435.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 359-360.

them, and therefore should not molest or disturb them. This answer not satisfying, the Troops fired upon them, and killed three or four; the others took to their heels, and the Troops continued to fire. A few took refuge in the Meeting-House, when the soldiers shoved up the windows, pointed their guns in, and killed three there. This is the best account I can learn of the beginning of the fatal day, and you must naturally suppose that such a piece of cruelty would rouse the Country.

3. *The London Gazette* presented this version of the Lexington affair to its British readers:¹⁹

Whitehall, June 10, 1775.

Lieutenant Nunn, of the Navy, arrived this morning at Lord Dartmouth's, and brought letters from General Gage, Lord Percy, and Lieutenant-Colonel Smith, containing the following particulars of what passed on the nineteenth of April last between a detachment of the King's Troops in the Province of Massachusetts-Bay and several parties of rebel Provincials. . . .

Lieutenant-Colonel Smith finding, after he had advanced some miles on his march, that the country had been alarmed by the firing of guns and ringing of bells, despatched six Companies of Light-Infantry, in order to secure two bridges on different roads beyond Concord, who, upon their arrival at Lexington, found a body of the country people under arms, on a green close to the road; and upon the King's Troops marching up to them, in order to inquire the reason of their being so assembled, they went off in great confusion, and several guns were fired upon the King's Troops from behind a stone wall, and also from the meeting-house and other houses, by which one man was wounded, and Major Pitcairn's horse shot in two places. In consequence of this attack by the rebels, the troops returned the fire and killed several of them. After which the detachment marched on to Concord without any thing further happening. . . .

4. Robert Douglass, who had been at Lexington, swore to the following deposition on May 3, 1827:²⁰

In about fifteen minutes after we entered the tavern, a person came to the door and said the British were within half a mile. I then heard an officer (who I afterwards learned was Captain Parker) call his drummer and order him to beat to arms. I paraded with the Lexington company between the meeting-house and the tavern, and then marched to the common near the road that leads to Bedford; there we were ordered to load our guns. Some of the company observed, 'There are so few of us, it would be folly to stand here.' Captain Parker replied, 'The first man who offers to run shall be shot down.' The Lexington company began to break off on the left wing, and soon all dispersed. I think no American was killed or wounded by the first fire of the British, unless Captain Parker might have been. No one of Captain Parker's company fired on the British, to my knowledge, that

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 945-946.

²⁰ Ezra Ripley, *A History of the Fight at Concord*, p. 35.

morning, and I think I should have known it, had they fired. I knew but two men of the Lexington company, and I never heard any person say that the Americans fired on the British that morning at Lexington.

After the British marched toward Concord, I saw eight men who had been killed, among whom were Captain Parker²¹ and a Mr. Porter of Woburn.

Robert Douglass.

5. The deposition of Sylvanus Wood (see page 7), sworn to in 1826, continued in this fashion:²²

Just as I . . . got back to my place, I perceived the British troops had arrived on the spot, between the meeting-house and Buckman's, near where Captain Parker stood when he first led off his men. The British troops immediately wheeled so as to cut off those who had gone into the meeting-house. The British troops approached us rapidly in platoons, with a General officer on horse-back at their head. The officer came up to within about two rods of the centre of the company, where I stood.—The first platoon being about three rods distant. They there halted. The officer then swung his sword, and said, 'Lay down your arms, you damn'd rebels, or you are all dead men—fire.' Some guns were fired by the British at us from the first platoon, but no person was killed or hurt, being probably charged only with powder. Just at this time, Captain Parker ordered every man to take care of himself. The company immediately dispersed; and while the company was dispersing and leaping over the wall, the second platoon of the British fired, and killed some of our men. There was not a gun fired by any of Captain Parker's company within my knowledge. I was so situated that I must have known it, had any thing of the kind taken place before a total dispersion of our company. I have been intimately acquainted with the inhabitants of Lexington, and particularly with those of Captain Parker's company, and, with one exception, I have never heard any of them say or pretend that there was any firing at the British from Parker's company, or any individual in it, until within a year or two.—One member of the company told me, many years since, that after Parker's company had dispersed, and he was at some distance, he gave them 'the guts of his gun.'

6. Ensign Jeremy Lister, youngest of the British officers, gave the following account in a personal narrative written in 1832:²³

However to the best of my recollection about 4 oClock in the Morning being the 19th of April the 5 front Compys was ordered to Load which we did, about half an hour after we found that precaution had been necessary, for we had then to unload again [to fire] and then was the first Blood drawn in this American Rebellion. it was at Lexington when we saw one of their Compys drawn up in regular order Major Pitcairn of the Marines second in Command call'd to them to disperse, but their not seeming willing he desired us to mind our space which we did when they gave us a fire then

²¹ It is presumed the witness meant Jonas Parker, as the Captain was not killed. [Footnote in original text.]

²² Ezra Ripley, *A History of the Fight at Concord*, p. 36.

²³ Allen French, *General Gage's Informers*, p. 55.

run off[f] to get behind a wall. we had one man wounded of our Compy in the Leg his Name was Johnson also Major Pitcairns Horse was shot in the Flank we return'd their Salute, and before we proceeded on our March from Lexington I believe we Kill'd and Wounded either 7 or 8 men.

7. The Reverend William Gordon was not present at Lexington on the 19th. Shortly after the incident, however, he undertook his own inquiry into the affair and subsequently published his findings under the title: "An account of the commencement of Hostilities between Great Britain and America, in the Province of Massachusetts-Bay. By the Reverend William Gordon of Roxbury, in a letter to a Gentleman in England, dated May 17, 1775."²⁴

The simple truth, I take to be this, which I received from one of the prisoners at Concord in free conversation, one James Marr, a native of Aberdeen, in Scotland, of the Fourth Regiment, who was upon the advanced guard, consisting of six, besides a sergeant and corporal: They were met by three men on horseback before they got to the meeting-house a good way; an officer bid them stop; to which it was answered, you had better turn back, for you shall not enter the Town; when the said three persons rode back again, and at some distance one of them offered to fire, but the piece flashed in the pan without going off. I asked Marr whether he could tell if the piece was designed at the soldiers, or to give an alarm? He could not say which. The said Marr further declared, that when they and the others were advanced, Major Pitcairn said to the Lexington Company, (which, by the by, was the only one there,) stop, you rebels! and he supposed that the design was to take away their arms; but upon seeing the Regulars they dispersed, and a firing commenced, but who fired first he could not say. The said Marr, together with Evan Davies of the Twenty-Third, George Cooper of the Twenty-Third, and William McDonald of the Thirty-Eighth, respectively assured me in each other's presence, that being in the room where John Bateman, of the Fifty-Second, was, (he was in an adjoining room, too ill to admit of my conversing with him), they heard the said Bateman say, that the Regulars fired first, and saw him go through the solemnity of confirming the same by an oath on the bible.

Samuel Lee, a private in the Eighteenth Regiment, Royal Irish, acquainted me, that it was the talk among the soldiers that Major Pitcairn fired his pistol, then drew his sword, and ordered them to fire; which agrees with what Levi Harrington, a youth of fourteen last November, told me, that being upon the common, and hearing the Regulars were coming up, he went to the meeting-house, and saw them down in the road, on which he returned to the Lexington Company; that a person on horseback rode round the meeting, and came towards the company that way, said something loud, but could not tell what, rode a little further, then stopped and fired a pistol, which was the first report he heard, then another on horseback fired his pistol; then three or four Regulars fired their guns; upon which, hearing the bullets whistle, he ran off, and saw no more of the affair.

Mr. Paul Revere, who was sent express, was taken and detained some time by the officers, being afterwards upon the spot, and finding the Regulars at hand, passed through the Lexington Company with another, having

²⁴Peter Force, ed., *American Archives*, pp. 627-629.

between them a box of papers belonging to Mr. Hancock, and went down a cross road till there was a house so between him and the company as that he could not see the latter; he told me likewise, that he had not got half a gun-shot from them before the Regulars appeared; that they halted about three seconds; that upon hearing the report of a pistol or gun, he looked round, and saw the smoke in front of the Regulars, our people being out of view because of the house; then the Regulars huzzaed and fired, first two more guns, then the advanced guard, and so the whole body. The bullets flying thick about him, and he having nothing to defend himself with, ran into a wood, where he halted, and heard the firing for about a quarter of an hour.

James Brown, one of the Lexington Militia, informed me, that he was upon the common; that two pistols were fired from the party of the soldiers towards the Militia-men as they were getting over the wall to be out of the way, and that immediately upon it the soldiers began to fire their guns; that being got over the wall, and seeing the soldiers fire pretty freely, he fired upon them, and some others did the same.

Simon Winship of Lexington, declared, that being upon the road about four o'clock, two miles and an half on this side of the meeting-house, he was stopped by the Regulars, and commanded by some of the officers to dismount, or he was a dead man; that he was obliged to march with the said Troops until he came within about half a quarter of a mile of the said meeting-house, when an officer commanded the Troops to halt, and then to prime and load; which being done, the Troops marched on till they came within a few rods of Captain Parker's Lexington Company, who were partly collected on the place of parade, when said Winship observed an officer at the head of said Troops flourishing his sword round his head in the air, and with a loud voice giving the word fire; the said Winship is positive that there was no discharge of arms on either side, until the word fire was given by the said officer as above.

I shall not trouble you with more particulars, but give you the substance as it lies in my own mind, collected from the persons whom I examined for my own satisfaction. The Lexington Company upon seeing the Troops, and being of themselves so unequal a match for them, were deliberating for a few moments what they should do, when several dispersing of their own heads, the Captain soon ordered the rest to disperse for their own safety. Before the order was given, three or four of the regular officers, seeing the company as they came up on the rising ground on this side the meeting, rode forward one or more, round the meeting-house, leaving it on the right hand, and so came upon them that way; upon coming up one cried out, 'you damned rebels, lay down your arms;' another, 'stop, you rebels'; a third, 'disperse, you rebels,' &c. Major Pitcairn, I suppose, thinking himself justified by Parliamentary authority to consider them as rebels, perceiving that they did not actually lay down their arms, observing that the generality were getting off, while a few continued in their military position, and apprehending there could be no great hurt in killing a few such Yankees, which might probably, according to the notions that had been instilled into him by the tory party, of the Americans being poltrons, end all the contest, gave the command to fire, then fired his own pistol, and so set the whole affair agoing. The printed account says very different; but whatever the General may have sent home in support of that account, the publick have nothing but bare assertions, and I have such valid evidence of the falsehood

of several matters therein contained, that with me it has very little weight. The same account tells us, that several shots were fired from a meeting-house on the left, of which I heard not a single syllable, either from the prisoners or others, and the mention of which it would have been almost impossible to have avoided, had it been so, by one or another among the numbers with whom I freely and familiarly conversed.

8. In 1775 Benjamin Franklin was acting as colonial representative in London. So that he might better present what the colonists thought was the true picture of the Lexington affair to the British public, the Massachusetts Provincial Congress collected 21 sworn depositions from both colonial and British witnesses, some of which were presented earlier in this section. The Congress forwarded the depositions to Franklin with the following introductory letter:²⁵

In Provincial Congress, Watertown,
April 26, 1775.

To the Inhabitants of Great Britain:

Friends and Fellow-Subjects: Hostilities are at length commenced in this Colony by the Troops under command of General Gage; and it being of the greatest importance that an early, true, and authentick account of this inhuman proceeding should be known to you, the Congress of this Colony have transmitted the same, and from want of a session of the honourable Continental Congress, think it proper to address you on the alarming occasion.

By the clearest depositions relative to this transaction, it will appear that on the night preceding the nineteenth of April instant, . . . the Town of Lexington . . . was alarmed, and a company of the inhabitants mustered on the occasion; that the Regular Troops, on their way to Concord, marched into the said town of Lexington, and the said Company, on their approach, began to disperse; that notwithstanding this, the Regulars rushed on with great violence, and first began hostilities by firing on said Lexington Company, whereby they killed eight and wounded several others; that the Regulars continued their fire until those of said Company, who were neither killed nor wounded, had made their escape. . . .

These, brethren, are marks of ministerial vengeance against this Colony, for refusing, with her sister colonies, a submission to slavery. But they have not yet detached us from our Royal Sovereign. We profess to be his loyal and dutiful subjects, and so hardly dealt with as we have been, are still ready, with our lives and fortunes, to defend his person, family, crown, and dignity. Nevertheless, to the persecution and tyranny of his cruel Ministry we will not tamely submit; appealing to Heaven for the justice of our cause, we determine to die or be free. . . .

We sincerely hope that the great Sovereign of the Universe, who hath so often appeared for the *English* Nation, will support you in every rational and manly exertion with these Colonies, for saving it from ruin; and that in a constitutional connection with the Mother Country, we shall soon be altogether a free and happy people.

Per order:

Jos. Warren, [President pro tem].

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 487-488.

9. The following excerpt is drawn from the official report of Lieutenant-Colonel Smith to General Gage, written April 22, 1775.²⁶

I think it proper to observe, that when I had got some miles on the march from Boston, I detached six light infantry companies to march with all expedition to seize the two bridges on different roads beyond Concord. On these companies' arrival at Lexington, I understand, from the report of Major Pitcairn, who was with them, and from many officers, that they found on a green close to the road a body of the country people drawn up in military order, with arms and accoutrements, and, as appeared after, loaded; and that they had posted some men in a dwelling and Meeting-house. Our troops advanced towards them, without any intention of injuring them, further than to inquire the reason of their being thus assembled, and, if not satisfactory, to have secured their arms; but they in confusion went off, principally to the left, only one of them fired before he went off, and three or four more jumped over a wall and fired from behind it among the soldiers; on which the troops returned it, and killed several of them. They likewise fired on the soldiers from the Meeting and dwelling-house.

We had one man wounded, and Major Pitcairn's horse shot in two places. Rather earlier than this, on the road, a countryman from behind a wall had snapped his piece at Lieutenants Adair and Sutherland, but it flashed and did not go off. After this we saw some in the woods, but marched on to Concord without any thing further happening.

²⁶ *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society, 1875-1876* (Boston, 1876). XIV, p. 350n.