

## How to Use the Digital History Reader

### Evidence 1: Deposition of William Wyat, March 7, 1770

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#### Introduction

William Wyat provided the account below of the Boston Massacre just two days after the event. It was one of 96 such accounts collected by the town of Boston and printed for distribution in England as part of a pamphlet entitled "A Short Narrative of the Horrid Massacre in Boston Perpetrated...by Soldiers of the 29th Regiment."

#### Questions to Consider

- How might the source of Wyat's account influence how historians read it?
- According to Wyat, how did members of the crowd act toward the soldiers?
- Why, according to Wyat, did soldiers fire on the crowd?

#### Document

I, William Wyat, of Salem, coaster, testify and say, that last Monday evening, being the fifth day of March current, I was in Boston, down at Treat's wharf, where my vessel was lying, and hearing the bells ring, supposed there was a fire in the town, whereupon I hastened up to the Town house, on the south side of it, where I saw an officer of the army lead out of the guard house there seven or eight soldiers of the army, and lead them down in seeming haste, to the Custom house on the north side of King street, where I followed them, and when the officer had got there with the men, he bid them face about. I stood just below them on the left wing, and the said officer ordered his men to load, which they did accordingly, with the utmost dispatch, then they remained about six minutes, with their firelocks rested and bayonets fixed, but not standing in exact order I observed a considerable number of young lads, and here and there a man amongst them, about the middle of the street, facing the soldiers, but not within ten or twelve feet distance from them ; I observed some of them, viz., the lads, &c., had sticks in their hands, laughing, shouting, huzzaing, and crying fire; but could not observe that any of them threw anything at

the soldiers, or threatened any of them. Then the said officer retired from before the soldiers and stepping behind them, towards the right wing, bid the soldiers fire; they not firing, he presently again bid 'em fire, they not yet firing, he stamped and said, " Damn your bloods, fire, be the consequence what it will ;" then the second man on the left wing fired off his gun, then, after a very short pause, they fired one after another as quick as possible, beginning on the right wing; the last man's gun on the left wing flashed in the pan, then he primed again, and the people being withdrawn from before the soldiers, most of them further down the street, he turned his gun toward them and fired upon them. Immediately after the principal firing, I saw three of the people fall down in the street; presently after the last gun was fired off, the said officer, who had commanded the soldiers (as above) to fire, sprung before them, waving his sword or stick, said, "Damn ye, rascals, what did ye fire for" and struck up the gun of one of the soldiers who was loading again, whereupon they seemed confounded and fired no more. I then went up behind them to the right wing, where one of the people was lying, to see whether he was dead, where there were four or five people about him, one of them saying he was dead, whereupon one of the soldiers said, "Damn his blood, he is dead, if he ever sprawl again I will be damned for him." And I remember as the said officer was going down with the soldiers towards the Custom house, a gentleman spoke to him and said, " Capt. Preston, for God's sake keep your men in order, and mind what you are about." And further I say not.

March 7, 1770. WILLIAM WYAT.

Source:

Originally published in "A Short Narrative of the Horrid Massacre in Boston Perpetrated in the Evening of the Fifth Day of March, 1770, by the Soldiers of the 29th Regiment, which with the 14th Regiment Were Then Quartered There..." (Boston, 1770); republished, with additional material, by John Doggett, Jr. (New York, 1849).