**What Really Happened at the Boston Massacre?**

On the evening of March 5, Private Hugh White, a British soldier, stood on guard duty outside the Custom House on King Street, known today as State Street. A young wigmaker's apprentice named Edward Garrick called out to a British officer, Captain-Lieutenant John Goldfinch, that Goldfinch had not paid a bill due to Garrick's master. Goldfinch had, in fact, settled his account and ignored the insult. Private White called out to the boy that he should be more respectful of the officer. The boy exchanged insults with Private White. Then, after the boy started poking the officer in the chest with his finger, the officer left his post, challenged the boy, and struck him on the side of the head with his musket. As Garrick cried in pain, one of his companions, Bartholomew Broaders, began to argue with White. This attracted a larger crowd.

As the evening progressed, the crowd around Private White grew larger and more boisterous. Church bells were rung, which usually signified a fire, bringing more people out. Over fifty Bostonians pressed around White, led by a former slave named Crispus Attacks, throwing stone-filled snowballs and other objects at the sentry and challenging him to fire his weapon. White, who had taken up a somewhat safer position on the steps of the Custom House, sought assistance. Runners alerted the nearby barracks and Captain Thomas Preston, the officer of the watch. According to his report, Preston dispatched a non-commissioned officer and six privates of the 29th Regiment with fixed bayonets, to relieve White.  Accompanied by Preston, the soldiers pushed their way through the crowd. At this point, Henry Knox (a Boston bookseller), trying to reduce tensions, warned Preston, "For God's sake, take care of your men. If they fire, you must die." Captain Preston responded "I am aware of it."  When the soldiers reached Private White on the Custom House stairs, the soldiers loaded their muskets, and arrayed themselves in a semicircular formation. Preston shouted at the crowd (which had now grown to between three and four hundred) to disperse.

The crowd continued to press around the soldiers, taunting them by yelling, "Fire!", spitting at them, and and continuing to throw snowballs and other small objects at them.  Richard Palmes, a local innkeeper who was carrying a small club, came up to Preston and asked if the soldiers' weapons were loaded. Preston assured him they were, but that they would not fire unless he ordered it, and that he was unlikely to do so, since he was standing in front of them. A thrown object then struck one of the soldiers, knocking him down and causing him to drop his musket. As he recovered his weapon, someone shouted "Damn you, fire!". The soldier then discharged his musket into the crowd although no command was given. Palmes swung his small club at the soldier, hitting his arm, and then at Captain Preston. He narrowly missed Preston's head, striking him on the arm instead.

There was a pause of uncertain length (eyewitness estimates ranged from several seconds to two minutes), after which the soldiers fired into the crowd. Rather than a disciplined volley (Preston gave no orders to fire), a ragged series of shots was fired, which hit eleven men. Three Americans—ropemaker Samuel Gray, mariner James Caldwell, and Crispus Attucks—died instantly. Samuel Maverick, an apprentice ivory turner of seventeen, was struck by a ricocheting musket ball at the back of the crowd and died a few hours later (in the early morning of the next day). An Irish immigrant, Patrick Carr, died two weeks later. Christopher Monk, another apprentice, was one of those seriously wounded in the attack.  Although he recovered to some extent, he was crippled and eventually died in 1780, purportedly due to the injuries he had sustained in the attack a decade earlier.

The crowd moved away from the immediate area of the Custom House, but it continued to grow in nearby streets. Captain Preston immediately called out most of the 29th Regiment, which adopted defensive positions in front of the state house. Acting Governor, Thomas Hutchinson, was summoned to the scene, and was forced by the movement of the crowd into the council chamber of the state house. From its balcony, he was able to minimally restore order, promising there would be a fair inquiry into the shootings if the crowd dispersed. From that point, things calmed down.