

FICTION AND TRUTH

ABOUT THE

BATTLE

ON

Lexington Common

APRIL 19, 1775

By frank warren COBURN

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The Journals of Each Provincial Congress of Massachusetts in 1774 AND 1775, [etc.] AND Other Documents. Published Agreeably to a Resolve Passed March 10, 1837. Boston, 1838. Containing the Journals of each of the three Congresses ; Narrative of the Excursion of the King's Troops April 19, 1775 ; the fifteen Depositions herein cited ; the Letter of Gov. Jonathan Trumbull of Conn., to His Excellency Thomas Gage ; the latter' s Reply ; the British Official Account.

A History of the Fight at Concord on the 19th of April, 1775, [etc.] Showing that Then and There the First Regular and Forcible Resistance was Made TO THE British Soldiery, [etc.]. Concord, 1827. Containing the four Depositions herein cited.

Life of Colonel Paul Revere, by Elbridge Henry Goss. Boston, 1891. Containing the Narrative of Paul Revere reproduced in fac-simile.

Report of Lieutenant-Colonel F. Smith in Proceedings OF THE Massachusetts Historical Society, 1875-6. [Commencing on page 350.] Boston, 1876.

Ensign De Berniere's Narrative, as Printed in the Collections of the Mass. Historical Society, Vol. IV., 2nd Series. Originally printed in Boston in 1779.

The Diary of a British Officer in Boston in 1775, in The Atlantic Monthly April and May, 1877.

Levi Harrington's Account. Manuscript in the Possession OF Messrs, Charles W. Swan and George D. Harrington, of Lexington.

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History of the Battle of Lexington, on the Morning OF THE 19th April, 1775. By Elias Phinney. Boston, 1825, [reprint of 1875]. Containing the ten Depositions herein cited.

History of the Siege of Boston. By Richard Frothingham. Second Edition. Boston, 1851. Containing Major John Pitcairn's Version as quoted by Ezra Stiles, D. D.

A Sermon Preached at Lexington April 19, 1776, to Commemorate the Murder, Bloodshed, and Commencement of Hostilities [etc.], to which is Added A Brief Narrative of the Principal Transactions of the Day. By Rev. Jonas Clarke, Boston, 1776.

Prefatory.

The many historical accounts of the battle of Lexington are founded upon the Narrative and Depositions of the Second Provincial Congress; on those gathered by other hands; on the testimony of eyewitnesses ; and on the British official reports.

These are sadly at variance with each other.

Unfortunately the group that Americans naturally turn to, those of the Second Provincial Congress, fail to inspire in the breasts of Lexingtonians, any feelings of patriotic fervor.

They are insufficient; they are misleading; they suppress a portion of the truth ; and therefore the impression they convey is a false one.

Because of the standing of Congress as the highest American authority many writers have accepted that report as conclusive.

There are two accounts of the battle that this Society delights to honor, one by Elias Phinney, published in 1825, and another by Charles Hudson<sup>^</sup> in his excellent History of Lexington, published in 1868.

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Neither relied entirely upon the official account of the Second Congress.

In grateful remembrance of their work, so far as I may, I dedicate this hour.

When our energetic president came to me a few months ago and requested a paper upon our favorite topic, I was obliged to confess that I had no new or strange offering. With his permission and approval I agreed to arrange all of the very old material in such form that we might judge candidly, by comparison, of its true value.

I therefore invite your attention to a brief synopsis of all of the American and British official accounts, and of all of the testimony of witnesses.

Bear in mind that it is not my aim to advance a theory and support it by a partial presentation of testimony.

You will find in these witnesses which I summon, repetitions, contradictions, inconsistencies.

I present them all without apology. It shall be your privilege to separate the wheat from the chaff, — the Fiction from the Truth.

Fiction and Truth About the Battle on Lexington Common.

The battle on Lexington Common was fought one hundred and forty-one years ago.

From that time until today historical writers have been seriously misled by the first American official account of that event.

On that morning the few men who stood facing the king's soldiers were loyal subjects. They had their grievances, but within them still burned a faith, that somehow, — sometime, — not too far away, their prayers for redress would be listened to and answered.

After that fatal second volley Captain Parker's men were indeed rebels.

When the smoke of battle had cleared away, when their vengeance had been fully wreaked upon the invaders, many of them, — not all, — listened to the calmer counsel of their Congress, whose plea seemed to be for peace, — peace, but with justice and honor.

Such an adjustment could be reached only by placing the martyrs' wreath upon the graves of Lexington's slain. It was the immediate purpose of the Congress to do exactly that.

Accordingly on April 22, three days after the battle, a committee of nine was appointed by the Congress to gather depositions of participants and spectators, and on the next day, April 23, a committee of three was appointed to prepare a Narrative of the Excursions of the King's Soldiers to accompany those depositions.

Dr. Church, Mr. Gerry, and Mr. Cushing constituted that committee.

The Narrative and Depositions were published in the following month of May, by Isaiah Thomas, at Worcester.

I find no serious departure from the truth, either in Narrative or Depositions, except as they fall far short of the whole truth, — and thus mislead and hide from our view the complete battle scene, with the result that erroneous conclusions have been drawn and may still be drawn.

What was the motive of Congress in publishing this misleading report?

Simply this : reconciliation was hoped for and expected, and it could easier be obtained by minimizing the offence of the colonists, and magnifying the offence of the king's soldiers !

Fortunately all of Parker's command were not willing to co-operate in the plan of Congress, so their signatures do not appear beneath those depositions. Years afterward, however, some were gathered by other hands, and thus we have the more finished story. '\ It IS my purpose in this essay to analyze all of "\* the first

ones,, and to place with them four others, gathered many years afterwards, that seem to belong to that side of the controversy.

In opposition to those I propose to also give an analysis of all other depositions and narratives of participants and eyewitnesses, together with the British official accounts, that we may see clearly the real happenings of that brief half hour.

First, let us consider briefly the civil authority under which the provincial military forces were acting.

Who constituted the First Provincial Congress of Massachusetts?

The Royal Governor, Gen. Thomas Gage, had issued his writs on Sept. 1st, 1774, calling upon the inhabitants to return representatives to the Great and General Court, to be convened at Salem, Oct. 5, but, between those dates, becoming alarmed at the extraordinary resolves passed by some of the County Conventions, and instructions given by Boston and some other towns to their representatives, thought the time was not auspicious for such a gathering. Therefore, he issued a proclamation countermanding his first call.

However, ninety elected representatives met, on Oct. 5, at Salem, and awaited the Governor — who failed to appear.

They adjourned to the next day, Oct. 6th, and then met as a Convention, and chose John Hancock, Chairman, after which they adjourned until the next day, Oct. 7, when they met again, and then declared themselves to be a Provincial Congress.

John Hancock was chosen Permanent Chairman.

Thus the First Provincial Congress was made over by themselves, from the duly elected members of the Great and General Court, which would have recognized Gen. Gage as their royal Governor, into a self constituted legislative body, whose whole legislative work was to be in direct antagonism to him, and to the English Parliament.

They were dissolved by their own vote Dec. 10, 1774.

The Second Provincial Congress was practically a direct representative gathering of the people.

They convened at Cambridge, Feb. 1, 1775, and dissolved May 29, following.

The Third Provincial Congress, also elected by the people, convened at Watertown, May 31, and dissolved July 19, 1775.

On July 20, 1775, the succeeding General Court of Massachusetts, consisting of a Council and a House of Representatives, enacted that all and every of the Resolves of the Provincial Congresses, from Oct. 4, 1774, to July 20, 1775, be confirmed and established as lawful and valid, thus legalizing all of the Acts of their predecessors.

The official Narrative of the battle which we are to consider, was the work of the Second Provincial Congress.

The Proclamation issued by the Third Provincial Congress, June 16, 1775, we shall also briefly consider, because of its variance from the Narrative.

Almost every vote of the First and Second Congresses was in preparation for a defensive war. The sessions were behind closed doors and those votes were in secret. Openly they frequently pledged their loyalty to their governor, their king, and their mother country, expressions that we must look upon as insincere, in fact, merely as measures of diplomacy.

For instance, on Oct. 29, 1774, the First Provincial Congress appointed a Committee to present a communication to his Excellency, Governor Gage, which contained this sentence : —

"We trust, sir, that we shall not fail in our duty to our country and loyalty to our king, or in a proper respect to your excellency."\* 'Yet every session bristled with rebellious activity.

The Second Provincial Congress, in an address to the Inhabitants of Great Britain, dated April 26, 1775, and speaking of the ravages of the King's troops on the 19th of April, affirmed their continued loyalty nevertheless, in these words: —

"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."

And yet nearly 4,000 minute men had mustered on the previous 19th of April to oppose their sovereign's troops.

We must look upon the Narrative of the Excursions of the King's Troops, promulgated

♦Journals of Each Provincial Congress, page 45. by the Second Congress, as a part of the diplomatic history of that Congress.

The opening sentence shows conclusively that the Congress did not yet wish to be considered as rebels, for it accuses the King's troops of shedding: "the blood of sundry of the loyal American subjects of the British king in the field of Lexington."

It continues by reciting how a detachment of about 900 men, under Lieutenant-Colonel Smith, attacked a small party of about 100 inhabitants of Lexington and other adjacent towns, some with and some without firearms.

The detachment were proceeding on their way at a brisk pace towards Concord, as the inhabitants supposed, to take or destroy a quantity of stores deposited there, for the use of the Colony.

The inhabitants were far from being disposed to commence hostilities against the troops of their sovereign, and unless attacked were determined to be peaceful spectators of this extraordinary movement.

On the approach of Col. Smith with the detachment under his command they dispersed, but the detachment, seeming to thirst for blood, wantonly rushed on and killed eight on the spot and wounded several others, before any guns were fired by our men.

Not contented with this effusion of blood, as if malice had occupied their whole souls, they continued the fire until all of the small party who escaped the dismal carnage were out of reach.

Colonel Smith then proceeded to Concord.

The Depositions were fashioned to support the Narrative.

The Committee appointed to take them were not looking for the entire truth, but only that portion of it which could be fashioned in support of their accusations against the King's soldiers.

Deposition of Solomon Brown, Jonathan Loring, and Elijah Sanderson, Jointly,  
Dated

They have nothing to say as to the action on the Common, but tell of being detained and abused by the British officers the night before, and on that morning.

Solomon Brown could have told an interesting story, but it was not required.

Deposition of Elijah Sanderson.

The next deposition is by the same Elijah Sanderson, separately, who swore April 25, that he saw the regular troops advancing towards the Lexington Company, "many of whom were then dispersing," and that he heard one officer say, "damn them — we will have them;" that the regulars shouted aloud, run and fired on the Lexington Company, "which did not fire a gun before the regulars discharged on them."



"Eight of the Lexington Company were killed while they were dispersing."

Deposition of Thomas Rice Willard.

Thomas Rice Willard, in his deposition of April 23, states that he was in the Daniel Harrington house, and on looking out of the window saw the regulars approach the minute men within eight or nine rods, at which time the militia dispersed, and that an officer hollered after them to lay down their arms; and "that there was not a gun fired till the militia of Lexington were dispersed."

Deposition of Simon Winship.

The next deposition is that of Simon Winship, dated April 25, who was taken prisoner by the British earlier in the morning, and was with them as they came to the Common.

When within an eighth of a mile of the meeting house the commander ordered the troops to halt and load. Then they marched on, and when within a few rods of Parker's Company, saw an officer at the head of said troops flourishing his sword, and heard him, in a loud voice, give the order to fire. He concluded his deposition by saying that there was no discharge of arms on either side until that order to fire.

Deposition of Captain John Parker.

Captain John Parker's deposition comes next, and is dated April 25.\* He ordered, and I quote his own words, "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 or molest us ; and upon their sudden approach I immediately ordered our militia to disperse, and not to fire. Immediately said troops made their appearance, and April 23, In facsimile in Hudson's Lexington. I, 218. f There are other slight differences between his two depositions but not materially changing his meaning. ' rushing furiously on fired upon and killed eight of our party without receiving any provocation therefor from us."

The Captain said nothing of a return fire. Taken altogether, his deposition is the most unfortunate one of all for us to consider.

I cannot reconcile his statement with his action. He said they "concluded not to be discovered," yet it is well known and accepted by all that his first order on learning of the British approach, was for Dimond to sound the alarm upon his drum,— which Pitcairn accepted as a challenge. Parker quickly followed it with other orders to his company to load with powder and ball, and to form for action practically across the British path.

Deposition of John Robbins.

The deposition of John Robbins, dated April 24, is next.

He testified that he was in the front ranks of Parker's Company when there suddenly appeared about a thousand of the King's troops, as he thought, at a distance of sixty or seventy yards. Three officers on horseback were in front, the foremost of whom cried: "throw down your arms! ye villains! ye rebels!"

Upon which the Company dispersing, that foremost officer gave the order to fire. Robbins was wounded and fell, and several of our men by his side were shot dead.

Parker's men, he believed, had not then fired a shot.

Deposition of Benjamin Tidd and Joseph Abbott.

Benjamin Tidd, of Lexington, and Joseph Abbott, of Lincoln, unite in a deposition under date of April 25.

They were mounted on horses, and were on the Common as spectators, when the regulars marched up to the Lexington Company, which was then dispersing. Soon after, the regulars fired, first a few guns, which Tidd and Abbott took to be pistols, then a volley or two, before any guns were fired by the Lexington Company.

Deposition of Nathaniel Mulliken and Thirty-three Others.

Nathaniel Mulliken and thirty-three others unite in one deposition, dated April 25.

They admit having been alarmed, and in consequence, of meeting at the place of the Company's parade, meaning on the Common, and were dismissed by the Captain for the time.

About five o'clock, hearing the drum beat, they proceeded towards the parade, and found that a large body of troops were marching towards them. Some of the Company had reached the parade, and some were coming, 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 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."

Deposition of Nathaniel Parkhurst and Thirteen Others.

Nathaniel Parkhurst and thirteen others unite in a deposition dated April 25.

They testify that at the drum beat, they attended, and formed on the parade, faced towards the regulars. Some of the Company were coming to the parade, with their backs towards the troops, and others on the parade began to disperse, when the regulars fired — before a gun was fired by any of Parker's Company.

Deposition of Timothy Smith.

Timothy Smith, whose deposition was dated April 25, testified that he was on the Common as a spectator.

He saw a large body of troops marching towards the Lexington Company, — then dispersing, — and likewise saw the regular troops fire, — before the Lexington Company fired a gun.

Deposition of Levi Mead and Levi Harrington.

Levi Mead and Levi Harrington unite in a deposition, dated April 25<sup>^</sup> to the effect that they were on the Common as spectators, and saw the regular troops marching towards the Lexington Company. Some were on horseback, whom they took to be officers, who fired a pistol or two on the Lexington Company, which was then dispersing, and those were the first guns that were fired.

Nothing said of any return fire.

Deposition of William Draper.

William Draper, probably as a spectator, and whose deposition was taken April 25, testified that the regulars appeared at the meeting house, and that Parker's Company, which was drawn up back of said meeting house, turned from said troops and made their escape by dispersing. The regular troops "made an huzza," ran towards Parker's Company, and immediately after the commanding officer of said troops, as Draper took him to be, gave the order to fire, and they did fire, before any of Parker's Company fired.

Deposition of Thomas Fessenden.

Thomas Fessenden swore, April 23, that he was in a pasture near the meeting house when he saw the regular troops pass the meeting house on their way towards the Lexington militia. He saw three officers on horseback advance to the front of said regulars. One of them, when within six rods of the militia, cried out: "disperse you rebels immediately," on which he brandished his sword three times. The second officer, about two rods behind, fired a pistol pointed at the militia. The regulars huzzaed until the officer finished brandishing his sword, and when he had finished brandishing his sword, he pointed it at the militia, — and immediately the regulars fired.

Fessenden further testified that as soon as 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."

Fessenden said nothing of a return fire.

Deposition of John Bateman.

John Bateman belonged to the 52nd Regiment of the British. He swore, on April 23, that he was with the party marching to Concord.

At Lexington there was a small party of men gathered, and he heard the word of command given to the troops to fire, — and some of said troops did fire, — and he saw one of said party lie dead on the ground nigh said meeting house.

And he further testified that he never heard, to use his own words : "any of the inhabitants so much as fire one gun on said troops."

Deposition of Lieutenant Edward Thornton Gould.

Lieutenant Edward Thornton Gould, of his Majesty's own regiment, under date of April 20, swore that he embarked with the forces under Colonel Smith on the evening of the 18th, landed on the marshes at Cambridge, and proceeded to Lexington. On arrival at that place they 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 so long as any of the provincials were to be seen."

So much for the fifteen Depositions that accompany the Narrative.

To those were signed sixty-four names, all participants or eyewitnesses, most of them of Parker's Company.

In all of the Depositions there is not a positive statement that any of Parker's Company returned the fire at all, though in nine out of fifteen it is hinted at in that left-handed sentence that no man in Parker's Company fired, until he was fired upon!

We are left to conjecture whether he did then or not.

Are there any omissions of names that we might expect to find there?

Yes!

In Parker's Company were more than a dozen Munroes ; but only two, John, Jr., and William, 3rd., can be found subscribed to the Depositions !

Why?

Jedidiah was wounded on the Common in the morning; and his patriotic spirit, not having been subdued, continued until he was killed in the afternoon.

Ensign Robert was among those who were slain.

Ebenezer, Jr., and John stood side by side through the first and second volleys, and then dispersing, deliberately fired back. Ebenezer had been wounded, and his return fire was his answer to the British bullet.

John, son of Ensign Robert, might have seen his father fall, for not many paces could have separated them, ere he sent back that second double leaden answer.

Those two Munroes were certainly conspicuous in their enmity to the king's soldiers, and their signatures would not have been a graceful addition to the Depositions of the Provincial Congress.

Concede to the others bearing that family name, the well-known family traits, and we are not mystified because they were not enrolled with the sixty-four, under Dr. Church's banner.

There were other names that the Provincial Congress would have been glad to add to their peace document, but they were not available.

Years after, some of them subscribed to another set of Depositions, which we shall soon contrast with those of 1775.

As we finish considering the official report of the Provincial Congress, let us pay our respects to the chairman of the Narrative part.

Dr. Benjamin Church was a part of Boston's contribution to the Congress. By reputation he was a man of sterling patriotism, enthusiastic in the duties assigned to him,— effective in their accomplishment.

Secretly he was in sympathy with the mother country. In the following November cipher letters of his were intercepted by Elbridge Gerry, and it was found that he had been in correspondence with the enemy.

He was condemned by the Massachusetts Legislature, for treason, and sentenced to imprisonment for life. His health failing, he was allowed to leave the country. He embarked for the West Indies, but the ship on which he sailed was never again heard of.

Just to what extent Dr. Church dominated the Narrative and Depositions committees, we cannot determine ; but the tragic ending of his political career casts its dark shadows backwards to Lexington Common.

The Ezra Ripley Depositions.

I will add to those fifteen Depositions four more, valuable in some respects, but so much in sympathy with the idea that Parker's men dispersed immediately upon Pitcairn's request, and without firing hardly a gun in response, that they should be a part of the same group.

Those four were probably the last sworn statements of survivors ever taken. They first appeared in the History of the Concord Fight, by Rev. Ezra Ripley, with the assistance of some other citizens of Concord, and published in 1827. Mr. Ripley's pamphlet was intended to be a reply to the one by Elias Phinney, and it was his evident ambition to place the commencement of the American Revolution at the Concord North Bridge.

In the back part of his pamphlet he published, in whole or in part, eight of the depositions of 1775, including the one by Captain John Parker, and the four new ones, which he or some of his assistants, had gathered for that particular use.

The new ones were by John Richardson, Samuel Hartwell, Robert Douglass and Sylvanus Wood.

Deposition of John Richardson.

John Richardson, of Newton, under date of June 25, 1827, swore that he was at Lexington on the 19th of April. He did not claim that he was present in the morning.

No mention was made in his hearing of the Americans having fired upon the British on that morning; that those events were a constant topic of conversation for a long time after; that he never heard that any individual in Parker's Company had fired upon the British "until the visit of Gen. Lafayette to this country in 1825, with the exception of one gun, which was said to have been fired by Solomon Brown, while standing in the back kitchen, of the tavern, then owned by Buckman, now Meriam."

Deposition of Samuel Hartwell.

Samuel Hartwell, of Lincoln, in a deposition taken July 19, 1827, swore that he had been acquainted with the inhabitants of Lexington, and particularly with many who were of Captain Parker's Company on the 19th of April, 1775, and did not recollect that any of the people of Lexington ever stated that there was any firing by Parker's Company, "until within a few years, except the firing of one gun, after the British had turned and were passing off the Common."

Deposition of Robert Douglass.

Robert Douglass, of Portland, Me., under date of May 3, 1827, swore that he was at his father's house, in Woburn, on the morning of April 19, and about an hour before daybreak a man rode up and knocked loudly at the door, and announced the coming out of the British, and that he must turn out and repair to Lexington.

He joined Sylvanus Wood, and they went to Lexington together, arriving there half an hour before sunrise.

He heard Parker order his drummers to beat to arms. He paraded with the Lexington Company, and marched to the Common, near the Bedford road, where they were ordered to load their guns.

Some one said: "There are so few of us it would be folly to stand here."

Parker replied: —

"The first man who offers to run shall be shot down."

The British came in sight, gave three cheers, and ran towards the Lexington Company, who began to break on the left wing, and ran off, and were soon dispersed.

No one of Parker's Company fired on the British,, to his knowledge, said Douglass. He further stated that he knew but two men of the Lexington Company, and that he never heard any person say that the Americans fired on the British that morning.

Deposition, of Sylvanus Wood.

Sylvanus Wood, of Woburn, swore June 17, 1826, that he was alarmed by the ringing of the bell, presumably on Lexington Common, about an hour before daybreak, on the morning of the 19th.

He was then in Woburn, about three miles away.

He and a companion soon reached the Common, and found Captain Parker and others, already assembled.

Parker begged the two to join his Company, and they did, taking their places in line, at once.

The British soon appeared, and the commander ordered the Lexington Company to lay down their arms and disperse, and gave the order to fire.

Wood thought that only powder had been used, for no one was hurt. Just then, he said, Parker ordered every man to take care of himself.

Not a gun was fired by any of Parker's Company, within his knowledge.

While they were dispersing the second platoon fired and killed some of our men.

One man told him some years afterwards^ that while the company was dispersing, he had given them the "guts of his gun."

Wood did not name the man, but that expression has been credited to Ebenezer Munroe, Jr.

Both Douglass and Wood actually knew so little of the happenings after the second volley, that it is safe to conclude they lost no time in accepting Pitcairn's suggestion to "disperse."

So much for Mr. Ripley's contribution to our historical literature.

Testimony of Paul Revere.

Paul Revere wrote an interesting account of his celebrated ride; and as he saw and heard just a little of that opening scene, which he included in that account, I will give it a place here.

After he had been released by the British officers, not far from the Common, he sought out Hancock and Adams, and accompanied them for about two miles in their flight. He and another man then returned to the Buckman Tavern to rescue a trunk of papers belonging to Hancock.

Looking out of the chamber window they saw the ministerial troops approaching and made haste to escape. They passed through Parker's Company, who were on the Common, and heard the commanding officer (meaning Parker) speak to his men to this purpose, and I quote Revere's words exactly, as his quotation of Parker's : —

"Lett the troops pass by, & don't molest them with out The begin first."

He had not got half gun shot off when the troops appeared in sight. They made a short halt, when one gun was fired. Revere heard the report, turned his head, and



saw the smoke in front of the troops, who then gave a great shout, ran a few paces, — and then the whole fired ; first irregular firing, then by platoons.

He could not then see our militia, for they were covered from him by a house.\*

Testimony of Rev. Jonas Clarke.

Rev. Jonas Clarke, pastor of the Church in Lexington, delivered a sermon April 19, 1776, (Goss's Life of Paul Revere, page 220) to commemorate the Commencement of Hostilities, to which he added a Narrative of the Principal Transactions of the Day. A valuable account, but presumably mostly hearsay, so not appropriate for consideration here.

I am glad to use, however, two sentences referring to what he actually saw: —

"After the militia company were dispersed and the firing ceased, the troops drew up and formed in a body, on the Common, fired a volley and gave three huzzas, by way of triumph, and as expressive of the joy of victory and glory of conquest! — ! — Of this transaction, I was a witness, having, at that time, a fair view of their motions, and being at the distance of not more than 70 or 80 rods from them."

Upon the foregoing, excepting the testimony of Paul Revere and the Rev. Jonas Clarke, are based all of the historical accounts, that do but scant justice to Parker's command.

The grave fault lies, not so much with the historian and the orator, who have used that material, as it does with the committees that prepared it, and the Congress that published it.

Fortunately for the military history of our town, there is a good treasury of better material, to which I invite your attention.

Official Report of Lieut.-Col. F. Smith.

The commander of the first detachment of the King's troops was Lieut.-Col. F. Smith.

His official report, addressed to Governor Gage, dated at Boston, April 22, relates clearly his mission to proceed to Concord, and destroy the ammunition, artillery, tents, etc., collected there;— of the utmost expedition and secrecy of his march; — of the country's intelligence and suspicion of his coming; — and of the signal guns and alarm bells along the way.

He speaks of detaching six light companies ahead, to seize the two Concord bridges; and of their arrival at Lexington, which part I will quote in his own language : —

"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-houses. 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."

Lieut.-Col. Smith's report for the entire expedition is equally as interesting and valuable, and not particularly unfair in any part of it.

He signed it: —

"F. Smith, Lieutenant-Colonel 10th Foot."

Major Pitcairn's Version.

Richard Frothingham, Jr., in his History of the Siege of Boston, second edition, quotes Stiles, in his manuscript diary, as to Pitcairn's version of the beginning of the firing: —

"Ezra Stiles, D.D., President of Yale College, in his Diary, under date of 1775, August 19 — says: 'Major Pitcairn, who was a good man in a bad cause, insisted upon it, to the day of his death, that the colonists fired first; and that he commanded not to fire, and endeavored to stay and stop the firing after it began : but then he told this with such circumstances as convince me that he was deceived, though on the spot. He does not say that he saw the colonists fire first. Had he said it, I would have believed him, being a man of integrity and honor. He expressly says he did not see who fired first; and yet believed the peasants began. His account is this: That riding up to them, he ordered them to disperse; which they not doing instantly, he turned about to order his troops to draw out so as to surround and disarm them. As he turned, he saw a gun in a peasant's hand, from behind a wall, flash in the pan without going off; and instantly, or very soon, two or three guns went off, by which he found his horse wounded, and also a man near him wounded. These guns he did not see; but believing they could not come from his own people, doubted not, and so asserted, that they came from our people, and that thus they began the attack. The impetuosity of the king's troops was such, that a promiscuous, uncommanded, but general fire took place, which Pitcairn could not

prevent; though he struck his staff or sword downwards with all earnestness, as the signal to forbear or cease firing.' "

Governor Gage's Version.

Under date of April 28, 1775, Jonathan Trumbull, Governor of Connecticut, addressed a letter to His Excellency, Thomas Gage, in which he admitted he was not sure of every part of his information, but by the best intelligence they had, the late transaction was a most unprovoked attack upon the lives and property of his majesty's subjects. He assured him that the people of that Colony abhorred the idea of taking up arms against the troops of their sovereign, — but were most firmly resolved to defend their rights and privileges to the last extremity.

He concluded, by asking if there was no way to prevent the unhappy dispute from coming to extremes ?

Governor Gage replied from Boston under date of May 3, in a lengthy letter, in which he assured Governor Trumbull that the information he had received as to the late excursion of the Troops was altogether injurious and contrary to the facts; and for his better information he enclosed a narrative of that affair taken from gentlemen of indisputable honor and veracity, who were eye witnesses of all the transactions of the day.

The official account by Governor Gage covers the entire excursion, as does the report of Lt. Col. Smith, but I will only consider the few sentences that are applicable to Lexington Common.

It is stated that Lt. Col. Smith first called his officers together, and gave orders that the troops should not fire unless fired upon.

After marching a few miles Major Pitcairn and six companies of light infantry were detached to take possession of the two bridges on the other side of Concord.

Within two miles of Lexington intelligence was received that about 500 men in arms were assembled to oppose the king's troops.

Major Pitcairn, galloping up to the head of the advance companies, was informed by two officers, that a man advanced from those that were assembled, presented his musket, and attempted to shoot them, but the piece flashed in the pan.

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 who had jumped over the wall fired four or five shots at the troops, wounded a man of the 10th 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. Then, without 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.

The account concludes with this sentence : —

"Thus this unfortunate affair has happened through the rashness and imprudence of a few people, who began firing on the troops at Lexington."-^

Ensign De Berniere's Version.

Early in the year Gen. Gage had sent Ensign De Berniere on a spying expedition for the purpose of discovering the location and amount of military stores in and around Concord and other places.

He accompanied the troops on their expedition as guide, and has left an interesting account of his experiences and observations on that day.

I will quote that part which tells of Lexington Common :

"The troops received no interruption in their march until they arrived at Lexington, a town eleven miles from Boston, where there were about 150 rebels drawn out in divisions, with intervals as wide as the front of the divisions ; the light infantry who marched in front halted, and Major Pitcairn came up immediately and cried out to the rebels to throw down their arms and disperse, which they did not do; he called out a second time but to no purpose; upon which he ordered our light infantry to advance and disarm them, which they were doing, when one of the rebels fired a shot, our soldiers returned the fire and killed about fourteen of them; there was only one of the 10th light infantry received a shot through his leg; some of them got into the church and fired from it, and were soon drove out. We then continued our march to Concord."

A British Officer's Version.

The Diary of a British Officer in Boston in 1775 was published in the Atlantic Monthly in April and May, 1877. It was furnished by R. H. Dana, Jr., who, in an editorial introduction, confessed that he did not know who was the author, but careful investigation had resulted in determining that it was either Lieut. Peregrine Francis Thorne, or Lieut. David Hamilton, both in the King's Own Regiment.\*

The writer of the Diary was in the expedition to Lexington, and speaks of reaching there at 5 o'clock, where he, to quote his own words: — "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 loth 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."

Statement by the Third Provincial Congress.

The Third Provincial Congress opened at Watertown, May 31.

On June 16, less than two months after the battle, and but twenty-two days after the publication of the Narrative and Depositions, it issued a Proclamation to the People.

It contained no claim of loyalty to the King, for it was intended more particularly for American readers^ a great majority of whom would not care to be longer classed as loyalists. It did not quite advocate colonial independence, — ^but love of the mother country was not professed.

Speaking of the scene on Lexington Common, it recited how eight men had been cruelly murdered, and then continued, — and I quote the exact language: —

"The fire was returned by some of the survivors, but their number was too inconsiderable to annoy the regular troops." \* \* \*

And a little further along it reads : —

"This action of the troops destroyed every hope of coming to any accommodation with them."

Thus it was officially recognized, by the highest civil authority, that out of Parker's sixty or seventy men, there were indeed some who had the courage to return the fire of Pitcairn's four hundred, a statement the previous Congress lacked the courage to express.

Testimony of Levi Harrington.

Daniel Harrington was the Clerk of Parker's Company, and stood in line on the Common that morning.

His son, Levi Harrington, then a youth in his fifteenth year, was a spectator of that thrilling scene. He lived until 1846, and a few months before his death gave to his son, Bowen Harrington, his recollections of the action.

That manuscript is now in the possession of some of his descendants, and I have been permitted to copy it.

He speaks of the mortal wounding of Jonas Parker by a ball passing through his body, and tells how he had placed his hat and ammunition on the ground between his feet, and fired at the British as they approached; how it exhausted the little remaining strength he had, and so he sank upon his knees. While in that position Parker attempted to load and fire again, but the Grenadiers reached him and put an end to his life with their bayonets.

Levi Harrington died in his 86th year. Had he lived to be a hundred, I doubt if that scene would have slipped from his memory.

Depositions Taken for the History of the Battle by Elias Phinney.

On Dec. 13, 1824, the Town of Lexington appointed a committee to collect and publish any reliable data as to the battle that might be found.

That committee consisted of nine members, and included Elias Phinney, who acted as the historian.

His book was first published in 1825.

Among the valuable facts which they assembled were the depositions of ten men, eight of whom were of Captain Parker's Company, and six of those were in line on that April morning. The others were spectators, or on the field during the day.

Those depositions were taken in 1824 and 1825, about fifty years after the battle; therefore the deponents had grown into old age.

As we look over that list of names, containing as it does some of the most substantial in the Revolutionary history of our town, I hardly think we shall be justified in questioning their memory or their mentality.

When one who has reached his three score years and ten can look back to his early youth — to some particular day, — to some particular hour, — to some particular moment, — when he stood before a line of blazing muskets, aimed to kill, — aimed to kill him, — such a scene can never be effaced from his memory.

He may forget trivial events of a dozen years ago, or even of yesterday; but he will ever remember the wounded and bleeding companion at his side, — the slain one at his feet !

Deposition of James Reed.

Of those ten depositions, that of James Reed, Jan. 19, 1825, is of the least value to us in the present consideration, for he tells only of the British prisoners captured soon after the regulars had left for Concord.

Deposition of Abijah Harrington.

Abijah Harrington, on April 4, 1825, swore that he heard the firing in the morning, and that soon after the troops left he went up to the meeting house, and to the spot where they stood when they fired on our men, and that he distinctly saw blood on the ground, which was a little descending, and that it had run along the road six or eight feet. He also swore that a day or two after, he \vas talking with Solomon Brown of the blood he had seen in the road, and that Brown told him it was where the regulars stood when he fired at them, and he must have hit some of them.

Harrington was then between fourteen and fifteen years of age.

Deposition of Amos Lock.

Amos Lock swore, on Dec. 29, 1824, that he and Ebenezer Lock responded to the ringing oi the bell, and on reaching the meeting house found the miUtia collecting. Shortly after, some person came up the road and reported that no regulars were coming, so they concluded to return to their families.

They had not proceeded far before they heard firing, and immediately returned.

Under cover of a wall they found Porter, a'bout twenty rods from where the British then were, shot through the body, upon which Ebenezer Lock took aim and fired at the British.

Deposition of Elijah Sanderson.

Elijah Sanderson's deposition of April 25, 1775, was used by the Provincial Congress, and. of course, contained nothing as to the heroism of Captain Parker's men.

However, he was induced to try again, -in a very much more detailed statement, on Dec. 17, 1824.

He belonged to Parker's Company, and had taken his place in line when the Captain ordered them to fall in.

Having no musket he realized he was of no use, and when the British were in full sight. left the line and stood as a spectator, about two rods away.

He saw the British commander ride up in advance, and heard his order to Parker's men to disperse, and then the order to fire, following it by firing his own pistol.

Sanderson looked for the effect, but saw no one fall, and thought the regulars could not be firing balls, so he did not move off.

After Parker's men had gone he saw the troops firing at one man, Solomon Brown. Then he knew they were firing balls, for he saw the wall behind which Brown stood smoke from the bullets hitting it.

The wall saved Brown, who "legged it," as Sanderson expressed it, just about the time that he did.

Sanderson returned after the British had gone, and saw blood in the road where they stood.

He assisted in carrying the dead into the meeting house.

Deposition of William Tidd.

William Tidd, Lieutenant in Parker's Company, was in line on that morning.

Bear in mind Tidd's deposition of April 25, 1775, in which he joined with thirty-three others, to the effect that while some of Parker's Company had reached the parade, others were coming up; and while their backs were turned the troops fired.

Tidd, at that time, tried to believe himself a loyal subject of King George.

After the Revolution, which commenced on that April morning, had cancelled his allegiance, he felt free to amplify his first version of the affair.

On Dec. 29, 1824, he swore that he heard one of the British officers say : —

"Lay down your arms and disperse, ye rebels !"

Then they fired. Tidd retreated up the north road, our present Hancock Street, pursued by an officer on horseback, calling on him to stop or he was a dead man.



Tidd sprang over a pair of bars, made a stand, and fired at his pursuer, who in turn made his escape.

That statement, that he tried to kill one of the King's officers, would not have sounded very loyal in 1775.

Deposition of Joseph Underwood.

Joseph Underwood, one of Parker's Company, swore, on March 7, 1825, that some of the men, on seeing the British approach, proposed to quit the field, but Captain Parker gave orders for every man to stand his ground, and said he would order the first man shot who offered to leave his post.

Underwood swore that he was confident that Parker did not order his men to disperse till the British troops had fired the second time.

His testimony was not taken in 1775.

Deposition of John Munroe.

Corporal John Munroe's deposition was taken Dec. 28, 1824. He swore that he was alarmed about 2 o'clock, — that he immediately repaired to the Common<sup>^</sup> and that Captain Parker ordered the roll called, and every man to load his gun with powder and ball. The men were then dismissed and ordered to remain within call of the drum.

About daybreak the drum beat, and Munroe took his station on the right. While the Company was collecting, Parker, then on the left, gave orders for every man to stand his ground until he should order them to leave. While the drum was still beating to arms the British appeared within ten or twelve rods of our line, and continued until within about eight rods.

An officer on horseback (whom Munroe erroneously thought to be Lieut. -Col. Smith), rode to the front and ordered our men to lay down their arms and disperse, and called them rebels.

Finding Parker's men kept their ground, he ordered his troops to fire. That order, not being immediately obeyed, he repeated it with an oath, when the front platoon did fire. Another order was given and then a general discharge from the front ranks.

After the first fire Corporal Munroe thought, and so stated to Ebenezer Munroe, Jr., who stood next to him on the left, that they had fired nothing but powder.

After the second volley Ebenezer Munroe, Jr., answered that it was more than powder, for he had received a wound in his arm, and that he would give them the guts of his gun.

Corporal John Munroe continued his statement by saying that then they both fired, aiming at the main body, the smoke preventing them from seeing anything more than the heads of some of their horses.

That statement as to smoke shows conclusively how soon after the volley fire was the Munroe return.

After the second fire Corporal John Munroe distinctly saw Jonas Parker struggling on the ground, with his gun in his hand, apparently attempting to load it. While in that situation the British came up and ran him through with the bayonet and killed him on the spot.

After firing the first time Munroe retreated about ten rods, loaded his gun a second time with two balls, fired at the British, and lost about a foot off the end of his gun barrel because of the extra heavy charge.

He also testified that he was confident other members of Parker's Company than himself and Ebenezer Munroe fired on the British. The regulars kept up their fire as long as any of Parker's men were in sight.

Isaac Muzzey, Jonathan Harrington, Robert Munroe, father of Corporal John, were killed near where the line was formed; Samuel Hadley and John Brown, after they had left the Common; Asahel Porter, the prisoner who attempted to escape, a few rods away; and Caleb Harrington as he was attempting to leave the meeting house, where he and others had gone before the British came up, for the purpose of removing the powder stored there.

Deposition of Ebenezer Munroe.

Ebenezer Munroe swore, on April 2, 1825, that Parker ordered his men to stand their ground and not to molest the regulars unless they meddled with them.

He spoke of the commanding British officer ordering them to disperse, and of his firing his pistol, and of the volley from the front rank.

After the first volley he received the wound in his arm, and as he turned to run discharged his own gun into the main body. As he fired, his face being towards them, a ball cut off part of one of his earlocks, and another passed between his arm and his body, marking his clothes.

As they were retreating one of the Company, Benjamin Sampson, he believed, who was running with him, turned and fired his piece.

"I am confident that it was the determination of most of our company, in case they were fired upon, to return the fire."

Ebenezer Munroe did not hear Captain Parker's order to disperse.

He believed at the time that some of their shots took effect, and was confirmed in that opinion by the observations of some prisoners taken in the afternoon, who stated that one of their soldiers was wounded in the thigh, and that another received a shot through the hand.

Deposition of Nathan Munroe.

Nathan Munroe's deposition was taken Dec. 22, 1824, and was to the effect that he was enrolled in Parker's Company, and knowing several British soldiers had gone up the road toward Concord, on the morning of April 18, he and Benjamin Tidd, at the request of Captain Parker, went to Bedford, and thence to Meriam's Corner, in Concord, to alarm the inhabitants of those towns.

When they returned to Lexington Common the alarm bell was ringing and the Company collecting.

He immediately got his arms and went to the parade, and heard Captain Parker's order to load, but not to fire unless they were fired upon.

About 5 o'clock the British appeared at the east end of the meeting house, near where our men were, and commenced firing on us.

Munroe got over the wall into Buckman's land and fired at them.

About the middle of the forenoon Captain Parker collected part of his Company and marched them towards Concord, and Nathan was one of them.

They met the regulars about noon in the bounds of Lincoln, retreating towards Boston, and fired on them continuously until they met their reinforcements in Lexington.

Deposition of Orderly Sergeant William Munroe.

Orderly Sergeant William Munroe's deposition was taken March 7, 1825.

At the time of the battle he was the landlord of Munroe Tavern.

Sergeant Munroe made oath that he was informed early in the evening of April 18 by Solomon Brown that he had seen nine British officers coming leisurely up the road from Boston, and as the wind occasionally blew their top coats aside he could see that they were armed.

Sergeant Munroe, fearing they intended to capture Hancock and Adams, assembled a guard of eight men, and proceeded to the home of Rev. Mr. Clarke, where they were stopping.

About midnight Revere rode up and gave the alarm.

Later Munroe conducted them to the north part of the town, and then returned to the Common, where he arrived about 2 o'clock.

Captain Parker and his Company were paraded on the Common, a little in the rear of the meeting house.

A messenger returned from towards Boston and reported that he could not learn there were any troops on the road from Boston. Parker then dismissed his men, with orders to assemble at the beat of the drum.

About daylight Captain Thaddeus Bowman rode up and gave the information that the regulars were near. The drum was ordered to be beat, and Munroe was commanded by Parker to parade the Company in two ranks, which he did, a few rods northerly from the meeting house.

The British came up, almost on the run. Major Pitcairn and another officer, whom Munroe erroneously called Col. Smith, rode up some rods in advance of their troops, and within a few rods of Parker's Company. One gave the order to "lay down your arms, you rebels, and disperse!" and immediately fired his pistol. After a moment's conversation with the other officer Pitcairn advanced to within four rods, and bringing down his sword with great force, and with an oath, gave the order to fire.

The front platoon of eight or nine men fired, but none of our men were killed or wounded. They immediately gave a second fire, when our Company began to retreat. As Munroe left the field he saw a person firing at the British from Buckman's back door, which was near his left. He was afterwards told that the same person, after firing from the back door, went to the front door and fired from there.

"How many of our Company fired before they retreated I cannot say; but I am confident some of them did."

He testified to having seen Jonas Parker standing in the ranks, with his balls and flints in his hat on the ground between his feet, and heard him declare that he would never run.

He was shot down at the second fire, and when Munroe left he saw him struggling on the ground, attempting to load his gun, which he had, no doubt, discharged at the British.

As he lay on the ground they run him through with the bayonet.

Munroe concluded his rather lengthy and very interesting deposition by reciting how the British dressed their wounded at his Tavern, which he had left in care of a lame man by the name of Raymond, who supplied them with whatever the house afforded.

Afterwards, when Raymond was leaving, the regulars shot him, and he was found dead within, a few rods of the house.

Of those ten deponents there were but two who gave their testimony to the Provincial Congress, Sanderson and Tidd.

The other eight, if solicited, refused to comply.

I have given a candid and complete summary of all of the official reports, and of all of the sworn statements of participants and eyewitnesses that I have ever found, so far as they apply to Lexington Common.

They do not agree with each other, nevertheless it is easy to arrive at this conclusion, that the first armed resistance to the British invasion was on Lexington Common.

As so many historians have only used the Narrative and Depositions of the Provincial Congress it seems to me that it would be a desirable work for the Lexington Historical Society to publish it in full, or at least an analysis of that material, and place in opposition to it, equally as full, all of the other material that I have submitted.

There need be no fear of the result. Not only publish it, but publish it thoroughly and world wide; not in thin pamphlet form, with perishable paper covers, but as a real book, in sturdy binding, thick enough to carry a golden title on its back, thick enough to stand alone on the library shelf.

Such a book has never been printed. In the interest of truth such a one is really needed.

For more than seven score years that scene has been misrepresented. By little effort, and by little expense, we can make available, in convenient and compact form, all of the original material.

We fondly cherish the names of those who were slain.

Let us also remember the names of those who fired back, and so changed a massacre into a battle; and so gave to Lexington a place in the world's history.

Possibly some day a modest tablet in bronze may spell them out :

SOLOMON BROWN, EBENEZER LOCK, EBENEZER MUNROE, JR.,  
CORPORAL JOHN MUNROE, NATHAN MUNROE, JONAS PARKER,  
LIEUTENANT WILLIAM TIDD,

AND POSSIBLY

BENJAMIN SAMPSON.

When we stand on that hallowed ground let the world stand with us, — not to view a field where martyrs were slain, but to look upon the battle ground where our soldier heroes dared to fight, — and dared to die!

By thd Sams Author

The MOST COMPLETE Account Ever Published.

THE BATTLE OF APRIL 19. 1775.