

How to Use the Digital History Reader

Evidence 2: Testimony of Matthew Murray, October 26, 1770

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Introduction

Seven months after the protest and shootings known as the Boston Massacre, Captain Thomas Preston, who commanded the soldiers in King Street that evening, went on trial for murder. Matthew Murray served as a defense witness in the trial and was called by Preston's lawyers to give evidence they believed would help acquit their client. There were no formal court reporters at that time, and all that remains of Murray's testimony is an anonymous summary found among the papers of John Adams, one of Preston's lawyers.

Questions to Consider

- How might the nature and source of Matthew Murray's account influence how historians read it?
- According to Murray, how did members of the crowd act toward the soldiers?
- How does Murray's description of the soldiers' firing on the crowd differ from that of William Wyat?

Document

Heard the Bells and ran out and heard what was in King street. I went in and got the handle of a Broom. Went to King Street. Saw no Soldiers. Went to Murrays Barracks. The Soldiers were gone. They bid me go home. Went into King Street, heard the Barbers boy say this is the man struck me with the breech of his Gun. The Centinel went to the steps and loaded. They dared him to fire. The Guard came down. I saw 'em load. Somebody spoke to the Captain and told him he had best withdraw none of the People would interrupt him. I stood next to the Grenadier. Saw a stick or piece of Ice strike him upon his right side. On which he instantly fired and I went off. I heard no order given. I stood within two yards of the Captain. He was in the front talking with a Person, I dont know who. I was looking at the Captain when the Gun was fired. The Soldier stood on the Captains right. I saw two or three Snow balls thrown at the Soldiers before the Gun was

fired, but none after for I went off immediately. The Captain had a Sword in his hand. I know not whether he had a Surtout on but believe he had. I know Capt. Preston by sight. The Prisoner is the Man. A Woman crowded by and spoke to the second Soldier on the right. I think if the Captain had given orders anything loud I should have heard.

Source:

The original document is in the Public Record Office, London. The above version was taken from a scan of the original published in L. Kinvin Wroth and Hillier B. Zobel, eds., *The Legal Papers of John Adams*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), 3: 69-70.