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# THE NEW ENGLAND QUARTERLY

DECEMBER, 1944

## THE NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF LEXINGTON AND CONCORD

FRANK LUTHER MOTT

THE commencement of actual hostilities between the English troops who had been quartered in Boston and the American militia who had been arming to defend their rights was a major "news-break" of the eighteenth century. The men of 1775 did not need the perspective of history to realize its importance; they understood at once that by this event they were plunged into "all the horrors of a civil war." It was big news by any standard, and everyone knew it was big news.

How, then, did the newspapers of the American colonies cover this great event? Did they all have their correspondents on the scene, ready to rush off hourly reports to be hurried on the streets in the columns of extras? Not at all; their coverage was conditioned by the primitive techniques of eighteenth-century news-gathering, by such facilities of communication as existed, and by the stage of development at which the newspaper had arrived. Perhaps as good a way as can be devised to study the American newspaper of these times is to see it in action in the coverage of this important event.

On April 19, 1775, thirty-seven newspapers were in course of publication in the thirteen colonies which were later to form the United States. All were weeklies except the *Pennsylvania Evening Post* (later to become the first American daily), which was then being published three times a week. They varied in page-size from 12 x 19 inches to 8 x 13; nearly all were four-page papers, though some of the more prosperous often added two or even four pages as a supplement to accommodate large advertising patronage.

None of them had even part-time correspondents in any of the news centers, if by "correspondent" one means a reporter who might be depended upon to cover important news with regularity. The nearest approach to a correspondent that any of them had was a postmaster-friend, or a friend in the shipping trade, who would write occasionally to send routine items, mainly of the sailings of ships, the weather, or the movements of the governor. Means of news-gathering were three: other newspapers, from England, the Continent, and the other colonies; letters of friendship, of business, or of official or semi-official affairs; and word of mouth by ship-captains, travelers, or newly arrived visitors.

The system may be said to have been founded upon the method of exchange of news by the newspapers themselves. In default of correspondents and newsgathering agencies, the papers by common agreement relied upon whichever one of their number was nearest to the scene of a "news-break" to cover that event; and then all the others helped themselves to the story as published in that paper, commonly without credit. Of course, if some letter with this news came to hand, or if some traveler or official courier brought in something about the event before the printed paper was received, the editor might take advantage of the windfall. But the newspapers mainly depended on one another for the more important news. Though home news was greatly slighted in general, local events which were considered really important must be covered, not only for the paper's own readers but for the other

papers at a distance. This made the exchange system among newspapers extremely important, and a paper which did not keep up its exchange list was hated as an outlaw. Such a system also made the papers in such large and central towns as Boston, New York, and Philadelphia the most important "exchanges" on the lists of papers in the smaller towns.

Before we examine the sources of the news reports of Lexington and Concord, however, we shall find it interesting to see how the newspapers of that time "played the story"—where they placed it and how they headlined it. It would undoubtedly surprise anyone unacquainted with the colonial papers to know that only two of them—the *New-Hampshire Gazette* and the *Georgia Gazette*—put this really big news on the first page. We may be sure that this was not because the editors evaluated the news improperly; they fully realized its importance. The reason was that front pages were not then the bill-boards of the newspaper, on which to blazon the most sensational news. As in England, the front page was the most dignified and often the heaviest part of a very sober-sided newspaper, and was given over to the printing of some document, like an address to the King, or to the proceedings of a colonial assembly, or to some serial essay or disquisition on public affairs. The only surprising thing in the handling of the bloody business at Lexington is that two papers did place their report of it on the front page: here were two editors who were unconventional enough to "play" this sensational news on page one. News of the colonies—all local and domestic news—properly went on pages two and three, and that is where all the other editors put their accounts of the Lexington and Concord fights.

And how was the news headed? With but two exceptions it was headed only with the name of the town at which the story originated (the paper's home town if the story was derived from a letter received there), set merely in capitals of the body-type of the next size larger, with perhaps a line or two in italics telling how the information was received. This

was, of course, no headline at all in the modern sense; it conveyed no intimation whatever of what was in the story. But it was again strictly in the tradition of English and colonial journalism. Indeed, there were some papers which did not even give the Lexington story the kind of head that has been described, but simply tucked it in following other news items from the same source. Of the two exceptions noted, one—the *Maryland Journal*—merely made a two-line head in pica caps of the salutation of the letter it printed: “TO ALL FRIENDS OF AMERICAN LIBERTY.” The other was the *New-Hampshire Gazette*, one of the two papers which gave the news anything like a headline in the modern sense. This headline consisted of the two words “BLOODY NEWS” and was set modestly in pica caps. Daniel Fowle, editor of the paper which alone of all the colonial press gave both position and headline to the Lexington story, was, as we are told by Isaiah Thomas, who knew him well, “pacific in his disposition, agreeable in his manners, liberal in his sentiments, and attached to the cause of his country.” He is most noteworthy as the founder of the *New-Hampshire Gazette*, which for many years before its suspension in 1943 was the oldest of American newspapers.

Let us turn now to matters of communication. How long did it take the great news to reach other towns and villages, and when was it published there? What with bad roads and slow sailing vessels, inter-colonial communication was slow; but in harmony with the old saw which tells us that bad news travels fast, the report of the fight at Lexington made surprising time. This was chiefly because the Patriot committees of New England saw how important it was that the other colonies should be fired simultaneously from the Massachusetts flame, and that to bring this about it was essential to get the news of the killing of the Patriot minutemen out over the whole country at once. With this object, they hurried the reports southward, sometimes dispatching their own couriers, and other Committees of Correspondence cooperated by sending their messengers on to the next towns, and so the news

went at top speed. John H. Scheide has told in detail<sup>1</sup> how the Palmer "Alarm" was rushed southward by expresses. Mails were, by official order, held up in New England, but the Patriot couriers sometimes carried newspapers containing the Lexington story, as well as the official Committee letters; so editors were not wholly deprived of the "exchanges" upon which they so much depended. The New Bern, North Carolina, Committee endorsement on the Wallingford message directed the next town on the route to "send all the bundle of papers forward as soon as possibly you can."<sup>2</sup>

But even though the news traveled fast, for those times at least, prompt publication was a different thing. These papers were weeklies, and publication of anything, however important, had to await the regular press-day. The advancement of the set time of printing was very rare indeed, and we are aware of only one such piece of irregularity in the handling of the Lexington story; this was an advancement of one day by the *Connecticut Journal* at New Haven, which had received its first news of the event by express three or four days earlier. The outstanding examples of enterprise were the issue of "handbills" by five colonial publishers between publication dates in order to give the Lexington news more promptly. Indeed, three of these publishers printed two each of the little extras, the first giving the initial news report (Palmer's "Alarm") and the second a more extended story. These "handbills" were small sheets one or two columns wide; strictly speaking, they were not extras, since they did not bear the name of the paper. With these exceptions, the newspaper publishers stuck to regular issues, even under the impact of the news of the outbreak of war.

The first near-by paper, then, to have a press-day after the battles of Lexington and Concord on Wednesday, April 19, was the *Boston News-Letter*, oldest of colonial papers and thoroughly Tory in sympathies, which went to press on

<sup>1</sup> *Proceedings* of the American Antiquarian Society, L (1940), 49-79.

<sup>2</sup> Scheide, 74.

Thursdays. The *News-Letter*, frightened at the thought of what was likely soon to happen to Boston Tories, printed a paragraph of only twenty-six lines about the events of the day before, ending with this sentence:

The Reports concerning this unhappy Affair, and the Causes that concurred to bring on an Engagement, are so various, that we are not able to collect any Thing consistent or regular, and cannot therefore with certainty give our Readers any further Account of this shocking Introduction to all the Miseries of a Civil War.

The next day, Friday, April 21, was press-day for Ezekiel Russell's *Salem Gazette, or Newbury and Marblehead Advertiser*, published at Salem, some twenty miles from Boston and about the same distance from Lexington. Russell had gathered a much more comprehensive story, which he told briefly and straightforwardly, with estimates of the numbers engaged, killed, and wounded on each side. This story was included in the famous "coffin broadside" which Russell printed two or three weeks later under the black display heading "A BLOODY BUTCHERY BY THE BRITISH, OR THE RUNAWAY FIGHT OF THE REGULARS." Included also in the broadside was the story of its Salem rival, the *Essex Gazette*, with a list of killed and wounded, and "A Funeral Elegy to the Immortal Memory of Those Worthies Who Were Slain in the Battle of Concord," composed in the best style of contemporary bathos. Lined up at the top of this broadside were forty small coffin-shaped figures, each marked with the name of one of the minutemen who had been killed by the British. The whole sheet was dressed in typographical mourning by means of turned rules. This was the first of six editions of this famous broadside. Later issues showed two additional coffin cuts in honor of two minutemen who had died since the first was printed. It was designed for Patriots "either to frame and glass, or otherwise to preserve in their houses . . . as a perpetual memorial."

Friday the twenty-first was also the publication day of the

*New-Hampshire Gazette*, printed at Portsmouth, over forty miles north of Salem on the postroad, and the northernmost town in the colonies to have a newspaper. The news had come to Portsmouth early Thursday morning by an express of the Committee of Correspondence of Newburyport, dispatched the evening before. It has already been noted that this paper gave the news a headline and front-page position. First came the letter brought by the express, signed by James Hudson, which gave first a short, excited, and confused account and then an appeal for "the readiest and fullest assistance in your power." This was followed by a paragraph of details given by the express-rider by word of mouth, including an error in the date of the fight, which was given as the eighteenth. This was followed in turn by news brought by a second messenger from Newburyport, who arrived at one o'clock Thursday, and that by some details from a third messenger who got in at six o'clock. Thus Editor Fowle filled the whole of one column of Friday morning's paper with the "bloody news."

Saturday was the press-day of the *Providence Gazette and Country Journal*. Providence had received the first news of the fighting on Wednesday evening, in a message to a Patriot committee there. A general meeting, including militia officers, was immediately assembled; two expresses were dispatched to Lexington for further news, and others to towns to the westward to spread the alarm; and a thousand militia were mobilized on Thursday and were ready to march. The expresses sent to Lexington were back by Friday morning, and the body of the *Gazette's* account consists of their report. Editor John Carter was himself a member of the Providence Committee of Correspondence, and was in the midst of all this activity. Three new elements enter the reports of the battles with the *Providence Gazette* story: first, the recital of British atrocities, such as killing all the enemy wounded and bayoneting the sick and aged in private houses (though setting fire to churches had already been mentioned in the *New-Hampshire Gazette* story; the killing of babes was to come later); second, the

controversy about who fired first at Lexington—the British troops or the American minutemen; and third, the editorial appeal as a part of the news story. Carter's story ends:

Thus, through the sanguinary Measures of a wicked Ministry, and the Readiness of a standing Army to execute their Mandates, has commenced the American Civil War, which will hereafter fill an important Page in History. That it may speedily terminate in a full Restoration of our Liberties, and the Confusion of all who have aimed at an Abridgement of them, should be the earnest Desire of every real Friend to Great-Britain and America.

The *Providence Gazette* story was the best that had thus far appeared, and it was reprinted in at least three later papers in other towns. It supplemented the account of the two Lexington expresses by that of "a Gentleman arrived from Concord" somewhat later, and by some rumors—among them one that the British troops were burning houses Friday night, a great light having been seen in the direction of Boston. This was later explained as a fire in the woods south of Boston.

Late on the same Saturday which saw the appearance of the *Providence Gazette* there appeared a broadside at Norwich, Connecticut, about fifty miles by road southwest of Providence, which contained most of Carter's story. That was fast work; and though the broadside is dated "10 o'Clock, P. M.," it was probably distributed considerably later in the night. The first news of the Lexington and Concord fights had reached Norwich Friday morning by an express sent from Pomfret, bearing a letter from Ebenezer Williams, who had the news from an express dispatched from Woodstock, who had, in turn, taken it "from the mouth of the Express that arrived there." All these expresses were part of the system organized by Patriot Committees of Correspondence with the purpose of arousing the country to face what seemed an imminent campaign of the British troops to subjugate all the New England villages. Added as a postscript to the Williams letter which was published in the broadside, or "handbill."

were a few details reported by a Plainfield merchant who had just returned from Boston, and who had "conversed with an Express from Lexington."

Monday, April 24, was press-day for the *Boston Evening-Post*. The week before the outbreak of hostilities at Lexington and Concord, there had been no fewer than five papers published in the town of Boston. But the two strongly Patriot presses—those of the *Gazette* and the *Massachusetts Spy*—threatened with suppression by the royal government, or worse, fled the city shortly before the ill-fated nineteenth of April, the *Gazette* going up the river to Watertown, and the *Spy* across country to Worcester. The three Tory papers could certainly find no home in the rebellious country villages, while in Boston they faced the enmity of the people, even when protected by the troops. And so the *Post-Boy*, disheartened by this prospect, shut up shop during the confusion of the first hostilities, and was never again published. This left two papers—the *News-Letter*, whose publication day made it (as already noted) the earliest newspaper reporter of the battles, and the *Evening-Post*. The Fleet brothers, publishers of the latter paper, were quite as discouraged as the printers of the *Post-Boy* had been; but they got out one issue after the battles of Lexington and Concord, in which they announced the paper's suspension "till Matters are in a more settled State." It was never resumed. It was this last issue of the *Evening-Post* that was published on Monday, April 24. In it appeared the following three-line statement under the Boston heading:

The unhappy Transactions of last Week are so variously related that we shall not at present undertake to give any particular Account thereof.

So the *Boston Evening-Post*, closing its eyes to perhaps the greatest "newsbreak" of the century, gave up the ghost. The *News-Letter* was left alone in Boston, where it persisted irregularly and unprosperously, until the British evacuation.

The *Newport Mercury* also printed on Mondays. The news of the Lexington bloodshed had come to Newport on Friday, whereupon an express was immediately sent to Providence for further details. The messenger returned Saturday evening with a copy of the *Gazette* published that morning; and the *Gazette* story, with an additional paragraph comprising some reports which the messenger had picked up in Providence, furnished the *Newport Mercury's* account.

The news apparently reached Hartford either late Friday or early Saturday; it was published in the *Connecticut Courant* on Monday. The *Courant* story began like that of the *Boston News-Letter*, but it soon diverged into a much more detailed and colorful report of the engagement, evidently derived from several sources. This story was without any heading, only a paragraph break separating it from the preceding material.

The great news reached New York by sea from Newport about six o'clock on Sunday morning, interfering with the customary Sabbath worship of many of the Patriots. At noon an express, probably Israel Bissel, who had brought the Palmer "Alarm" all the way from Watertown, Massachusetts, since Wednesday morning, rode into town. To Palmer's message, which Bissel had brought to a dozen Connecticut villages and towns, had been added (at Fairfield) the Williams letter and its postscript. These reports furnished material for a "handbill" which was published in New York Sunday afternoon, probably by John Holt, of the *Journal*. That evening the Sons of Liberty took over certain stores of arms in the custody of the city, and on Monday they marched up and down the streets, beating a drum and enlisting volunteers for the American army.

Monday was the publication day of Hugh Gainé's *New-York Gazette and Mercury*. That paper stated that the early reports from Rhode Island and New London had been discredited, but that about noon on Sunday an express had arrived bringing reports which were evidently convincing even

to Gaine, since he published them. These were the letters which had been published by broadside the day before.

An express had in the meantime been sent on to Philadelphia with the Palmer "Alarm" and the Williams letter. He arrived at five o'clock Monday evening, to find John Dunlap getting out a "Postscript" to the regular edition of his *Pennsylvania Packet* printed that morning. Dunlap made room for the news on the second page of his supplement; but the Bradfords, of the *Journal*, at the same time issued a single-column "handbill" with the identical material. The next day, Tuesday the twenty-fifth, the same matter appeared in Ben Towne's diminutive Philadelphia tri-weekly, the *Pennsylvania Evening-Post*, and, in a German translation, in the *Philadelphische Staatsbote*.

Tuesday was also the press-day of the *Essex Gazette*, published in Salem, Massachusetts. Since Salem was close to the scene of action, and its editors had had five days to gather up the details, their story, with its list of killed and wounded on the Patriot side, is rather commonly regarded as the most satisfactory early account of the battles. That being the case, it will be interesting to give some attention to its form.

A present-day news story based upon the same set of facts might begin something like this:

Open war broke out last Wednesday between the British troops and the Massachusetts militia. The British were decisively defeated in their attempt to capture Patriot leaders and arms at Lexington and Concord, with the loss of 112 killed and 103 wounded, while the militia lost 40 killed and 20 wounded.

The *Essex Gazette* story began:

Last Wednesday, the 19th of April, the Troops of his *Brittanick* Majesty commenced Hostilities upon the People of this Province, attended with Circumstances of Cruelty not less brutal than what our venerable Ancestors received from the vilest Savages of the Wilderness. The Particulars relative to this interesting Event, by

which we are involved in all the Horrors of a civil War, we have endeavored to collect as well as the present confused State of Affairs will admit.

After this "lead," the story goes on to relate the events in strict chronological order, beginning with the embarkation of the troops "at the Bottom of the Common in Boston," their landing "a little Way up Charles River"; tracing their movements to Lexington, where they encountered a body of militia, and on to Concord; and then describing the retreat. The main story is followed by a paragraph detailing reported atrocities of the British, and that by the following paragraph:

We have the pleasure to say, that, notwithstanding the highest Provocations given by the Enemy, not one Instance of Cruelty, that we have heard of, was committed by our victorious Militia; but, listening to the merciful Dictates of the Christian Religion, they "breathed higher Sentiments of Humanity."

The account closes with a list of American killed, wounded, and missing, an estimate of the British casualties, and an expression of sympathy for "the Friends and Relations of our deceased Brethren, who gloriously sacrificed their lives in fighting for their Liberties and their Country."

The next day after this story was published, the *Essex Journal*, of Newburyport, reprinted it in full and with credit. This was just a week after the battles; but the *Journal's* regular press-day was Wednesday, and the story waited.

On this day, Wednesday, April 26, a day earlier than its regular press-day, appeared the *Connecticut Journal*, of New Haven, which reprinted the story that its contemporary at Hartford, the *Connecticut Courant*, had published two days earlier. April 26 was the press-day of two more Philadelphia papers, the *Pennsylvania Gazette* and the *Pennsylvania Journal*, both of which reprinted the material of the *Journal's* "handbill," with added paragraphs presenting parts of letters recently received from the North by Philadelphians.

The news appears not to have reached Baltimore until the twenty-sixth—probably early in the morning, since Mary Katherine Goddard got out a reprint of the Philadelphia “handbill” without waiting to print it in her *Maryland Journal*, regularly published that day. She used the same type in the paper that had been set for the broadside.

The next day, Thursday the twenty-seventh, the *Maryland Gazette*, in Annapolis, reprinted the Goddard handbill, saying it was “received yesterday.” Thursday was also the press-day of Hugh Gainé’s two competitors in New York—John Holt’s *Journal* and Rivington’s *New-York Gazetteer*. The *Journal* had a fuller account of the fighting than any other paper had contained up to this time: it ran to nearly three long and wide columns, and consisted of letters from various Massachusetts and Connecticut points. All were unsigned except one from the Committee at Wallingford, which had been brought by express through Fairfield, Norwalk, Stamford, Greenwich, and New Haven. Rivington’s paper published the New York “handbill,” the Wallingford communication, extracts from a letter from Boston “to a Merchant in this City,” and the following editorial comment:

The late melancholy accounts from Boston have filled the minds of the good people of this city with the most anxious concern. It was the wish of every generous mind that the unhappy contest with the mother country would have been compromised without the shedding of blood; and the time when it would become necessary to enter into an unnatural civil war with those, with whom we are connected by the tenderest ties, has ever been deprecated as the most horrid calamity. May the Almighty interpose his gracious providence and avert the impending miseries, and may the blessings of peace be restored to this great continent upon the principles of liberty and the constitution!

Friday, April 28, was press-day for the *Connecticut Gazette*, of New London. Since the news from Lexington had reached New London on the preceding Friday at seven in the eve-

ning—too late to be printed in that week's *Gazette*—it had to be left over a full week. Even then, Editor Timothy Green had been so busy with “public affairs” that he had had time to get out only a “half-sheet paper”—that is, two pages. His account of the outbreak of war is his own forty-line summary. He apologized to his readers as follows:

The Printer requests his Customers to excuse the issuing only a half-sheet Paper this Week—the alarming and confused State of public Affairs, for some Days past, having made it difficult for him to execute his usual Business.

On this same Friday, the *Pennsylvania Mercury* published its first account of the troubles in the North. It reprinted the “handbill”—its fifth appearance in the Philadelphia papers—and the Wallingford communication, together with several letters from New England and New York. One of them—from Boston—had come in by mail, so that we know the post was now riding again, at least between New York and Philadelphia. Altogether, the *Mercury* devoted four columns to the battles—more than any other colonial paper in its first account.

The next day, Saturday the twenty-ninth, the *Pennsylvania Ledger*, sixth and last of the Philadelphia papers to carry the news, was issued. Its story consisted of four letters from Boston and Hartford, three of which had appeared the day before in the *Mercury*.

Also on Saturday appeared the first Virginia paper to print the story. This was Dixon and Hunter's *Virginia Gazette*. The news had arrived in Williamsburg only the night before, and the *Gazette* printed the contents of the “handbill” on the third page of its Supplement. Purdie's rival *Virginia Gazette* would not be published until the next Thursday; so he issued the same matter in a broadside.

John Dunlap started a brand-new paper in Baltimore on Monday, May 2. In its first number he printed the Wallingford letter and extracts from two unofficial letters giving details of the fighting at Lexington and Concord.

On May 3, Isaiah Thomas, who had now got his press set up at Worcester, printed the first copy of the *Massachusetts Spy* to be issued in that town. His story of the battles in that issue is probably as well known as that of the *Essex Gazette*—possibly better. It begins:

AMERICANS! forever bear in mind the BATTLE of LEXINGTON!—where British Troops, unmolested and unprovoked, wantonly, and in a most inhuman manner fired upon and killed a number of our countrymen, then robbed them of their provisions, ransacked, plundered and burnt their houses! nor could the tears of defenceless women, some of whom were in the pains of child-birth, and cries of helpless babes, nor the prayers of old age, confined to beds of sickness, appease their thirst for blood!—or divert them from their DESIGN of MURDER and ROBBERY!

In his story of the fight, Thomas emphasized the claim that the British fired first upon the Continentals, who “did not even return the fire.” He also recounted all the atrocity stories which had become current. Thomas had himself taken part in the running fight with the British troops, and by virtue of this story he has some title to be called the first of American war correspondents.

Rind’s *Virginia Gazette*, Williamsburg, appeared on Wednesday, May 4, just two weeks after the battles. Its story consisted of the letters from Boston which had appeared in the *Pennsylvania Mercury*. The next day Purdie’s *Virginia Gazette* appeared with precisely the same matter.

The big news reached North Carolina by sea. It arrived by a vessel which docked at New Bern on Wednesday, May 4, from Newport, Rhode Island, and was published in the *North-Carolina Gazette* the next day. The story was given in a letter from Newport, dated April 22, the day after the citizens of that town had first heard the news, and was based on the report of “a gentleman from Cambridge.” Either the gentleman or the typesetter insisted on spelling the name of the Massachusetts village “Lixington.”

The news came to Charleston, South Carolina, on Monday morning, May 9, "by the Brigantine, Industry, Captain Allen, who sailed the 25th ult. from Salem," thus striking the press-day of the *South-Carolina Gazette and Country Journal*. The account of the battles was in the form of the *Essex Gazette* story, supplemented by a few additional details from Captain Allen. Three days later, on Thursday, the twelfth, the *South-Carolina and American General Gazette*, also of Charleston, used the same story, but substituted for Captain Allen's remarks an extract from a letter received in Charleston from a British officer in Boston. This letter was far from rancorous; indeed, it praised the bravery of the "Provincials."

The southernmost newspaper in the colonies was the *Georgia Gazette*, at Savannah. Just when the news of Lexington and Concord was received in Savannah, and by what means, is not clear; but it came sometime between May 24 and 31, probably by sea from New York. It was published on the thirty-first, just six weeks after the event. The main story was the one originally published in the *Providence Gazette*.

Thus we come to the end of the original or first newspaper stories of the Lexington-Concord engagement. Through the month of May, several of the papers which published the earliest reports printed supplementary accounts, lists of killed and wounded, and so on. An essay entitled "The Rural Heroes: or, the Battle of Concord" was published in the *Newport Mercury* May 8, and copied in the *New-Hampshire Gazette* and perhaps in other papers. At least five papers published General Gage's "Circumstantial Account of an Attack that Happened on the 19th of April, 1775, on His Majesty's Troops," some with interpolated comments and denials. At least as many printed the score or more of depositions made by members and groups of members of the American militia regarding the moot question of who fired first at Lexington and Concord; and many published the official statement of the Provincial Convention of Massachusetts Bay, giving the details of the action. Finally, some of the papers printed a series

of "intercepted letters from the soldiery in Boston," apparently first published in the *Boston Gazette*, newly established at Watertown, on May 12. Many of these letters, written to relatives at home, gave details of the fight of April 19.

In one respect the coverage of this great news event was not typical of colonial journalism: letters and papers received by the post were comparatively unimportant in connection with it. The fact that the post had been "stopt" for the time, in New England at least, had something to do with this aberration; but the main reason was that the Committees of Correspondence mistrusted the government control of the post. It would have been too slow, anyway; the Patriot organization needed expresses who would ride at night as well as in daylight, despite dangers.

Consequently, the Committee expresses were the chief means of communication in the coverage of this news-break. Sailing ships in two or three instances were of major importance. Only three stories can be said to have been first-hand; all the others were made up of information from the following sources, listed in the order of their relative importance: (1) bulletins of the Committees of Correspondence (more than a third of the original newspaper accounts used Palmer's "Alarm" and the Williams letter), (2) reprints of the three first-hand stories, (3) letters received by obliging friends of the editor from gentlemen living near the scene of the trouble, and (4) word-of-mouth reports of travelers who had just come from that scene. Most of the stories, indeed, utilized more than one—some of them all—of these news sources. Finally, the time-lag between "news-break" and publication, due to faulty communication and the weekly issue of newspapers, varied from one day to six weeks.