

# *A Dear-Bought Victory*

## **THE BATTLE OF BUNKER HILL AND THE SIEGE OF BOSTON, 1775–1776**

by Daniel T. Davis and Phillip S. Greenwalt

Unedited Excerpt

EMERGING REVOLUTIONARY WAR SERIES



*Robert Orrison, series editor*

© 2026 Daniel T. Davis and Phillip S. Greenwalt

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

First edition, first printing

Library of Congress Control Number: 2026016151

ISBN-13: 978-1-61121-783-4 (paperback)

ISBN-13: 978-1-61121-784-1 (ebook)



Savas Beatie LLC

989 Governor Drive, Suite 101

El Dorado Hills, California 95762

916-941-6896 / [sales@savasbeatie.com](mailto:sales@savasbeatie.com) / [www.savasbeatie.com](http://www.savasbeatie.com)

All Savas Beatie titles are available for bulk purchase discounts. Contact us for details.

Proudly published, printed, and warehoused in the United States of America.

# Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS viii

FOREWORD by *Christian Di Spigna* xi

PROLOGUE xix

CHAPTER ONE: Aftermath of the Battle Road 1

CHAPTER TWO: Affairs Wear a Serious Aspect 9

CHAPTER THREE: Undoubted Veracity 21

CHAPTER FOUR: Any Man Who Shall Quit His Rank 31

CHAPTER FIVE: An Eye for Good Ground 37

CHAPTER SIX: The First Attack 45

CHAPTER SEVEN: The Second Attack 53

CHAPTER EIGHT: The Loss We Have Sustained 63

CHAPTER NINE: The Siege 73

CHAPTER TEN: A Noble Train of Artillery 95

CHAPTER ELEVEN: Evacuation Day 111

APPENDIX A: Walking Tours 119

APPENDIX B: “The Whites of their Eyes”: Myth or Reality? by *Phillip S. Greenwalt* 133

APPENDIX C: The Liberty Tree: Casualty of War by *Chris Mackowski* 139

APPENDIX D: Bunker Hill in Memory by *Kate Egner* 147

APPENDIX E: From Cambridge to Quebec: The Continental Invasion of Canada  
by *Daniel T. Davis* 155

ORDER OF BATTLE 163

SUGGESTED READING 167

ABOUT THE AUTHORS 170

Footnotes for this volume are available at  
<https://emergingcivilwar.com/publication/footnotes/>

# List of Maps

Maps by Edward Alexander

BOSTON, 1775	6
CAMBRIDGE TO CHARLESTOWN	24
BUNKER HILL, OPENING ACTION	46
BUNKER HILL, MIDDLE OF ACTION	54
BUNKER HILL, END OF ACTION	58
SIEGE OF BOSTON	74
KNOX'S ROUTE TO CAMBRIDGE	98
BATTLE OF BUNKER HILL TOUR GUIDE	120
ARNOLD'S MARCH TO QUEBEC	158

**PHOTO CREDITS:** Cambridge (c); Daniel T. Davis (dtd); Phillip S. Greenwalt (psg); Library of Congress (loc); Chris Mackowski (cm); National Archives (na); New York Public Library (nypl); *Old Landmarks and Historic Personages of Boston. Profusely Illustrated* (olhpbpi); Paul Revere House (prh); Smithsonian (s); Brian Swartz (bs); Wikipedia (wiki)

*For the Emerging Revolutionary War Series*

Theodore P. Savas, *publisher*  
Sarah Keeney, *editorial consultant*  
Veronica Kane, *production supervisor*  
Rebecca Hill, *copyeditor*  
Ryan Quint, *proofreader*

Robert Orrison, *chief historian and co-founder*  
Phillip S. Greenwalt, *co-founder*  
Chris Mackowski, *advisory editor*

Layout by Jess Maxfield  
Maps by Edward Alexander

# Foreword

BY CHRISTIAN DI SPIGNA

When it comes to the battle for American independence, a few select terms resonate with most people in the twenty-first century. Fittingly, those buzzwords revolve around the Massachusetts resistance that helped ignite the war for independence: the Boston Massacre, the Boston Tea Party, the Midnight Ride of Paul Revere, and the battles of Lexington and Concord. These events culminated in the first pitched battle of the American Revolution on June 17, 1775, in Charlestown, Massachusetts: the battle of Bunker Hill.

Although faint, those distant voices of war still echo. On the eve of battle, general Israel Putnam declared, “We will fill hell tomorrow so full of redcoats that the devils will break their shins over them.” Following the battle, one British commander claimed that the patriots “fought more like devils than men.” Bunker Hill was the bloodiest battle of the Revolutionary War, producing more total casualties than any other. After their costly victory, the Crown’s top military commander lamented, “I wish this cursed place was burned.”

**The Dr. Joseph Warren statue at his grave, Forest Hills Cemetery, Jamaica Plains, Massachusetts. Warren peers toward the future and a country he did so much to start but died before he could see its beginning. (psg)**

Among those who stood firm at the battle were free and enslaved African Americans, Native Americans, and Dr. Joseph Warren. A Harvard graduate, gentleman physician, spymaster, Masonic Grand Master, and president of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress, Warren had been spearheading the patriot resistance in Boston alongside Samuel Adams for a decade. With Adams and the other founding fathers away at the Continental Congress in Philadelphia, Warren—now the top Son of Liberty in Boston—was directing the rebellion. Although appointed a major general by the Massachusetts Provincial Congress, Warren declined command of the battle of Bunker Hill and instead fought as a volunteer soldier in the most dangerous part of the arena—the redoubt atop Breed’s Hill. When the terrified patriots recognized him, they erupted in cheers and huzzahs.

Warren bravely helped defend the redoubt. After multiple attempts to breach the position, British commanders ordered a final bayonet assault. Patriot fire had devastated the British officer corps throughout the afternoon, but as Americans’ ammunition ran out, the battle descended into savage hand-to-hand combat. Patriots wielded their muskets as clubs against the bayonet onslaught; some hurled rocks, others fought with fists.

As British troops poured into the redoubt, Warren drew his sword and screamed for his men to retreat. As the Crown forces stabbed and bashed the wounded patriots with their bayonets and muskets, Warren remained to cover the escape. The last man standing, he was swarmed by British soldiers and shot through the face, killed in the closing moments of the battle. Warren’s sacrifice allowed many fellow patriots to escape.

His body was brutally mutilated by British troops and thrown into a shallow ditch on Breed’s Hill, where it remained for nine months. Warren left behind four orphaned children, having died just days after his thirty-fourth birthday.

Warren died a martyr to freedom, but also a traitor to King George III, as a declaration of independence was more than a year away. Without Bunker Hill, would there have been an American Revolution? A Declaration of Independence? A United States of

America? With so many casualties that day, there was no turning back for either side. The Revolutionary War had begun.

Two months earlier, Warren, the leading spymaster, dispatched Paul Revere on his epic midnight ride based on intelligence reports that British regulars were on the march. The following morning, on April 19, 1775, Warren rushed to the battles of Lexington and Concord where he was nearly killed by enemy fire. Understanding the need for a trained and unified fighting force, Warren implored the Continental Congress to establish a national army and appoint a generalissimo to lead it. Weeks after receiving Warren's seminal letter, the Continental Army was formed, and George Washington appointed Commander-in-Chief on June 14, 1775. Unbeknownst to Warren and his comrades at the Bunker Hill battle, they were fighting under what would become the United States Army.

The obelisk that has towered over that hill in Charlestown since 1843 memorializes a lost battle. Those hallowed grounds have been many things throughout the centuries—a place of bloodshed and woe, healing and reflection, celebration and community.

In 1875, on the battle's centennial anniversary, 350,000 people came to Boston to commemorate and honor Warren and his fallen comrades. That day also served as a healing moment for the nation, marking the first time since the start of the Civil War that Northern and Southern troops marched in unity.



Although drawn in the 20th century, this rendering may have authentically captured a single moment in Paul Revere's ride. (psg)

The inscription at the bottom of the Warren statue at his grave says: Major General, Grand Master of Masons, Doctor, Son of Liberty/Born June 14, 1741, Slain at Bunker Hill June 17, 1775/"Defend and Preserve Those Civil and Religious Rights and Liberties." (psg)





**The Bunker Hill monument now stands in what was the middle of Prescott's redoubt on Breed's Hill. It is maintained by the National Park Service and is open for visitors to ascend. (psg)**

More than 100 years after the centennial, during Ronald Reagan's first presidential inaugural address, he quoted Dr. Joseph Warren: "Our country is in danger but not to be despaired of. . . . On you depend the fortunes of America—you are to decide the important question on which rests the happiness of millions yet unborn. . . . Act worthy of yourselves."

We still commemorate this battle, not to glorify war, but to remember that democracy has always come at a cost. Bunker Hill was a moment when Americans—divided by class, color, and ideology—found unity in purpose. Liberty is not a finished story, it is a promise we must keep writing. So may the memory of Bunker Hill inspire us to rise, again, to the challenge of becoming a more perfect union.

Today's divisions feel impossible to bridge. But 250 years ago, colonists faced their own civil fractures. Still, they found the courage to forge something new together. Our challenge is different, but the call is the same: act worthy of yourselves.

The hill still calls. How will we answer?

**CHRISTIAN DI SPIGNA is the executive director of the Dr. Joseph Warren Foundation and author of *Founding Martyr: The Life and Death of Dr. Joseph Warren, the American Revolution's Lost Hero*. Di Spigna serves on the board of the Charlestown Historical Society, is a member of the Bunker Hill Monument Association, and is the vice-chairman for the Massachusetts Freemason's Revolution 250 Committee. He has dedicated nearly three decades to the study of Dr. Joseph Warren and the Boston rebellion.**

“. . . to acquaint your Lordship of an action that happened on the 17th instant, between His Majesty's Troops and a body of the rebel forces.”

— *Lt. Gen. Thomas Gage*







# Prologue

As the sun rose on June 17, 1775, over Boston Harbor, Peter Brown, a Massachusetts militiaman, huddled behind the earthen redoubt hastily built the night before on Breed's Hill. In the harbor below, a wooden flotilla of masted warships and transports ominously crowded offshore.

"We work'd there undiscovered until about five in the Morning, then we saw our danger, being against Ships of the Line, and all Boston fortified against us," Brown wrote in a letter to his mother eight days later. Brown suspected calumny. "The danger we were in made us think that there was treachery oversight or presumption in the Conduct of our Officers," he said.

But neither treachery, nor oversight, nor presumption had put Brown and his compatriots in peril. Colonel William Prescott had selected the spot with intention. He placed his soldiers on the best ground available, atop Breed's Hill and along the banks of the Mystic River, behind an improvised rail fence. But he knew topography would even the odds

**The Bunker Hill Monument towers over the surrounding landscape, much like the battle fought there still looms large in the annals of the American Revolution today.**  
(ditd)

**Abigail Adams and her husband, John, engaged in extensive correspondence. With John away at the Second Continental Congress, Abigail was at home in Braintree, Massachusetts, and reported to him about the Battle of Bunker Hill. (nypl)**



only so much. “I was now left with perhaps 150 Men in the Fort,” he estimated.

Yet, somehow, the colonists defied the odds of battle, even as the British claimed victory. “God in Mercy to us fought our battle,” a grateful Brown wrote, “and tho’ we were but few in number, and suffer’d to be defeated by our enemy, yet we were preserv in a wonderful manner, far beyond our expectation.” The New Englanders gave up their ground, withdrawing to Cambridge, back into positions that would let them continue their siege of Boston.

Behind them, red-coated bodies heavily littered the slope and summit of Breed’s Hill, strewn “as thick as sheep in a fold.” Roughly 50 percent of the British forces fell as casualties. One survivor remarked, “The shocking carnage that day will never be erased out of my mind.”

On the same day that Brown was writing his mother, General Thomas Gage, overall commander of British forces in North America, set pen to paper to write to Lord Dartmouth in England. “MY LORD,”

he began, "I am to acquaint your Lordship of an action that happened on the 17th instant, between His Majesty's Troops and a body of the rebel forces." His communique continued with the precision of an official battle report, subverting the disastrous victory beneath the language of bureaucracy. Gage presented June 17, 1775, as just another day in the service of His Majesty, putting down a colonial rebellion in a corner of the British Empire.

For the Americans, though, the Battle of Bunker Hill was not just another day. "The Day; perhaps the decisive Day is come on which the fate of America depends," wrote Abigail Adams, whose husband, John, represented Massachusetts in the Second Continental Congress, then meeting in Philadelphia. Adams had watched the fight from atop Penn's Hill near her home in Quincy, on the far side of Boston Harbor. From her perch, she watched Charlestown burn, "laid in ashes."

"My bursting Heart must find vent at my pen," she admitted. "The Spirits of the people are very good. The loss of Charlestown affects them no more than a Drop in the Bucket."

But the battle did affect the Adams family. Their friend and physician, patriot leader Dr. Joseph Warren, lay dead on the field. "Great is our loss," Adams lamented.

Her home sat next to the Coast Road from Boston to Plymouth, and details from the front would no doubt make their way past her doorstep. In the meantime, it was all she could do to process what she'd seen. "A particular account of these dreadful, but I hope glorious days, will be transmitted you, no doubt, in the exactest manner," she promised John.

We are pleased to offer to you, 250 years later, a particular account of those days, transmitted "in the exactest manner."



# Aftermath of the Battle Road

## CHAPTER ONE

“Indeed, they know too well what was proper to do . . .” Lord Percy said ruefully.

The British officer voiced his concern following the devastation he witnessed on April 19, 1775, along the thoroughfare from Boston, Charlestown through Menotomy, to Lexington and Concord. On that spring day, militia and minutemen wreaked havoc on the British expedition to capture military supplies gathered in the town of Concord. When the day ended, 73 British soldiers had been killed, 174 wounded, and 26 declared missing for a total count of 273. Colonial casualties were accepted as 95 altogether, with 49 killed, 41 wounded, and 5 missing. The chasm between Great Britain and the burgeoning rebellious movement had widened further and now witnessed the shedding of blood.

What would happen next?

On April 20, 1775, both sides sought an answer that could somehow make sense out of the chaos.

Dr. Joseph Warren, a prominent member of the Sons of Liberty, a secret organization formed

**The North Bridge at Concord, one of the many locations where colonists clashed with British troops in the first battle that would become the American Revolution. (dtd)**



**Lord Hugh Percy led a relief force to the aid of the British expedition to Concord and continued in service with the British Army until disagreements with Lt. Gen. William Howe led him to resign in 1777.** (wiki)

**Artemas Ward played a critical role in organizing and leading the Massachusetts army in the spring of 1775 and served as Gen. George Washington's second-in-command after Washington arrived in July.** (nypf)



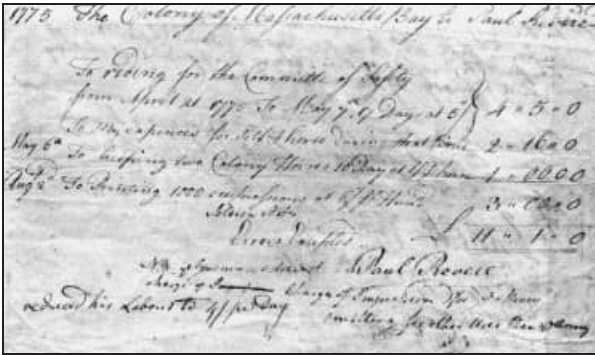
in colonial America to oppose British policies and taxation, and a leading voice in the growing provincial government of Massachusetts, was busy collecting depositions from eyewitnesses. As Warren undertook this mission, Maj. Gen. Artemas Ward, 47-years-old, of the Massachusetts militia, made his way by horseback toward Cambridge and the Jonathan Hastings House.

Born on November 26, 1727, Artemas Ward, son of Nahum and Martha Ward, spent most of his life in the town of Shrewsbury, Massachusetts. He left Shrewsbury to pursue two degrees at Harvard College. Devoted to his Protestant religion, he tried to end swearing around the college campus during his time there. After college, he returned to Shrewsbury, and married Sarah Trowbridge in 1750. The pair eventually had eight children. Ward inherited his father's farm and became active in local town governance. Five years later, in 1755, Ward joined the militia. Due to his standing in the community, he was selected as major. He served in the French and Indian War, rising to the rank of lieutenant colonel in the Massachusetts militia. At the onset of peace in 1763, Ward returned to politics and was elected to the Massachusetts legislature.

While in that political body, he advocated against the new taxes imposed on Massachusetts, and, as early as 1774, lent his voice in support of the colony purchasing weapons and supplies necessary for defense. He was at home in Shrewsbury on the night of April 18, in pain that did not subside as the sun rose on April 19.

Ward, suffering from "calculus," which was likely bladder stones, had spent April 19 bedridden at his home in Shrewsbury, Massachusetts. When word arrived of the British incursion into the interior of Massachusetts, he cursed his bad luck in terms of physical health and prepared to head toward Boston. Being the top militia officer in the colony, his presence was needed, and in the coming months, he provided a steady hand as the growing colonial forces besieged Boston.

Jonathan Hastings, the proprietor of the house now central to the cause of colonial rebellion, was a native Cantabrigian. He graduated from Harvard College in 1730 and served as a steward for his alma



Founded throughout the colonies, Committees of Safety often acted as bodies of government separate from the legislatures. (prh)

mater for the next 30 years. In 1750 he married Elizabeth Cotton. Now his residence became the epicenter of government and military matters against the British. When Ward arrived, he entered a house where the Committee for Public Safety held their meetings. This provincial body nominated, and Ward accepted, the position as commander-in-chief of the New England militia now surrounding British-held Boston.

Other luminaries of the revolutionary movement also arrived, including John Thomas, a Mansfield, Massachusetts native and medical doctor by trade. Prior military experience during the French and Indian War earned him the rank of colonel. In February 1775, the Massachusetts assembly promoted him to brigadier general. When he arrived at the Hastings House, Ward gave Thomas command of militia forces around the town of Roxbury. This assignment was a place of honor, as Roxbury was the closest village to Boston in 1775, located near Boston Neck, the only land connection to the city. Nearby, Fort Hill provided a strategic rise for the growing militia army to observe British movements. The imposing 6-foot-tall Thomas moved quickly to his new command, instilling strict discipline, but earning the trust of the rank-and-file while in command at Roxbury, due to his fair and patient nature.

Begrimed, and still wearing his farm clothing, Connecticut native Brig. Gen. Joseph Spencer led the militia from the colony. Joining Spencer was Israel Putnam. Putnam became well-traveled, making the trek between his native Connecticut to discuss military preparations and the army around Boston. Putnam's prowess and battle demeanor defied his 57 years.



**Elbridge Gerry assisted with governing in the Massachusetts Provincial Congress after Lexington and Concord.** (mypl)

The colonial force continued to be in flux, as men trickled in and out of the encampments. Numbers would grow as the chance for another confrontation beckoned, the men fated to play a role in the next battle.

Dr. Warren, eschewing sleep, continued to fulfil tasks at a dizzying rate, penning two missives before the day was out. One letter went to British Lt. Gen. Thomas Gage, as Warren attempted to open communication between the leaders. “Be assured, sir, as far as my influence goes, everything which can reasonably be required of us to do shall be done, and everything promised shall be religiously performed.”

Warren also continued his work compiling accounts of the recent fighting. He was assisted by Elbridge Gerry. Gerry headed a committee of nine members. This select group transcribed testimony from eyewitnesses of the momentous events of April 19, capturing their memories and nightmares onto parchment. Local justices of the peace certified the accuracy and veracity. Warren ensured this collection of documents would be sent to the rest of the colonies. Word of the fighting in Massachusetts sped down the Atlantic Coast and reached Savannah, Georgia on May 11, 1775, where the *Georgia Gazette* published the accounts.

A copy of these testimonials also went to Salem, Massachusetts, where Richard Derby, merchant and member of the Provincial Congress, offered his schooner to his compatriots. Under his son, John Derby, the *Quero* set sail eight days later. After avoiding the Royal Navy ship the *Lively* patrolling the waters off Salem, the *Quero* raced the 3,000 miles across the Atlantic Ocean, ignoring Warren’s admonition to sail more in an arc fashion to avoid more well-known travel lanes. Derby sailed past the Isle of Wight, skirting Portsmouth, and docked. He then raced to Benjamin Franklin’s residence. The famous scientist and agent for Pennsylvania to the British Parliament had already departed for America. Undeterred, the industrious Derby sought out Arthur Lee. Lee was a member of one of the first families of Virginia, who, like Franklin represented his colony’s interests to the Crown. However, he quickly grasped the importance of the documents to the independence movement, especially with Warren’s attached introductory note.

*We most ardently wish, that the several papers herein enclosed may be immediately printed and dispersed through every town in England, and especially communicated to the Lord Mayor, Alderman, and Common Council of the city of London. . . . [W]e are confident that it is the united efforts of both Englands that must save either. But whatever price our brethren in one may be pleased to put on their constitutional liberties, we are authorized to assure you that the inhabitants of the other with the greatest unanimity, are inflexibly resolved to sell theirs only at the price of their lives.*

Lee then visited his friend John Wilkes, the Lord Mayor of London and a vocal opponent of King George III. Wilkes delivered Warren's packet to the editor of the *London Evening Post*, who published it the next day. The news shocked Prime Minister Lord Frederick North and his administration. Caught off guard, as Gage's report had yet to arrive, the Secretary of State for the North American Colonies, Lord Dartmouth fired off a missive to the British Commander in Chief.

"An account has been printed here, accompanied with depositions to verify it, of skirmishes between a detachment of the troops under your command, and different bodies of provincial militia." Dartmouth believed the reports "plainly made up for the purpose of conveying every possible prejudice and misrepresentation of the truth . . . it is very much to be lamented that we do not have some account from you of this transaction."

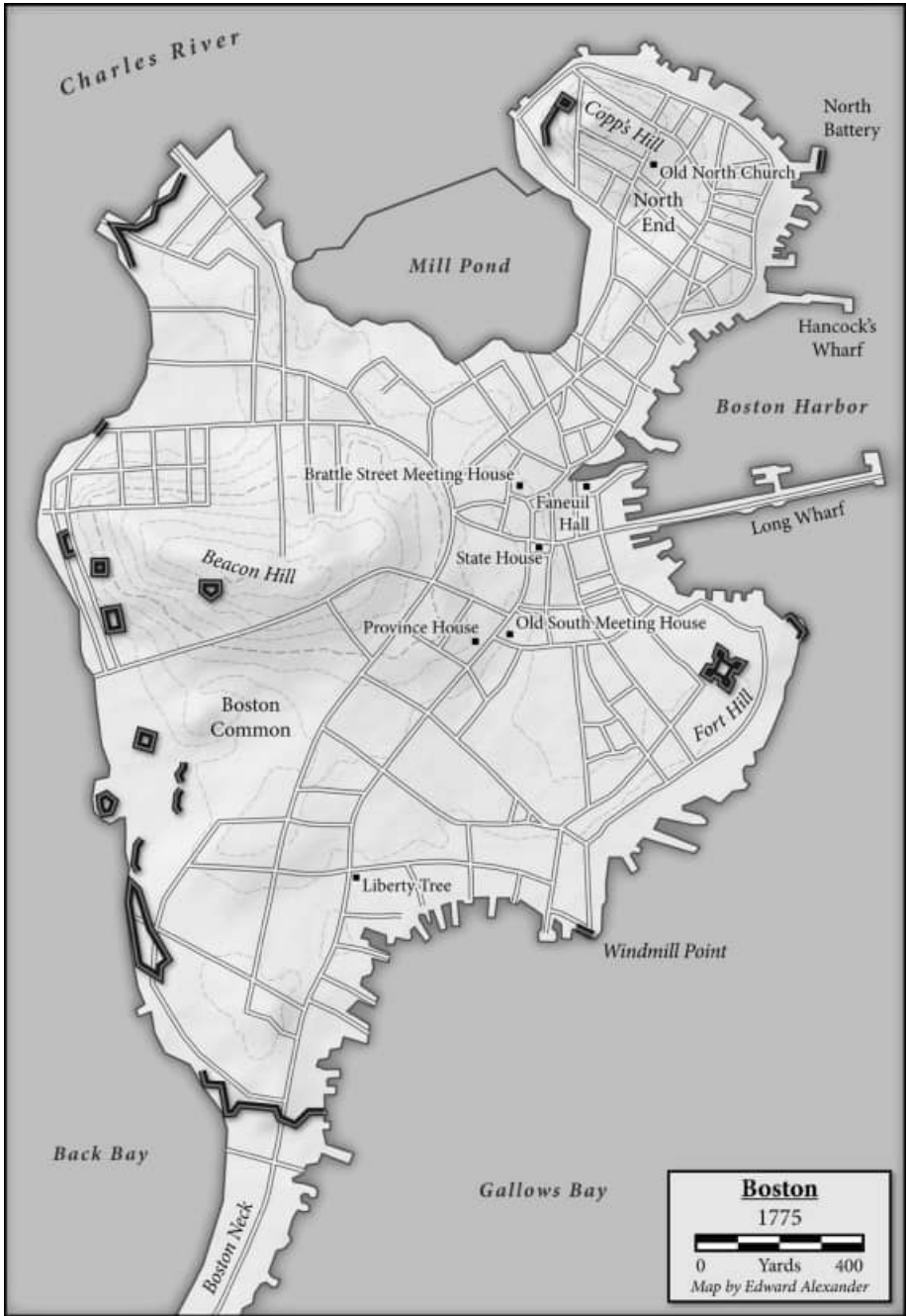
An ocean away, Gage had his own problems to deal with, as his army was bottled up in Boston, the die seemingly cast.

On April 20, Warren issued another circular to all the towns of Massachusetts.

*Gentlemen—The barbarous murders committed on our brethren, on Wednesday, the 19th instant, have made it absolutely necessary that we immediately raise an army to defend our wives and our children from the butchering hands of an inhuman soldiery, who, incensed at the*

**The Sons of Liberty were a secret political group formed in the colonies in 1765 to protest British taxation. (s)**





BOSTON, 1775—A city largely altered by modern development, this map depicts Boston as it appeared in 1775 to those who witnessed the momentous events that eventually led to independence for a new nation.

*obstacles they met with in their bloody progress, and enraged at being repulsed from the field of slaughter, will, without the least doubt, take the first opportunity in their power to ravage this devoted country with fire and sword.*

An army would indeed be raised. Hundreds of miles to the south, in Philadelphia, the largest city in the 13 colonies, men gathered to decide who would lead that force. Meanwhile, events in Massachusetts continued at their own pace.

End of Unedited Excerpt