

Communication Station in Boston

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Framing Question:

What were the sources of news in Massachusetts towns? Where did people gather within the towns to share news? How wide was their world in terms of where they traveled and what they read about? How did this range influence their outlooks?

Objectives:

- a) Students will understand how information travels between communities before the use of modern technology
 - 1) Moved through oral and written word through many different venues: Formal Church/Town meetings vs. informal meetings at the taverns
 - 2) Families were closely connected.
 - 3) Understand the role taverns played in the ordinary colonist's lives
- b) Understand political propaganda
- c) Understand the colonists' complex ways of moving information
 - 1) Roads
 - 2) Bells

Document: "Boston, March 12. The Town of Boston affords a recent and melancholy Demonstration ..." Article from pages 2-3 of *The Boston-Gazette, and Country Journal*, Number 779, 12 March 1770.

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<http://www.masshist.org/database/316>

With a population of nearly 2.5 million by the mid-1770s, the literacy rates for New England were around 90% for men and 60% for women. New Englanders had a rich tradition of written text, from newspapers, broadsides, almanacs and pamphlets to personal letters, diaries, and journals. In particular, broadsides—single sheet essays—and pamphlets were cheap and widely distributed throughout the region. Events such as the Boston Massacre would have been reported in the newspapers and analyzed in the broadsides and pamphlets, allowing many to express their opinions and further their cause. Letters and diaries would also forward more personal views to a limited audience, spreading information and news through the towns of New England. The *Boston Gazette* was a popular newspaper started in 1719 by James Franklin and continued until 1798 when it lost support over its unpopular stand against the Constitution and ceased publication.



Questions:

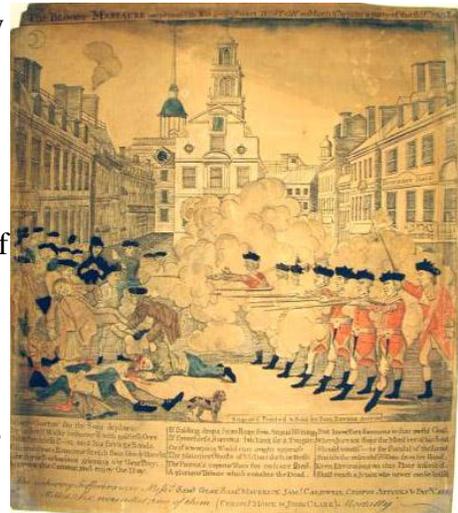
- How many newspapers were available throughout the colonies in the 1770's. (38 according to Bernard Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, p. 1)
- Why were newspapers able to be an important communication tools in New England?
- Who owned and controlled the newspapers?
- How did newspapers help to spread the ideas of the American Revolution?

Artifact: Boston Massacre Engraving by Paul Revere

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The Boston Massacre included the killing of five colonists by British regulars on March 5, 1770. It was one of many skirmishes between soldiers and colonists to take place in Boston after the soldiers arrived in Massachusetts in October 1768 to enforce the heavy tax burden imposed by the Townshend Acts. The Massacre helped to incite anti-Royal sentiment and was an event that foreshadowed the violence of Revolution to come. Paul Revere helped to whip up support among future Minutemen through the publication of his widely-known engraving, which now serves as an emblematic artifact. At the time, it was not simply a document meant to convey information about a historical act; it's not unbiased documentary. Rather, how does it work as propaganda?



Questions:

- What was the purpose of the engraving?
- What message does it communicate?
- What is historically inaccurate about Revere's engraving?
- What other documents recount the events of March 5? How do the "facts" presented in those documents differ from the scene offered in Revere's engraving?

Landscape: Hartwell Tavern on the Bay Road connecting Boston to Concord



In Colonial times the tavern was the center of communication for the town, next to the meeting house/ church. Often the church was used as the meeting house for town affairs because church and state were combined. Also both of these locations allowed people to congregate and share news. Taverns were vital in allowing people to gain knowledge of events occurring in places removed from the immediate area. Taverns were placed at resting points along the roads; one important site along the road that connected Concord to Boston was the

Hartwell Tavern in Lincoln. The strategic location of this tavern allowed communications to flow from Boston into the surrounding countryside. It is important to remember that men would also gather at the taverns to discuss issues and politics. Keep in mind that the information coming to and from these hubs always had a bias of the listener and the speaker.

Questions:

- a) Why would the meeting house/ church or tavern be at the center of communication?
- b) What type of things would the tavern offer to travelers?
- c) How could information learned in the church or tavern change when passed from person to person?
- d) How would Hartwell's Tavern on the Bay Road connecting Boston and Concord play a role in how the towns communicated?

Assessment/ Activity:

- a) At the beginning of class have the students brainstorm how people communicate. Narrow the list of options down to written and spoken (face-to-face) communications.
- b) Have the students play telephone to see how it is easy for information to get changed to benefit the person with the most interest
- c) Break students in to three groups
 - (1) Group 1: will have a person describing the event (using a written script) simulating the taverns of the time.
 - (2) Group 2: will be looking at the Revere engraving.
 - (3) Group 3: will be looking at the newspaper article.
- d) Each person will write a summary of the events of the Boston Massacre as if they were telling someone else about the events. When the students have finished, ask them to share their narratives to see how the accounts differ from one other. Discuss how this could influence the tensions between the British Regulars and the Colonists.