





## TEAPOT

Boston, Massachusetts, or England, 1740–60  
 Pewter, wood  
 H. 4½, W. 7⅞, D. 4¼  
 Gift of Miss S. E. Kimball through the Bostonian Society  
 1918.1655

THIS GNARLY OLD TEAPOT is without doubt the least pretentious object included in this catalogue, and yet it may well carry the deepest associations, for it is thought to have belonged to Crispus Attucks, the first man killed in the infamous Boston Massacre of March 5, 1770. Although much is known about his death, Crispus Attucks's life is a mystery. Even so, over the course of the nineteenth century his memory was invoked as a hero both of the American Revolution and of the antislavery movement, and as an exemplar of what it means to be American. Because of its association with Attucks, this teapot helped sanctify his memory.

The Boston Massacre occurred after months of rising tension over the quartering of troops in the city, troops brought in to keep peace in the wake of the hated Townshend and Stamp Acts. "Redcoats" became fair game to rowdy young townsmen, the subject of taunts and the targets of snowballs. The soldiers responded, and brawls were soon commonplace. On a snowy Monday evening after one particularly tense weekend, a number of brawlers converged on the sentry stationed outside the Customs House. His patience worn thin by the taunting and jeering, the sentry lashed out, hitting a boy nearby with his fist. The crowd's taunts changed to shouts: "Kill him, kill him." The sentry called for help from the guardsmen quartered nearby and was soon joined by eight soldiers who formed a semicircle and tried to keep the crowd at bay with their loaded weapons and bayonets. It is still not known who, if anyone, gave the order to fire, but within moments four townsmen were dead, another lay dying, and several others were seriously wounded.

As one historian has suggested of the Boston Massacre, if it hadn't happened, colonial patriots would have had to invent it.<sup>1</sup> In fact, some have suggested that essentially they did invent it, with leaders like Samuel Adams and William Molineaux egging on townsmen to behave in a way that forced British soldiers to respond.<sup>2</sup> Once blood had been spilled, it was easy to rally support for the patriot cause. The Sons of Liberty were brilliant propagandists, circulating broadsides and pamphlets within days of the "Massacre," demanding the immediate arrest of the soldiers and the instant removal of



Fig. 1 Revere's print of the skirmish on King Street circulated widely within weeks of the event. *The Bloody Massacre Perpetrated in King Street Boston on March 5th 1770*, by Paul Revere, Boston, Massachusetts, 1770. (Courtesy, Winterthur Museum)

troops from Boston, and rallying thousands of mourners to attend the funeral of the victims. Within three weeks, Paul Revere's engraving "of the late horrid Massacre in King St." was advertised in the *Boston Gazette* (fig. 1). Showing not the clash of brawlers that occurred, but a group of armed soldiers taking aim at a peaceful citizenry, the print's effect was electric. Few who saw it could doubt the patriots' cause.<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps the only reason five full years passed before the first shot was fired at the battle of Lexington was because of the intervention of two men. In the belief that in a free land all men are entitled to a fair trial, patriots John Adams and Josiah Quincy, Jr., took on the defense of the arrested soldiers. In his stirring closing at the trial, Adams argued that the Massacre was not the fault of the soldiers, rather it was the fault of a reckless policy that allowed troops to be quartered in a city