

**THE NARRATIVE OF
GENERAL GAGE'S
SPIES, MARCH,
1775: WITH NOTES**

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The Narrative of General Gage's Spies, March, 1775: With Notes by Jerome Carter Hosmer

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JEROME CARTER HOSMER

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GENERAL GAGE'S SPIES

MARCH, 1775, WITH NOTES

BY

JEROME CARTER HOSMER



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Joh. Gage.



THE NARRATIVE OF GEN. GAGE'S SPIES,
WITH BIOGRAPHICAL AND OTHER NOTES

A PAPER READ BEFORE THE BOSTONIAN SOCIETY, COUNCIL CHAMBER,
OLD STATE HOUSE, DECEMBER 8, 1903, BY

JEROME CARTER HOSMER



N the afternoon of March 6, 1770—the day following the “Boston Massacre”—an immense Town-meeting gathered in the old Faneuil Hall; it proved too small to hold the crowd of excited citizens, and they speedily adjourned to the Old South Meeting-house. Governor Hutchinson, looking out from one of the windows of the Council Chamber in the Old State House,—the room where we have met to-day,—watched the thronging multitude as it passed up King street. Describing it, he said, “Their spirit seemed to be as high as was that of their ancestors when they imprisoned Andros, while they were four times as numerous.” He had promised to remove the offending regiment, but when

Samuel Adams brought back to him the stern reply of the thousands who crowded the Meeting-house and filled the street between, leaving but scanty room to pass, "Both regiments or none!"—the patriot tells us he "saw the Governor's knees tremble, and his face grow pale," and he "enjoyed the sight."

On the eighteenth of November, 1773, the British Tea-ships were nearing the harbor, and another Town-meeting had assembled. The committee who had been appointed to request the consignees to resign their commissions reported their refusal; whereupon, says Fiske, "the meeting instantly dissolved itself without a word of comment or debate, and at the ominous silence the consignees and the Governor were filled with a vague sense of alarm, as if some storm were brewing whereof none could see the result."* One result made itself manifest on the night of the sixteenth of December following, when the Old South and the adjacent streets were thronged with more than seven thousand people, and fifty "Mohawks" raised the war-whoop on their way to Griffin's wharf to discover the reply to John Rowe's question, "Who knows how tea will mingle with salt water?"

After deliberate acts like these it needed no prophet to discern the advancing shadows of coming events, and both parties began to prepare for the future. By virtue

* "The American Revolution," I: p. 84.

of his office Lord North was the adviser of King George III, but that stubborn monarch, confident in his army and his abundant resources, was really his own Prime Minister. In April, 1774, General Gage displaced Hutchinson, the king believing that with four regiments behind him and the oppressive Port Bill, Boston would submit, and as Lord Mansfield said, "Victory would be won without carnage." But as the weeks went on, Gage's inability to carry out the plans of the British Ministry became more and more evident, and Hume did not hesitate to call him "a luke-warm coward."

The winter of 1774-75 found Gage and his regiments virtually cooped up in the town of Boston. As early as the 5th of the preceding September he had judged it expedient to fortify the "Neck," thus closing the only entrance by land. His troops became impatient at their confinement, and the General felt that he must soon adopt a more active policy to satisfy them and to meet the expectations of the Ministry. That the Province was making military preparations, that the "minute-men" were actively drilling on every village Common, and that abundant munitions of war had been gathered at Concord, Worcester and other towns, he well knew from numerous reports of sympathizers with the Crown in Suffolk, Middlesex and Worcester Counties. In February the Provincial Congress had ordered that supplies sufficient for 15,000 men should be collected and stored at Concord and Worcester — chiefly in the

former town. On the 13th of February the Joint Committees of Safety and Supplies requested Col. Robins to send 15,000 canteens, four brass field pieces and two mortars to Concord, and on the 21st ten tons of lead, and a large supply of balls and cartridges were ordered. All through that and the early part of the following month, tents, provisions, tools, medicines, including twenty hogsheads of rum, as many of molasses, and other necessaries for a vigorous campaign, were coming into that town in wagon-loads.*

Concord was a centre of strong patriotic influence, and the fact that it was the principal point for the assemblage of supplies was by this time no doubt as well known to the Royal Governor as to the Provincial authorities themselves. An armed resistance to the King's troops was evidently a part of their plans, and to forestall these designs it became necessary that the British commander should obtain full and accurate information about the roads and strategic points to the westward of Boston. He therefore issued an order addressed to two of his officers, — Captain Brown of the 52d Regiment, and Ensign D'Berniere† of the 10th Regiment, — under date of February 22, 1775, directing them to go over the roads between Boston and Worcester, observing the topography of the country, noting what provisions and other necessaries the several

* See Shattuck's History, pp. 94-99, for a more detailed account.

† See note at close of this paper.

townships could supply, and report the results of their investigations. When the British evacuated Boston on March 17, 1776, Gage's order and the "Narrative" of the spies, with other documents, were left behind, and fell into the hands of the Provincials; these were printed a few years later,* and with some explanatory notes will form the body of this paper.

Before proceeding it may be proper to say that the story of the expedition of these spies has had a peculiar charm for me, as I am familiar with nearly every mile they journeyed, the inns and houses at which they tarried, and with many of the descendants of the men they mention as having met,—for my ancestors, both paternal and maternal, were Middlesex born and bred for eight generations, and some of them were soldiers in the Revolutionary army from the beginning to the end of the war. Aside from the "Narrative" I have freely availed myself of Sabine's "Loyalists," Shattuck, Hudson, and other authorities, town records, and various town histories.

The expedition of these officers and its object did not escape the knowledge of the patriots, and when Captain

* The original—a pamphlet of twenty pages—is extremely rare; I know of but a single copy in existence to-day, which brought \$53 at one of Libby's sales in December, 1910. Besides the "Narrative" it contains an account, from a British point of view, of the Battle of Lexington; but as this is not pertinent to the immediate subject of this paper, it will not be given here; it may be found in full, together with a reprint of the "Narrative," in Collections of the Mass. Hist. Soc., 2d Series, IV: pp. 205 *et seq.* (1816.)