

## *The Lexington Alarm*

JOHN H. SCHEIDE

THERE has recently come to light a document which, when considered with other documents which have been known but widely scattered, adds to the story of the rise of feeling in the American colonies against Great Britain and of the organization by which the revolution was finally set in motion.<sup>1</sup> This document is a manuscript copy of the message which first carried beyond the immediate vicinity of Boston the news of an encounter between the British Regulars and the provincials at Lexington. It is hastily written on a single sheet of paper measuring 30.5 x 19.6 cm. bearing the watermark "L C Norwich." This watermark identifies the paper as that of the Christopher Leffingwell mill near Yantic, just outside of Norwich, Connecticut.<sup>2</sup> The text of the document reads:

Watertown Wednesday Morning near 10 oClock

To all the Friends of American Liberty—Be it Known that this Morning before Break of Day a Brigade Consist[ing] of about 1000 or 1200 Men Landed at Phips's Farm at Cambridge & marched to Lexington—where they found a Company of our Colony Militia in Arms, upon whom they fir'd without any Provocation & killed 6 Men & wounded 4 others—by an Express—from Boston this Moment we find another Brigade are now upon the March from Boston—supposed to be about 1000 the Bearer Mr Israel Bissel is Charged to alarm the Country quite to Connecticut & all Persons are Desired to furnish him with fresh Horses as they may be needed. I have spoken with several persons who have seen the Dead & wounded—Pray let the Delagates from this Colony to Connecticut see this they know—

Jos Palmer, one of the Committe  
Colo. Foster of Brookfield—one of the Delagates

<sup>1</sup> Grateful acknowledgment is made to Miss Mina Ruese for the research she has done and for her work in the actual preparation of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> A comparison of this watermark with watermarks in other papers from the Leffingwell mill was made by Miss Alice H. Lerch, Assistant Curator of Rare Books, Library of Congress.

A true Coppy taken from the Original p[er] Order of Committee of  
Correspondence for Worcester Worcester, April 19th 1775

Attest Nathan Balding T[own] Clerk

Brooklyne Thursday 11 oClock—The above is a true Coppy as rec[eived]  
here p[er] Express forwarded from Worcester—

Test Daniel Tyler Junr<sup>1</sup>

The text is known in two other manuscript forms, one in a document which has been for a number of years in the library of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania<sup>2</sup> and another whose present whereabouts is unknown but whose existence is evidenced by a reproduction in the New York Public Library.<sup>3</sup> However, before analyzing these three manuscripts it is necessary to consider something of the background from which they came.

Paul Revere's ride, thanks to Longfellow, has become one of the great American legends. Yet like an iceberg, the main part of the story lies below the surface, unknown and partly unrecorded. Ever since the first colonists landed on American shores, they and their descendants had lived under a constant fear and in real danger of outside infringement on what they considered their rights. Consequently, a means of alarming the countryside developed which called for an unquestioning response for the common defense against Indian attacks, alien colonists, or any other imminent danger. When the mother country alienated the loyalties of the American colonists by her demands, and when she attempted to use force to stamp out the resentment these policies generated, she, too, became an outside menace and the gathering for the common defense was almost an instinctive reaction. It is no more unusual that the beginnings of such a system should be unrecorded than that the songs and the folk-lore of a people live without being written down.

It is impossible to put a finger on the exact point at which resentment against the policies of Great Britain began to show

<sup>1</sup> This manuscript is now in the library of John H. Scheide, Titusville, Pennsylvania.

<sup>2</sup> See note 4, p. 63.

<sup>3</sup> Emmet Collection #5144, New York Public Library, a facsimile reproduction only. All efforts to trace the original manuscript from which the Emmet facsimile was made have been unsuccessful.

Watertown Wednesday Morning near 10 Clock  
 I call the Friends of American Liberty - Most know  
 that this Morning before Noon a Brigade consist  
 of about 1000 or 1200 Men landed at Chelsea from  
 Cambridge & marched to Lexington - where they found  
 a Company of few Colony Militia in Arms upon whom  
 they fired without any Provocation & killed 5 Men &  
 wounded 4 others. By an Express from Boston this  
 Morning we find another Brigade was sent upon the  
 March from Boston - supposed to be about 1000 the  
 Major M. Israel Meade is charged to alarm the Country  
 quite to Connecticut & all Persons are desired to avoid  
 them with great Speed as they may be armed. I have  
 spoken with <sup>several persons</sup> who have seen the Road & intended - I have  
 let the Vigilantes from this Colony to Connecticut &  
 let this they know - I am  
 Yours ever  
 J. P.

Col. Foster of Newfield wife of the Vigilante  
 A true Copy taken from the Original of the  
 Committee of Correspondence for Worcester  
 Worcester April 19th 1775 Attest Nathaniel Madding Esq. Clerk  
 Newburyport Thursday 11 Clock The above is a true  
 Copy as was made of Express forwarded from  
 Worcester  
 J. Daniel Esq.

itself in the form of concerted action. There is a striking similarity between the accounts which were circulating throughout the colonies in 1775 and the following sentence from Nathaniel Byfield's *An Account of the Late Revolution in New England*: "Upon the Eighteenth Instant, about Eight of the Clock in the Morning, in Boston, it was reported at the South end of the Town, That at the North end they were all in Arms; and the like Report was at the North end, respecting the South end: Whereupon Captain John George was immediately seized, and about nine of the clock the Drums beat through the Town; and an Ensign was set upon the Beacon."<sup>1</sup> This was the eighteenth of April, 1689, and concerned one of the incidents in the controversy of the New England colonists with Governor Andros over their chartered rights. Opposition to Great Britain's policies became more and more tangible in the decade preceding 1775 and may be traced in the organization and activities of the Sons of Liberty and in the political manoeuvres of Samuel Adams in Massachusetts. Chief among the results of Adams' work was the organization of the Committees of Correspondence, for their immediate origin may be attributed to him; although the roots of this movement, too, extend far beyond his time.<sup>2</sup> Jared Sparks has summed up the development of these Committees in this way:

Wherever the power of Great Britain was thrown off or disavowed, all political control passed by its natural course into the hands of the people. . . . Hence the primary movement was to bring the people to understand their interests and act in concert, and the first means used to attain this end was the establishment of Committees of Correspondence in different parts of the country.<sup>3</sup>

In a country made up of scattered communities which had a common background and similar problems a Committee of Correspondence answered many needs. Ministers saw in it a means of communion with other churches, merchants a means of

<sup>1</sup> Nathaniel Byfield, *An Account of the Late Revolution in New England* (London, 1689), pp. 3-4.

<sup>2</sup> George E. Howard, *Preliminaries of the Revolution* (in *The American Nation: A History*, vol. 8), p. 255.

<sup>3</sup> Jared Sparks, *The Life of Gouverneur Morris* (Boston, 1832), vol. I, p. 30.

uniting to fight unwelcome trade restrictions, secret societies an instrument to spread their doctrines. Moreover, all the ties between the mother country and the colonies, including government itself, depended upon correspondence.<sup>1</sup> Like all leaders of great political movements who use the simplest desires and instincts of the masses, the leaders of the radical party in the colonies took over those channels of communication which had developed to fill a common need.

At a town meeting in Boston on November 2, 1772, Samuel Adams, taking advantage of a rise of feeling against the government, moved, "That a Committee of Correspondence be appointed, to consist of Twenty-one Persons, 'to state the Rights of the Colonists, and of this Province in particular, as Men, as Christians, and as Subjects; to Communicate and Publish the same to the several Towns . . . and to the World, as the Sense of this Town, with the Infringements and Violations thereof that have been, or from Time to Time may be made.'"<sup>2</sup> Throughout Massachusetts other towns began to follow Boston's lead and in a very short time at least a third of all the Massachusetts towns had formed Committees of Correspondence.<sup>3</sup>

Two months later another form of Committee of Correspondence developed independently. The House of Burgesses, in Virginia, appointed a committee for intercolonial correspondence. By July of that year five other colonies had also appointed similar committees.<sup>4</sup> It is to be remembered here that the committees for intercolonial correspondence were appointed with the sanction of the established government and that they were in no sense revolutionary organs. However, when the assemblies adjourned and the new provisional governments were set up, the pattern was there for the provincial Committees of Correspondence.

<sup>1</sup> Edward D. Collins, "Committees of Correspondence of the American Revolution," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association*, 1901, vol. 1, p. 246.

<sup>2</sup> *The Votes and Proceedings of the Freeholders and other Inhabitants of the Town of Boston* (Boston, [1772]), p. iii.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Hutchinson, *History of the Province of Massachusetts Bay*, vol. 3 (London, 1828), p. 369.

<sup>4</sup> Howard, *Preliminaries of the Revolution*, pp. 257-258.

A third form of Committee of Correspondence, the county committee, developed in New Jersey. In this colony the inhabitants of each township elected a committee whose business it was to correspond with the committees in other townships in the county. From these organizations representatives were selected to form a county committee which was to keep in touch with other counties in the province. In New Jersey, it was a convention of representatives from these committees which met, nominated and appointed the delegates to the Continental Congress.<sup>1</sup>

Thus by the beginning of 1774 the seed of the organization had been planted and needed only to take root and spread to become one of the most powerful propaganda agencies known to that time—the town, county and provincial Committees of Correspondence. Although these committees had no power from any governmental authority, in this period of transition, as a practical bit of machinery already in operation they came naturally and easily to function as the only effective government when the provincial assemblies and the Continental Congress were not in session. E. D. Collins, in a study of the development of the Committees of Correspondence says that, "It was correspondence, with cooperation at the terminal points, that brought about the Revolution. . . . Its importance as a piece of revolutionary machinery can hardly be overestimated. It was not merely a channel through which public opinion might flow; it created public opinion and played upon it to fashion events."<sup>2</sup>

In the year before the revolution actually started these three types of committees spread throughout all the colonies. They were elected by popular vote, often at a town meeting. They varied in their numbers but were usually headed by a chairman. To illustrate how these bodies took form, the New York Committee will probably serve as well as any. There were nominated, on May 16, 1774, at general meeting of merchants and other townspeople, fifty men to be appointed as a standing committee, fifteen of whom constituted a quorum. The next day news

<sup>1</sup> Collins, "Committees of Correspondence," p. 257.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 247.

arrived from Boston by express that Parliament had closed the port of Boston. With this new reminder of the friction between the mother country and the colonies, a group of people met two days later at the Coffee House and approved the committee appointed. At the first meeting of the newly formed committee, the rule was adopted, "That the first five members on the list, who shall be in town be a Committee to open all letters directed to the Committee, in the absence of the Chairman and Deputy Chairman."<sup>1</sup> At a subsequent meeting, relative to the assembling of a general congress, the New York Committee wrote to Boston approving the idea of a Continental Congress and expressed its willingness to forward any messages southward.<sup>2</sup> The people of Norwich, Connecticut, in June of 1774, voted to maintain a standing committee "for the keeping up a correspondence with the towns in this and the neighbouring Colonies" and to "transmit a copy of these votes to the Committee of Correspondence for the town of Boston."<sup>3</sup> Thus Boston naturally became the nucleus of the organization and into these widening channels each colony poured its woes, making them problems common to all.

The stage was more or less set for the drama of the revolution by the fall of 1774. Just as the Continental Congress was convening in Philadelphia, one of the most curious "false alarms" of history stirred the people in at least four of the colonies. The origin of the rumor which led to the alarm is unknown and its many possible explanations are pure conjecture. One letter of the time suggested that it was started by the King's party to test the reactions of the people.<sup>4</sup> However, this much is certain: on Thursday morning, September 1, two hundred sixty British troops embarked on thirteen boats at the Long Wharf in Boston and went up the Mystic River to Charlestown, where they marched to the powder house and removed two hundred and fifty half-barrels of powder. A detachment proceeded to Cam-

<sup>1</sup> Peter Force, *American Archives Fourth Series*, vol. 1, pp. 293-296.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 302.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 390.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 793.

bridge and took off two field pieces. A contemporary account tells that, "The preparation for this scandalous expedition caused much speculation, as some who were near the Governour gave out that he had sworn the Committee of Salem should recognize or be imprisoned; nay, some said be put on board the *Scarborough*, and sent to England forthwith. The Committee of Boston sent off an express after ten, on Wednesday evening, to advise their brethren of Salem of what they apprehended was coming against them. . . . From these several hostile appearances the County of Middlesex took the alarm, and on Thursday evening began to collect in large bodies, with their arms, provisions, and ammunition, determining by some means to give a check to a power which so openly threatened their destruction. . . ."<sup>1</sup> A gentleman from Boston, observing motion in the British camp, concluded that the troops were on the point of marching to Cambridge and therefore communicated the alarm to Charlestown. The intelligence was instantly spread and horsemen were sent out to get more certain information, but returned saying that the soldiers remained in camp.

One cannot definitely say that news of the general disturbance escaped and went down into Connecticut, growing as it went along, but this is a possibility. At any rate, there appeared in Connecticut at this time a letter which in both form and itinerary is so curiously like the alarm which set off the spark after the encounter at Lexington that it makes the latter seem much less a matter of chance than would appear to the casual observer.

On September 3, 1774, Israel Putnam wrote the following letter from Pomfret, Connecticut, to Captain Aaron Cleveland:

Mr. Keys this moment brought us news that the men-of-war and troops began to fire upon the people last night at sunset at Boston, when a post was immediately sent off to inform the country. He informs, that the artillery played all night; that the people were universally rallying from Boston as far as here, and desire all the assistance possible. . . . Six of our number were killed the first shot, and a number wounded,

<sup>1</sup> Force, ser. 4, vol. 1, pp. 762-764.



and beg you will rally all the forces you can, and be upon the march immediately for the relief of Boston, and the people that way.

Hereupon follows the endorsement of Aaron Cleveland with the directions, "send an Express to Norwich and elsewhere."

The document was forwarded from Norwich to New London. At the latter place, it was endorsed, "Pray send forward an express to Saybrook, and elsewhere on the sea shore, and to East Haddam, immediately. I desire those towns to forward expresses to their neighbouring towns." This is signed by Richard Law, Nathaniel Shaw, and Samuel H. Parsons, all three of whom also signed the message which was sent south telling of the encounter at Lexington and Concord on April 19, 1775. Samuel Parsons added a note, "You will see, by a Letter to your Committee of Correspondence, the necessity of rallying all your forces immediately. . . . We shall march before noon to-morrow. . . ." As evidenced by the succeeding endorsements, the message was sent to Lyme, Saybrook, Killingsworth, Branford, New Haven, and New York, where it arrived on September 5, the day the First Continental Congress convened in Philadelphia.<sup>1</sup>

The following day the message arrived in Philadelphia.<sup>2</sup> A letter from that city reports something of the response to this news there: "Some time ago I do not doubt but you were all much alarmed, on a report that the King's ships were firing on the town of Boston. When the news came to this city the bells were muffled, and kept ringing all that day; however, in a few days after, that news was contradicted. . . ." It declares further that when the expresses went to contradict this false report they found in Massachusetts and Connecticut different parties in arms totaling fifty thousand men, well armed and actually on the march to Boston. When the news was contradicted, three days later, these men returned peaceably to their homes.<sup>3</sup>

At this time, William Smith of New York wrote to his nephew,

<sup>1</sup> Force, ser. 4, vol. 1, p. 325.

<sup>2</sup> Edmund C. Burnett, *Letters of Members of the Continental Congress*, vol. 1, p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Cæsar Rodney, to Mr. Thomas Rodney, Philadelphia, September 19, 1774. Force, ser. 4, vol. 1, p. 793.

W<sup>h</sup>artestony  
 Wednesday May 10<sup>th</sup> of the 1775  
 To all friends of American Liberty, but know that this  
 Morning before break of day a Brigade consisting of about 1000, or 1200  
 Men landed at Philips farm at Cambridge and Marched to Lexington  
 where they found a Company of our Colony Militia in arms upon whom  
 they fired without any provocation, and killed 6 Men and wounded 16  
 Others. By an express from Boston we find another Brigade are now  
 upon their March from Boston supposed to be about 1000. The news  
 of this kind is enough to alarm the Country quite to Connecticut,  
 and all persons are desired to furnish him with fresh Horses, as they may  
 be needed. I have spoken with several who have seen the Dead and  
 wounded - Pray let the Delegates from this Colony to Connecticut see  
 this they know Col. Gater of Brookfield is one of the Delegates.

A true copy taken from the  
 Original of Order of the Committee of correspondence for Boston  
 April 14<sup>th</sup> 1775. Attest Nathl Baldwin Town Clerk

Brookline Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> of Clock above is a true Copy rec<sup>d</sup> of Express  
 forwarded from a messenger Attest Dan<sup>l</sup> Tyler Jun<sup>r</sup>

Concord Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> of Clock above is a true Copy rec<sup>d</sup> of Express  
 forwarded as sent of Express from M<sup>r</sup> Tyler  
 Attest Chris Luffingwell

New London Thursday evening 17<sup>th</sup> of Clock is true Copy of  
 Express -  
 Attest  
 Sam<sup>l</sup> H. Parsons } (m<sup>r</sup>?  
 Nathl. Shaw }  
 Wm Gil

THE PHILADELPHIA COPY OF THE ALARM

secretary to General Gage, that, "the first Act of Indiscretion on the Part of the Army or the People marked with Blood, would light up a Civil War."<sup>1</sup> Smith also observed that, "Nothing so fully discovered the Spirit of the lower Classes as their Countenances and speeches, upon a false alarm which arrived yesterday, of Genl. Gages firing upon Boston. . . ."<sup>2</sup> Another letter from New York states that, "we were Shocked with an a Larrem that General Gage had Robbed the Magazine of the Powder & that in Attempting to take it Back were fired upon & 6 men killed he did take the Province powder but no further harm was done. It is said above Fifty Thousand Men were in Motion for the Relief of Boston, & Expresses dispatched every way Believe me a verry dark Cloud hangs Over this Country & By Force I dare Prophecy She Never will be Conquered."<sup>3</sup>

The end of the rumor is just as uncertain as its beginning. The endorsement for New Haven has a clue in its statement, "We thought it necessary and expedient to communicate by express, expecting your speedy aid to forward the same to the Congress at Philadelphia. . . ."<sup>4</sup> Perhaps it was intended to go no farther than Philadelphia (we do know that it arrived there during a meeting of Congress),<sup>5</sup> or perhaps it was overtaken there by the expresses contradicting the original report. Whatever its origin and its destination, it mirrors the spirit of the times. The fact that the news spread as widely and as rapidly as it did when the first shot was fired is not nearly so remarkable as the fact that a people whose emotions were so feverishly aroused could be kept in hand for eight full months before the conflict began.

With the meeting of the First Continental Congress in Philadelphia statutory regulations began to be formulated to provide for united action in case of possible attacks by the British. Soon

<sup>1</sup> September 8, 1774. William Smith's Diary, vol. 4, October 19, 1761—August 14, 1775. New York Public Library.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, September 7, 1774.

<sup>3</sup> "Extracts from the Letter Books of John Thurman, Junior," *The Historical Magazine*, ser. 2, vol. 4, pp. 289-290. Letter dated Sept. 14, 1774.

<sup>4</sup> Force, ser. 4, vol. 1, p. 325.

<sup>5</sup> Edmund C. Burnett, *Letters of Members of the Continental Congress*, vol. 1, p. 13.

after its meeting, Congress considered and approved unanimously a set of resolutions which had been passed by the County of Suffolk, Massachusetts, at a general meeting and submitted by that County to Congress. Joseph Palmer was chosen as the moderator of this meeting. Palmer, who lived at Braintree, was one of the outstanding political leaders in Massachusetts. He was a member of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress and later a member of the Committee of Safety.<sup>1</sup> It was he who sent out the written message telling of the encounter at Lexington. One of the Suffolk County resolutions was:

That, should our enemies, by any sudden manœuvres, render it necessary to ask the aid and assistance of our brethren in the country, some one of the Committee of Correspondence, or a Selectman of each town, or the town adjoining where such hostilities shall commence, or shall be expected to commence, shall despatch couriers with written messages to the Selectmen or Committees of Correspondence of the several towns in the vicinity, with a written account of such matter, who shall despatch others to Committees more remote, until proper and sufficient assistance be obtained; and that the expense of said couriers be defrayed by the county, until it shall be otherwise ordered by the Provincial Congress.<sup>2</sup>

There is nothing in this article, to which Congress gave its unanimous consent, which says how far such a message should go nor did it attempt to set up any standard by which the "some one" person taking it upon himself to set the alarm in motion might judge whether his actions were justified.

As the situation became more tense the Massachusetts Provincial Congress chose a Committee of Safety. This committee, appointed in October, 1774, was composed of nine members, three from Boston and six from the country districts. Its duty was "most carefully and diligently to inspect and observe all and every such person and persons as shall, at any time, attempt or enterprise the destruction, invasion, detriment, or annoyance of this Province, &c.; which said Committee, or any five of them

<sup>1</sup> (Charles S. Palmer), "Biographical Sketch of Gen. Joseph Palmer," *The New Englander*, vol. 3, January, 1845, pp. 1-23.

<sup>2</sup> Force, ser. 4, vol. 1, pp. 778-9.

(provided always, that not more than one shall be an inhabitant of the town of Boston), shall have power, and they are hereby directed, whenever they shall judge it necessary . . . to alarm, muster, and cause to be assembled . . . such and so many of the militia . . . as they shall judge necessary for the ends aforesaid. . . ."<sup>1</sup> Early the next year a new committee of eleven members, mostly identical with the first appointment, was chosen. The members of the new committee were John Hancock, Joseph Warren, Benjamin Church, Richard Devens, Benjamin White, Joseph Palmer, Abraham Watson, Azor Orne, John Pigeon, William Heath, and Jabez Fisher.<sup>2</sup>

At the time of the appointment of this new Committee its powers were restricted to the extent that it was to call out the militia only if an attempt were made to carry out by force the laws passed by Parliament entitled, "For the Better Government of Massachusetts," which took away the chartered rights of the colony, and "For the Impartial Administration of Justice," which destroyed the right of trial by jury.<sup>3</sup> With the organization of the Massachusetts Committee of Safety and the allocation to it of power by the Provincial Congress to alarm the people and call out the militia, the decision as to the time for commencing hostilities was placed more surely than ever in the hands of a very few people.

There were those who realized what dynamite lay at the command of these committeemen. Joseph Hawley, a member of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress, wrote on February 22, 1775:

I have been most seriously contemplating the commission and most important trust of our committee of safety, and especially that branch of it which relates to their mustering the minutemen and others of the militia. . . . The soldiers, when thus mustered . . . will suppose it their duty to fight. . . . They will suppose that the continent have devolved the resolution of that question upon this province, and that this province have devolved it on the committee of safety, and that the committee, by calling them, have decided it. . . . Thus, hostilities will be commenced. . . .

<sup>1</sup> Force, ser. 4, vol. 1, p. 843.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1331.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1331.

When once the blow is struck it must be followed, and we must conquer, or all is lost forever. . . . I beg of you, therefore, as you love your country, to use your utmost influence with our committee of safety, that the people be not mustered, and that hostilities be not commenced, until we have the express, categorical decision of the continent, that the time is absolutely come that hostilities ought to begin. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Admonitions like that of Joseph Hawley were not heeded, however, for on March fourteenth and fifteenth the Committee of Safety appointed watches to guard the stores of supplies and ammunition at Worcester and Concord and provided couriers to alarm the towns on the first sign of a hostile movement of the British.<sup>2</sup> The Massachusetts Provincial Congress passed the following resolve on March thirtieth:

That whenever the Army under command of General Gage, or any part thereof, to the Number of Five Hundred, shall march out of the Town of Boston, with Artillery and Baggage, it ought to be deemed a design to carry into execution by Force the late acts of Parliament, the attempting which, by the Resolve of the late Honorable Continental Congress, ought to be opposed; and therefore the Military Force of the Province ought to be assembled, and an Army of Observation immediately formed, to act solely on the defensive so long as it can be justified on the Principals of Reason and Self Preservation and [no?] longer.<sup>3</sup>

Two days after this resolution was passed a letter from Boston to Philadelphia states that,

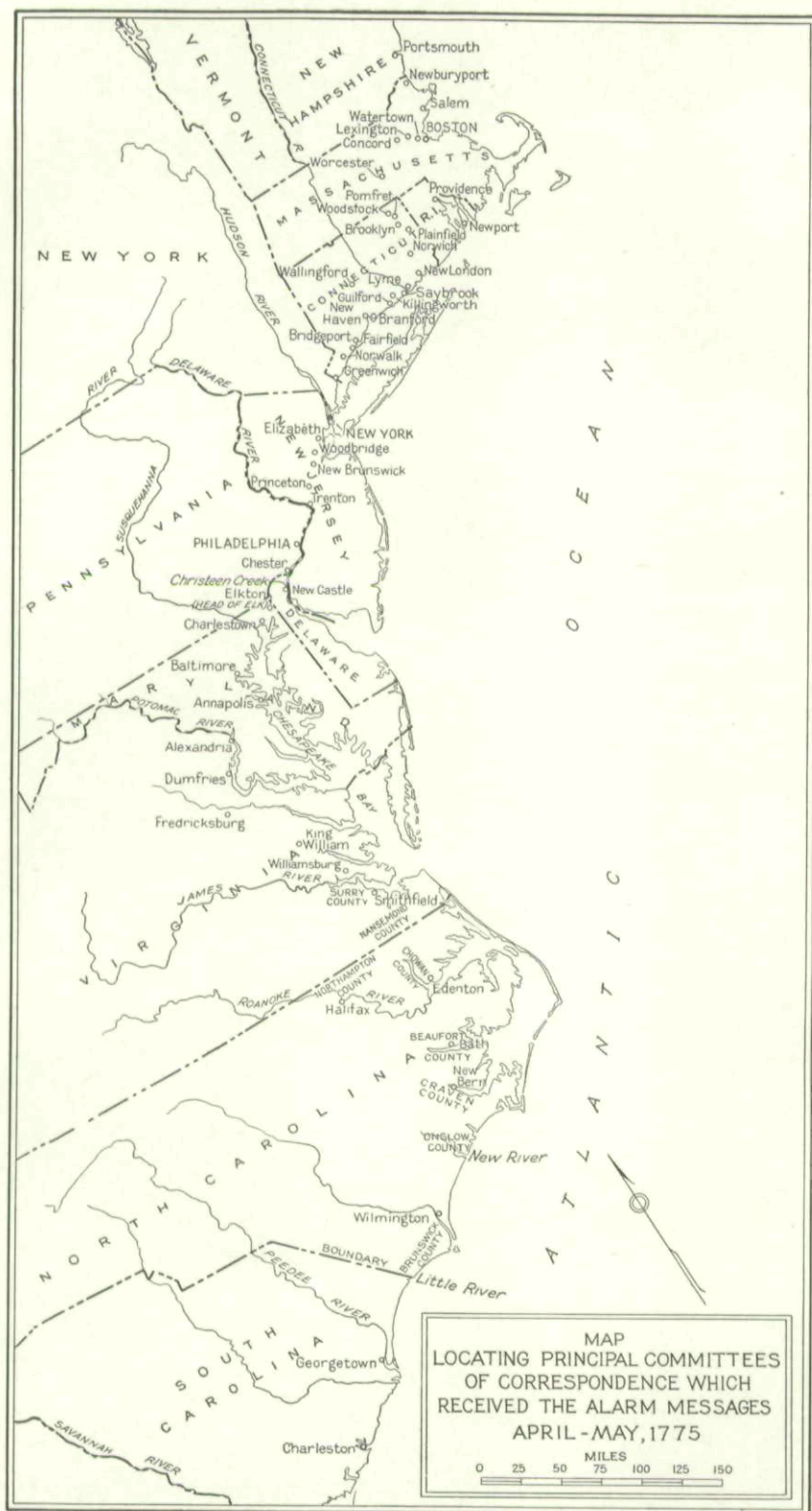
On Thursday last at daylight, the Troops beat to arms; five Regiments marched out with Earl Percy at their head; it was supposed they were going to Concord, where our Provincial Congress is now sitting. A quantity of provisions and warlike stores, I understand, is lodged there. Several expresses were immediately sent away to give notice of their marching. Important consequences were apprehended; but happily they went only a few miles out of Boston and returned again. The Town and Country were alarmed; many of the neighboring country Towns immediately mustered, and got equipped for a march.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Journals of Each Provincial Congress of Massachusetts* (Boston, 1838), pp. 748-9, 750-1. Joseph Hawley to Thomas Cushing.

<sup>2</sup> Force, ser. 4, vol. 1, p. 1370.

<sup>3</sup> Allen French, *The Day of Concord and Lexington*, p. 41. Acknowledgment is made, also, to Mr. French for the use of his notes and his courteous interest in this study.

<sup>4</sup> Force, ser. 4, vol. 2, p. 253.



On April 5 the Provincial Congress adjourned to May 10, "but if necessary to meet earlier."<sup>1</sup> The Committee of Safety was in session on the eighteenth of April at Menotomy (now Arlington) and adjourned to meet the next morning.

On the evening of April 18 the members of a committee in Boston, of which Paul Revere was one, who had been watching the movements of the British since the fall of 1774, observed movements in the British camp. Dr. Joseph Warren, one of the Committee of Safety, summoned Revere about ten in the evening and asked him to go to Lexington to warn Samuel Adams and John Hancock, another of the Committee of Safety, that the British were on the march because it was believed that they were the object of the march. Revere stopped to ask a friend to show the prearranged lantern signals advising certain men in Charlestown that the British were moving. He then crossed the Charles River and when he arrived in Charlestown he was met by the men who had seen the lantern signals. He gave them the news and also talked with Mr. Richard Devens, another of the Committee of Safety, who told him that he, Devens, had met ten British officers on the road from Lexington. Revere rode to Medford and stopped to waken the captain of the minute men. From Medford to Lexington he alarmed almost every house. After talking with Hancock and Adams and resting, Revere set off, together with William Dawes who had also been sent to Lexington by Dr. Warren, to alarm the people as far as Concord. Revere was intercepted by some British officers and turned back with them toward Lexington. When they neared Lexington they heard a volley of guns, which had been fired by the assembled militia as a general alarm. When the British troops appeared at Lexington there was a pistol report then two guns were fired and this was followed by a roar of muskets.<sup>2</sup> The long awaited shot had been fired.

Up to this point the alarms had been local to rally the people to meet an immediate need. Here the written alarm messages enter to begin a new stage in the development of the conflict.

<sup>1</sup> *Boston Gazette and Country Journal*, April 17, 1775.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of Paul Revere to Dr. Jeremy Belknap, Boston, January 1, 1798. *Coll. Mass. Hist. Soc.* ser. 1, vol. 5, p. 106.



Joseph Palmer, who had learned of the British movements,<sup>1</sup> was on his way to Lexington. At Watertown, at ten in the morning, he sent off his hasty note. We cannot tell what was in Palmer's mind when he wrote the message but it is probable that he conceived himself as acting under the indefinite authority of the Suffolk County resolutions as an individual sending out a written message of information, for the message was carried on in the procedure outlined by those resolutions. However, he signed his name as one of the Committee of Safety, even though in this capacity he had no power to call the militia without the agreement of at least four others of the committee. There is no indication that he had the agreement of any of the other members of the committee. Yet his letter may have given the impression of a formal call to many hasty, excited readers and may have carried more weight as such. The first drafts of Palmer's message, if they are in existence, have not yet been discovered. The draft that is reproduced here is the one which was written at Brooklyn, Connecticut, and sent forward to Norwich, Connecticut. It is impossible to know from this the exact form in which Palmer's message was written nor is it possible to determine how much of the careless punctuation and the abbreviation of words and sentences is attributable to Palmer's haste in first writing the message or to haste in copying it along the way. It is possible, for example, that the last sentence of Palmer's message may have originally read something like this, "Pray let the Delegates [who were sent] from this Colony to Connecticut see this. They [will] know [what to do now]" At any rate this last cryptic sentence can apparently be explained by the fact that early in April the Massachusetts Provincial Congress had resolved to apply to Connecticut, Rhode Island and New Hampshire for raising an army for general defense. The papers for Connecticut had been presented by the delegates but Governor Trumbull did not feel that the appearance of affairs

<sup>1</sup> According to the account of Mrs. Joseph Pearse Palmer, daughter-in-law of Joseph Palmer, she and her husband were awakened on the night of April 18 by a drum beat. While her husband was dressing, his father, Joseph Palmer, entered and said, "My son, we must ride. I have received an express. . . ." They went off immediately and did not return until ten the next night. "A Biographical Sketch of Gen. Joseph Palmer," *The New Englander*, vol. 3, January, 1845, pp. 3-4.

warranted calling an assembly. Jedidiah Foster, of Brookfield, was one of the delegates to Connecticut.<sup>1</sup> In accordance with Palmer's instructions to advise these delegates the first endorsement appearing on the Norwich manuscript is that of "Colo. Foster of Brookfield—one of the Delagates." Colonel Foster reports to the Massachusetts Provincial Congress in a subsequent letter that they were with Governor Trumbull at Lebanon two hours after he had Colonel Palmer's message and that he "cheerfully consented to call the Assembly of the Colony" for the following Wednesday.<sup>2</sup>

The next endorsement on the Norwich document is that for Worcester with no indication of the time of arrival or departure. The colorful but highly dubious tradition is that Bissel arrived in Worcester before noon on the nineteenth, dusty and worn, shouting, "To arms, to arms, the war has begun" and that his white horse, spent with fatigue, fell dead near the meeting house.<sup>3</sup> If this were true he would have covered thirty-six miles in two hours while his average per hour on the rest of the trip is about five miles per hour. Furthermore, the next endorsement is for Brooklyn, Connecticut, on Thursday, the twentieth, at eleven o'clock and since Brooklyn is less than forty-five miles from Worcester it seems possible that he arrived in Worcester in the late afternoon or early evening and spent the night there.

The Norwich copy of the alarm ends at this point and it is necessary, in order to trace the progress of the message south, to turn to the copy of the alarm message which was received in Philadelphia.<sup>4</sup> This copy was evidently made at Trenton since the

<sup>1</sup> Force, ser. 4, vol. 2, p. 378.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 378.

<sup>3</sup> From an unpublished paper of Mr. Abraham Wakeman, a copy of which is now in the American Antiquarian Society.

<sup>4</sup> The manuscript copy of the alarm message which is now in the collections of The Historical Society of Pennsylvania is made up of four pages. The first begins with the Watertown message of Joseph Palmer and ends with the endorsement of the Committee for New London. The second page begins with the endorsement for Lyme and, after the first endorsement for Fairfield, begins the message which was added at Fairfield giving the news of the express from Woodstock. The third page completes the Woodstock message and ends with a second endorsement for Fairfield signed by the same men who signed the endorsement on the second page. The fourth page carries the endorsements from New York to Trenton, inclusive, and the notation of the arrival of the document in Philadelphia.

message and all the endorsements are in the same hand and Trenton is the last place named on the manuscript before the final notation in another hand which reads: "Acct. of the Battle of Lexington, sent p[er] Express from Town to Town. This is the Paper sent to Phila. & delivered to me by one of the Comme Eben. Hasard." This copy of the message has essentially the text of Palmer's letter, with the exception that the words "this moment" are omitted after "by an Express from Boston," "the march" becomes "Their march," and "Mr Israel Bissel" is "Trail Bissel," "persons" is omitted after "I have spoken with Several," all mistakes which do not change the sense of the message and are easily attributable to hasty copying. In addition to this, the endorsement, "Colo. Foster of Brookfield—one of the Delagates" has been so placed as to read, "Pray let the Delegates from this Colony to Connecticut see this they know Col. Foster of Brookfield one of the Delegates. [signed] J. Palmer." The other endorsements in the Norwich document are carried over to the later copy. Immediately following them there is an endorsement, "Norwich Thursday 4 o'clock above is a true Cobby rec'd p[er] Express forward as sent p[er] Express from W Tyler Att[est] Chris Leffingwell"

Christopher Leffingwell, the proprietor of a Norwich tavern and a row of shops known as "Leffingwell Row," was one of the Committee of Correspondence for Norwich and one of its leading citizens. Since Leffingwell's tavern and shops were on the green of old Norwich they must have been the nucleus of the community.<sup>1</sup> Governor Trumbull was in Norwich when the news of the battle arrived.<sup>2</sup> This explains, perhaps, why there is no endorsement for Lebanon, Governor Trumbull's home.

From Norwich, the endorsements show that its next stop was at New London where it arrived at seven o'clock that same evening, Thursday. At New London three of the four names which

<sup>1</sup> Information concerning Christopher Leffingwell, the location of his shops and the Leffingwell tavern were supplied by Miss E. B. Huntington, a descendant of Christopher Leffingwell. Miss Huntington lives in the Leffingwell house which was formerly the tavern, in Norwich, Connecticut.

<sup>2</sup> I. W. Stuart, *Life of Jonathan Trumbull, Sen.* (Boston, 1859), p. 173.

appear on the message are the same as those who endorsed the false alarm of September 3, 1774. From thence it went down the coast with endorsements at Lyme, Friday morning at one o'clock; at Saybrook, Friday morning at four o'clock; Killingsworth at seven o'clock; East Guilford at eight; Guilford at ten; Branford at twelve, noon. While there is no hour of arrival or departure noted for New Haven it seems that Bissel must have stayed all night there for he arrived on the twenty-first, Friday, and the next endorsement is at Fairfield, twenty-one miles away, at eight o'clock, Saturday, the twenty-second.

Immediately after the names of the Fairfield Committee, on the Philadelphia manuscript, two supplementary accounts are written, with the explanation, "Since the above written we recd the following p[er] second Express." The first, which started as an oral report, may have been set down first in writing at Pomfret, Connecticut, since a broadside printed at Norwich gives the same account under the heading of Pomfret on the twentieth at three o'clock.<sup>1</sup> The message as it is found in the written copy is headed Thursday, which was the twentieth, at three o'clock and reads: "Sir: I am this moment informed by Express from Woodstock taken from the mouth of the Express that arrived there two of the Clock [this] afternoon that the contest between the first Brigade that marchd to Concord was still continuing this morning at the Town of Lexington to which said Brigade had retreated, that another Brigade said to be the second mentioned in the letter of this morning had landed with a quantity of Artillery at the place where the first troops did. The provincials were Determined to prevent the two Brigades from joining their strength if possible and remain in great need of Succour.

"NB. The regulars when in Concord burnt the Courthouse, took two p[iece]s of Cannon which they renderd useless & began to take up Concord Bridge on which Cap- who with many on both sides were soon Killed then made an Attack upon the Kings troops on which they retreated to Lexington."

<sup>1</sup> *Interesting Intelligence*. Norwich, April 22, 1775, 10 o'clock, P.M. . . . Printed by Robertsons and Trumbull. Dr. A. S. W. Rosenbach now owns two copies of this broadside.

On the manuscript this is signed, "I am Hblservt Eb. Williams" and on the Norwich printed handbill it reads, "In haste I am Sir your humble Servant Eb. Williams"

Williams seems to have addressed this message to Colonel Obadiah Johnson of Canterbury and immediately after the address to have added a postscript which reads, "P.S. Mr. W. McFarland of Plainfield Merch[ant] has just returned from Boston by way of Providence, who Conversed with an Express from Lexington who further informs, that about 4000 of our Troops had Surrounded the first Brigade above Mentioned who were on a hill in Lexington, that the Action Continued, and there were about 50 of our men Killed. and 150 of the Regular as near as they could determine when the Express came away, it will be Expedient for every man to go who is fit & willing."

At the end of this message the Fairfield Committee again attest the message with a notation, "The above is a true Copy as recd p[er] Express from Woodstock and Attested to by the Committee of Correspondence from Town to Town." This would indicate that they have eliminated the endorsements on this additional message. The names of the Fairfield committee are the same as those in the previous endorsement but appear in different order.

The next endorsement on the manuscript is that of the New York committee at four o'clock Sunday afternoon, April 23. Here the message was printed in a handbill<sup>1</sup> together with letters which had arrived by boat from Newport. The name of the printer and the date do not appear on the bill. On the back of one copy<sup>2</sup> of this printed broadside there is an account, which, although unsigned, is apparently in the handwriting of General Alexander McDougall,<sup>3</sup> of the arrival of the news and its effect. McDougall states that the news was received about two o'clock on Sunday

<sup>1</sup> *New-York, Sunday 23rd April, 1775.* The following interesting Advices, were this Day received here, by two Vessels from Newport, and by an Express by Land. Listed in Charles Evans, *American Bibliography*, No. 14337.

<sup>2</sup> The broadside carrying General McDougall's manuscript account is in the library of John H. Scheide, Titusville, Penna.

<sup>3</sup> Alexander McDougall was one of the leading New York radicals and a member of the New York Committee of Correspondence. *Dictionary of American Biography.*

Copy of the Alarm sent by the Committee of Wintertown  
near Boston, to raise the Country, writ by me as Chairman  
of the Committee of Safety at Elizabeth Town on the Even-  
ing of 28 April 1775

Water Town -

Wednesday Morning near 11 O'Clock

To all friends of American Liberty, be it known, that  
this morning before break of Day, a Brigade, consisting of about 1000  
or 1200 Men, landed at Chipp's Farm at Cambridge and marched to Lex-  
ington, where they found a Company of our Militia in Arms, upon  
whom they fired without any provocation and killed 6 Men & wounded  
12 others - By an express from Boston we find another Brigade are  
now upon their March from Boston, supposed to be about 2000 -  
The Deacon Israel Bissel is charged to alarm the Country quite  
to Connecticut; and all Persons are desired to furnish him with  
fresh Horses, as they may be needed - I have spoken with several  
who have seen the dead & wounded -

J. Palmer one of the Committee  
of S - Y

forwarded from Worcester April 19 1775

Brooklye - Thursday 11 O'Clock

Norwich - 4 O'Clock

New London - 7 O'Clock

Seymour - Friday Morning 1 O'Clock

Saybrook - 4 O'Clock

Hellingsworth - 7 O'Clock

E. Guilford - 8 O'Clock

Guilford - 10 O'Clock

Bridford - 12 O'Clock

New Haven - April 21<sup>st</sup>

Not forwarded on certain Intelligence

Fairfield - April 22<sup>nd</sup> 8 O'Clock

afternoon; that the Committee of Correspondence was called at four, at which time "they dispatched the intelligence by Mr. Moorbach express to the Southard. At our breaking up Mr. Low declared, as the people of Massets bay wanted no men & fought our Battles, we ought to supply them with Provisions and munition & for his part his fortune was at their Service."<sup>1</sup> Again the message which had been directed "quite to Connecticut" was given new impetus by the decision of the New York Committee. While there is no mention of the express rider in the directions for forwarding to New York, it is probable that Bissel carried it to that point, since he was a regular express between Boston and New York.

Although the message had lost its original purpose to bring immediate reinforcement to the men at Lexington and Concord as it progressed to more distant territories it still produced violent reactions in those who read its news. General McDougall reports that when the message was received in New York, "Two Sloops loaded with Provisions and Stores for the [British] Troops, at Boston were unloaded. Messrs. John Watts, Oliver DeLancy & Mr. Watts the Recorder came down to one of these sloops to intimidate the people from Landing the Provisions but it did not avail. A Transport with Provisions & Stores for them went down this morning. . . . This afternoon the People broke open the doors at the City Hall & took out the City Arms. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

For some reason the directions of the New York Committee, as recorded on the Philadelphia alarm manuscript, were to forward the message to New Brunswick but to stop at Elizabethtown. In accordance with these instructions no endorsement appears on the Philadelphia manuscript for Elizabethtown. However the rider did stop as he was instructed to do at Elizabethtown. This fact is established by the third manuscript copy of the alarm message.<sup>3</sup> It is evident that the copy was made in haste and re-

<sup>1</sup> General McDougall's account.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Emmet Collection # 5144 New York Public Library, a facsimile reproduction only. All efforts to trace the original manuscript from which the Emmet facsimile was made have been unsuccessful.

tained in Elizabethtown while the document from which it was made was forwarded on to the next Committee. Only Palmer's original message was copied, after a brief explanatory heading, "Copy of the Alarm sent by the Committee of Watertown near Boston, to raise the Country, rec'd by me as Chairman of the Committee of Safety at Elizabethtown<sup>1</sup> in the Evening of 23rd April 1775." After Palmer's message the towns through which the letter had passed with the dates after each are briefly listed to and including Fairfield. The Elizabethtown copy differs from the other two in that it was made by a member of the Committee of Safety rather than of the Committee of Correspondence. It may, therefore, have been intended only for the information of that committee since it was not a duty of that committee to see that the news was sent forward.

From New York to Philadelphia the express rode all night. This confirms General McDougall's statement that a new rider carried the news. The regular form of endorsement appears for New Brunswick, dated April 24 at two o'clock in the morning, for Princeton at six and at Trenton at nine in the morning. Here ends the manuscript alarm which was received in Philadelphia at five o'clock in the afternoon of April 24.

At Philadelphia a broadside was printed by W. and T. Bradford.<sup>2</sup> This handbill gives the hour of the arrival of the news, Palmer's message, the additional message attached at Fairfield, lists the towns through which the news had passed between Worcester and Fairfield and ends with the summary, "The above was received yesterday at 4 o'clock, by the Committee of New York, and forwarded to Philadelphia, by ISAAC LOW, Chairman of the Committee of New-York." Three Philadelphia newspapers of the twenty-fifth and twenty-sixth printed the same message, utilizing the text of the handbill.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Elizabethtown copy was probably written by Jonathan Hampton who signed a similar endorsement on a later message (note 1, p. 72) from Wallingford, Connecticut, as "Chairman of the Committee."

<sup>2</sup> Evans No. 14397.

<sup>3</sup> *Pennsylvania Evening Post*, April 25, 1775; *Pennsylvania Gazette*, April 26, 1775; *Pennsylvania Journal*, April 26, 1775.



PHILADELPHIA, April 24, 1775.

An Express arrived at Five o'Clock this Evening, by which we have the following Advices.

Watertown, Wednesday Morning, near 10 of the Clock.

**T**O all Friends of American Liberty, be it known, that this morning before break of day, a brigade consisting of about 1000 or 1,200 men landed at Phipps's Farm, at Cambridge, and marched to Lexington, where they found a Company of our Colony Militia in arms, upon whom they fired without any provocation, and killed six men, & wounded four others. By an express from Boston we find another brigade are now upon their march from Boston, supposed to be about 1000. The bearer, Trail Bissel is charged to alarm the country quite to Connecticut; and all persons are desired to furnish him with fresh horses, as they may be needed. I have spoken with several, who have seen the dead and wounded. Pray let the Delegates from this colony to Connecticut see this, they know Col. Forster, one of the Delegates.

J. PALMER, one of the Committee.

A true copy from the Original, per order of the Committee of Correspondence of Worcester, April 1775.

Attested and forwarded by the Committees of Brookline, Norwich, New-London, Lyme, Saybrook, Killingworth, E. Guilford, Guilford, Brandford, New-Haven.

Fairfield, Saturday, April, 22, 8 o'clock.

SINCE the above-written we have received the following by a second express.

Thursday, 3 o'clock afternoon, A. M.

S I R,

I am this moment informed by an express from Woodstock, taken from the mouth of the Express, then two of the clock afternoon.—That the contest between the first Brigade that marched to Concord was still continuing this morning at the town of Lexington, to which said Brigade had retreated, that another Brigade had, said to be the second mentioned in the letter of this morning, landed with a quantity of Artillery, at the place where the first did. The Provincials were determined to prevent the two Brigades from joining their strength if possible, and remain in great need of succour.

N. B. The Regulars when in Concord, burnt the Court House, took two pieces of cannon which they rendered useless; and began to take up Concord bridge, on which Capt. — (who with many on both sides were soon killed,) made an attack upon the king's troops, on which they retreated to Lexington.

I am,

To Col. Obadiah Johnson,  
Canterbury.

EB. WILLIAMS.

P. S. Mr. M'Farlan' of Plainfield, Merchant, has just returned from Boston by way of Providence, who conversed with an express from Lexington, who further informs, that 4000 of our troops had surrounded the first brigade above-mentioned, who were on a hill in Lexington, that the action continued, and there were about 50 of our men killed, and 150 of the regulars as near as they could determine, when the express came away; it will be expedient for every man to go who is fit and willing.

The above is a true copy as received per express, from New-Haven, and attested to by the Committee of Correspondence, from town to town. Attest.

Jonathan Sturgis,  
Andrew Rowland,  
Thaddius Burr,  
Job Bartram. } Committee.

The above was received yesterday at 4 o'clock, by the Committee of New-York, and forwarded to Philadelphia, by ISAAC LOW, Chairman of the Committee of New-York.

Printed by W. and T. BRADFORD.

It is probable that the official message was carried to the Committees of Correspondence south from Philadelphia in the form of the printed broadside. Two days after the news was received in Philadelphia, a handbill appeared in Baltimore<sup>1</sup> which carried the heading, "We have just received the following important intelligence. . . ." In this bill the identification "Massachusetts-Bay" has been inserted in brackets after "Watertown," the name Israel Bissel has been converted into "Tryal Russell" and attempts to clarify the sense have been made by changing the punctuation, as, "Pray let the Delegates from this Colony to Connecticut, see this; they know Col. Foster, of Brookfield, one of the Delegates." For the most part, however, the text follows that of the Philadelphia printed message.

The *Maryland Gazette* for April 27, printed at Annapolis, follows the same text in its account, prefaced by, "The following was received yesterday, a handbill, by express."

At Williamsburg the message was put into print by Alexander Purdie on April 29.<sup>2</sup> Purdie begins, after a heading:

Late last night an express arrived from Philadelphia, with the following melancholy advices from the province of Connecticut, forwarded to the committee of correspondence in this city. The blow (so much dreaded by our noble friend Lord Chatham) is now struck, a great deal of blood spilt, and much more, it is likely, than the present advices communicate. That great man, in his speech upon the necessity of withdrawing the troops from Boston (delivered in the House of Lords the 20th of January last) says: "Perhaps, even whilst I am now speaking, the decisive blow is struck, which may involve millions in the consequences; and, believe me, the very first drop of blood that is spilled will not be a wound easily skinned over; it will be irritabile vulnus, a wound of that rancorous and festering kind, that, in all probability, will mortify the whole body."

Hereupon follows the message headed, "Philadelphia, April 24, 1775 . . . Watertown, Wednesday morning, near 10 o'clock. . . ." There are only a few minor changes in the text. Israel Bissel has now become "Trial Brisset" and "supposed to be about 1000" is now "supposed to consist of 1000 men," but in no way is the sense of the message changed. The Williamsburg message ends

<sup>1</sup> *Baltimore: April 26.* Evans No. 13819.

<sup>2</sup> Evans No. 14628.

with, "This morning the Committee of Correspondence met, and have determined to send expresses to the southward— It is now full time for us all to be on our guard, and to prepare ourselves against every contingency. The *sword is now drawn*, and God knows when it will be sheathed."

The *Virginia Gazette* for April 29 prints the text of the Philadelphia handbill almost exactly. It is natural that a newspaper account, which would be printed with less haste than a handbill, would be more accurate. The account in the *Gazette* has carried over from the Philadelphia handbill even the errors in the spelling of names such as "Brandford" and reproduces the final sentence of the handbill to the extent of printing "ISAAC LOW" in capitals to stand out from the rest of the sentence as it was in the original. The only changes in the *Gazette* printing are in capitalization and punctuation and, in only a very few cases, in spelling. This gives added color to the theory that the message was carried from Philadelphia to Williamsburg in the form of the broadside printed in Philadelphia. The *Gazette* disagrees with Purdie's handbill in stating that this news arrived "this morning" which would be on the twenty-ninth, for the handbill gives the time of arrival as "late last night," which would be the twenty-eighth; both accounts are dated April twenty-ninth.

Up to this point there has been no indication that the Committees of Correspondence receiving this message had had any other notices of the encounter before it arrived; but our next and last printed evidence of this particular message was preceded by two others. The Watertown account appears in the *North Carolina Gazette* for May 12, 1775, printed at New Bern, North Carolina, under a heading of May 8 and the explanation, "Just now arrived here an Express from Halifax [North Carolina] with the following important Account, which was forwarded from Williamsburg to the Committee of Northampton County." After this follows the text of the Williamsburg broadside, including the quotation from Lord Chatham. From this it would seem that the document received in Williamsburg was retained there and that one of Purdie's printed handbills was sent on south from there.

Previous to the arrival at New Bern of the Palmer story of the battle, the *North Carolina Gazette* printed on May 5, 1775, what appears to be the first news of the encounter to reach the south. This news arrived in the form of a letter from Newport, dated April 22, and received in North Carolina by boat the previous Wednesday (i. e. May 3) according to the account in the paper. The writer of the letter states that they had just been informed by a gentleman from Cambridge that a detachment of troops marched out from Boston amounting to "1000 or 1500 Men, as is reported" who found at "Lixington" one hundred provincials under arms. The story tells of the march to Concord, the opposition of the provincials and of the encampment of the regulars at Bunker Hill. There is a very evident difference between this unofficial letter and the simple statement of Joseph Palmer which had been written on the day that the encounter took place and only a few miles away from the scene of the action. This change is reflected in sentences such as this, "Last Evening a very great Light was seen by several Gentlemen, who were riding in the Night, that appeared to be in or near Marchfield, so that it was conjectured here, that either the Kings Troops, or the Provincials, had set Fire to that town." And another, "Since the Arrival of this Account, we hear for certain, that the Soldiers on their Retreat entered two or three Houses, and most barbarously butchered several old and sick People."

More significant than this first letter to reach the south is the second message which was carried by land and which arrived at New Bern on May sixth. It was printed in the same issue of the *North Carolina Gazette*<sup>1</sup> as the Watertown message, appearing just above the latter. This account was first set into writing at Wallingford, Connecticut, on Monday morning, April twenty-fourth, and followed the general route of the Watertown letter, and was frequently attested by the same members of the Committees of Correspondence along the way. Although it started five days later and made many more stops than the Palmer message, it travelled faster and was carried in manuscript with endorsements all the

<sup>1</sup> May 12, 1775.

way south.<sup>1</sup> Like the first message, handbills<sup>2</sup> were printed from it in New York and Philadelphia and newspapers<sup>3</sup> carried its story along the way.

The text of the Wallingford message<sup>4</sup> reads thus:

Col. Wadsworth was over in this place most of yesterday and has ordered twenty Men out of each Company in his Regiment, Some of which have already set off and others go this Morning—He brings Accounts, which come to him authenticated from Thursday in the afternoon—The Kings Troops being reinforced a second Time, and joined as I suppose from what I can learn by the party who were intercepted by Col. Gardner, were encamped on Winter Hill, and were surrounded by 20000 of our Men, who were intrenching—Col. Gardner's Ambush proved fatal to Lord Percy and another General Officer who were killed on the spot at the first fire.— To counterbalance this good news, the Story is, that our first Man in Command (who he was I know not) is also killed. It seems they have lost many men on both sides— Col. Wadsworth had the Accts in a Letter from Hartford— The Country beyond here, are all gone off, and we expect it will be impossible to procure Horses for our waggons; as they have, or will in every place employ themselves all their horses. In this place they send a Horse for every sixth Man, and are pressing them for that purpose. I know of no Way but you must immediately send a Couple of stout able horses, who may overtake us at Hartford possibly, where we must return Mr. Noy's and Meloy's if he holds out so far— Remember the horses must be had at any Rate. I am in the greatest Haste, your entire Friend & humb[le] serv[an]t, James Lockwood.

<sup>1</sup> Dr. A. S. W. Rosenbach has a manuscript copy of this message which agrees in detail with that printed in R. W. Gibbes, *Documentary History of the American Revolution 1764-1776*, (New York, 1855), pp. 82-91, and in Force, *American Archives*, ser. 4, vol. 2, pp. 366-369, with the exception that both Force and Gibbes have many more endorsements than are now present with the manuscript. Like the manuscript described by Gibbes, Dr. Rosenbach's copy was apparently copied for the last time in Baltimore, the later endorsements being in different hands on various sheets of paper. It is possible, therefore, that the copy now owned by Dr. Rosenbach is that which was used by both Gibbes and Force, and that in the meantime some of the endorsements have been lost or sold separately as autographs. The citations here are from the manuscript, when they are present there, supplemented by Gibbes and Force to supply the later endorsements which are lacking in the manuscript.

<sup>2</sup> *NEW YORK*, Tuesday, April 25, 1775 [New York, 1775]. Evans No. 14338.  
*PHILADELPHIA*, April 26, 1775 [John Dunlop, Philadelphia, 1775]. Evans No. 14398.  
*PHILADELPHIA*, April 26, 1775 [W. & T. Bradford, Philadelphia, 1775]. Not in Evans. A copy was sold by Goodspeed in 1927.

<sup>3</sup> *New York Journal*, April 27, 1775; *North Carolina Gazette*, May 12, 1775.

<sup>4</sup> From the Rosenbach manuscript.

Isaac Bears adds a note to the message saying that Colonel Gardner took nine prisoners, and that twelve of the King's men came over to the colonists party; that there were eighteen hundred of the King's men instead of twelve hundred as before reported and that if reports are true all but four or five hundred of the King's men are now encamped at Winter Hill.

The sensational character of this message does much to explain the haste with which it was carried on and its endorsements show how the temper of the people along the way has risen since they first received the news of the clash of the British troops and the provincials. After the message left Philadelphia the instructions are "Night and day to be forwarded." The endorsement for Alexandria, Virginia, reads, "We received the enclosed" instead of "a true copy" as the previous committees worded their acknowledgments. This seems to indicate that at this point the committees gave up the practice of making new copies to send on but merely added a note and sent on the copy received. This supposition is strengthened by the fact that the known manuscript copy was last copied at Baltimore and the endorsements appear in different hands thereafter on various sheets of paper.<sup>1</sup> The committee for Dumfries, Virginia, wrote, "In one hour I hired the bearer to convey it to your place. . . ." The directions of the Williamsburg committee, which received this account four days after it had the Watertown story, specify, "with the request of the Committee of Williamsburgh that you will be pleased to forward the papers to the Southward, and disperse the material passages through all your parts." The committee of Bath, North Carolina, is very definite in its instructions to the next committee. They read: "In haste have sent to request you will peruse the enclosed papers; and that you will do, by opening the packet herewith sent the moment it comes to your house. Get three or four of your Committee to write a line, and send the whole, enclosed, to the next Southward Committee, with the utmost dispatch. . . ."

The committee at New Bern throws more light on the procedure for handling the messages. "The enclosed," ran the instructions,

<sup>1</sup> Note 1, p. 72.

"arrived here about an hour past, and is forwarded immediately to you; and desire you will keep a copy of James Lockwood's letter, and send them on as soon as possible to the Wilmington Committee. . . ." The committee adds the following note, "N.B.—We have enclosed our last paper, which gives an account of the first beginning of the battle, which please to send to Wilmington, &c, and send all the bundle of papers forward as soon as possible you can." Another later endorsement mentions the enclosed *Gazette*. Since the New Bern endorsement is dated the sixth and the *North Carolina Gazette* for the fifth carried the letter from Newport, it would seem this was the "account of the beginning of the battle" enclosed.

The arrival of the Watertown message at New Bern on the eighth must have seemed of little consequence in comparison with the exaggerated accounts which preceded it. It may be that the Watertown message went no farther than New Bern for this reason, or if it did, it created little notice.

The Wallingford message with the Newport letter, however, went on south. The endorsement for the committee of Onslow County, North Carolina, reflects some indecision. It reads, "About an hour past I received the enclosed papers. Disperse them to your adjoining County. Keep a copy of James Lockwood's letter, and pray write us what to do."

It is most interesting and important to note the zeal with which these messages were received in the far south. This speaks loudly for the effective work done by the Committees of Correspondence in knitting together the thirteen colonies into one united group. The Wilmington committee say, "If you should be at a loss for a man and horse, the bearer will proceed as far as the Boundary house," and adds a postscript, "For God's sake send the man on without the least delay; and write to Mr. Marion to forward it by night and by day." At Brunswick the newspaper is again mentioned: "Enclosed is the newspaper, giving an account of the beginning of the battle; and a letter of what happened after. Pray don't neglect a moment in forwarding." Isaac Marion, in forwarding the packet says: "I Request, for the good of our

Country, and the welfare of our lives and liberties, and fortunes, you will not lose a moment's time. . . ."

The last endorsement known directs the message to the General Committee at Charleston, South Carolina, and again mentions the letter and the newspaper. Thus by the middle of May the news had been carried down the trunk line of communication the length of the colonies and from this main artery it spread through countless subsidiary veins until it reached all parts of the country. In less than a week after the receipt of the news at Williamsburg, Virginia, it had crossed the Blue Ridge and was known to the people in the Shenandoah Valley.<sup>1</sup> A letter written to Draper's Meadows near Blacksburg, Montgomery County, Virginia, reports, "This very moment Boston's News Struck my Ears & affects my Heart, tho' it is but what I expected. We live in a terrible world (terrible indeed) when men of the same Nation make a merit of shedding one anothers Blood."<sup>2</sup> Word reached Pennsylvania the second week in May and on May sixteenth the inhabitants of Westmoreland County met at Hannastown to consider the alarming situation of the country.<sup>3</sup> Bancroft reports that a group of campers on the present site of Lexington, Kentucky, received the news at that point and gives that as the reason why Lexington bears its name.<sup>4</sup>

The results of Joseph Palmer's message can not be measured alone in the number of men who turned out from Massachusetts and Connecticut as a direct result of its summons, nor in the proceedings of the Connecticut Assembly which met a few days later, nor even in those first angry demonstrations it occasioned along its route like that described by General McDougall in New York. Its real influence and importance lies no more in these than the significance of Samuel Adams' address to a town meeting in Boston, in November of 1772 rests solely in the formation of a

<sup>1</sup> Reuben Gold Thwaites and Louise P. Kellogg, *The Revolution on the Upper Ohio, 1775-1777* (Madison, 1906), p. ii, note 23.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> William Henry Smith, *The St. Clair Papers* (Cincinnati, 1882), vol. I, p. 363.

<sup>4</sup> George Bancroft, *The American Revolution* (Boston, 1858), vol. I, op. 312.



Committee of Correspondence for Boston. Such events can not be measured singly but only in relation to each other in the light of events which followed them. It was the Wallingford message, exaggerated and inaccurate, which was carried by special messenger to the far south, making many more stops along the way, and it was this message which finally entirely eclipsed the simple Watertown message; but the Newport letter which arrived first at New Bern and the Wallingford account were but two of innumerable letters and accounts which were circulated through the colonies and were sent to England in the week following the clash after that first pistol shot. Everywhere in the wake, first, of those oral alarms like Revere's and, later, in districts more remote, of Joseph Palmer's written message, Committees of Correspondence met not only to send the alarm on as it had been received but, not satisfied with the brief details of their original information, to send out messengers to gather up such additional information as they could get in nearby towns. The paths of these expresses must have crossed and recrossed and with each telling, rumor did much to enlarge and embellish the facts at hand. The handbill printed at Norwich on April twenty-second which gave the two messages which were added to the Palmer message at Fairfield tells something of the reaction to these messages. It states, "Mr. David Nevins who yesterday Forenoon went Express from this town to obtain Intelligence, returned from Providence." Mr. Nevins reported that the inhabitants of Providence, upon hearing the news of Lexington, had immediately assembled the officers of the independent companies and militia with a number of gentlemen of the town; had a meeting and two expresses were dispatched for Lexington to obtain authentic accounts while others were sent to different parts of Rhode Island and Connecticut—from which Nevins had come and was returning the news. When the Providence expresses returned from Lexington they reported, as it is relayed by Mr. Nevins, that the British troops, as they proceeded toward Concord, at Lexington came upon a small number of men, who were drilling, and after accosting them in profane and insulting language they ordered them to disperse. At first the provin-

cials refused to do this but after being threatened they started to obey but were immediately fired upon when eight of them were killed. The report continues with the skirmish at Concord, the pursuit to Bunker Hill and the return to Boston, stating that seventy privates were killed and one lieutenant of the King's forces and about thirty provincials killed and three or four taken prisoners. It also accuses the troops of, "having with a Barbarity heretofore unpracticed by British soldiers, destroyed all they met with. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

There is a glimpse of another oral alarm, which like the Wallingford message, was set down in writing along its way. This is from a letter of James Hudson of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, on April twentieth, as follows:

Early this morning we were alarmed with an Express from Newburyport, with the following Letter to the Chairman of the Committee of Correspondence in this town:

Newburyport, April 19, 1775.

SIR: This Town has been in a continual alarm since mid-day, with reports of the Troops having marched out of Boston to make some attack in the country. The reports in general concur, in part, in having been at Lexington. And it is very generally said they have been at Concord. We sent off an express this afternoon, who went as far as Simons's at Danvers, before he could get information that he thought might be depended upon. He there met two or three gentlemen who affirmed, the regular Troops and our men had been engaged chief of the morning, and that it is supposed we had twenty-five thousand men engaged against four thousand Regulars; that the Regulars had begun a retreat. Our men here are setting off immediately. And as the sword is now drawn, and first drawn at the side of the Troops, we scruple not you will give the readiest and fullest assistance in your power. And send this information farther on. In behalf of the Committee for this Town.<sup>2</sup>

One letter telling of the clash says, "This alarmed the country so, that it seemed as if men came down from the clouds. . . . We have now at least ten thousand men round this Town. . . ."<sup>3</sup> Another letter from Weathersfield, Connecticut, reports, "We are all in motion here, and equipt from the Town, yesterday, one

<sup>1</sup> Note I, p. 65.

<sup>2</sup> Force, ser. 4, vol. 2, p. 359.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 359. Letter from Boston to New York, April 19, 1775.

hundred young men, who cheerfully offered their service; twenty days provision, and sixty-four rounds, per man. They are all well armed and in high spirits. . . . Our neighboring Towns are all arming and moving. . . . We shall by night have several thousands from this Colony on their march. . . ."<sup>1</sup> This same letter also reports that Earl Percy, General Haldimand, and many other are said to be killed.

The newspapers, too, reflect the confusion that was prevalent throughout the northern colonies. The *Massachusetts Gazette* for Thursday, April 20, noted that, "the Reports concerning this unhappy Affair . . . 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."<sup>2</sup>

Probably the best summary of the state of the colonies at this time is given in a quotation from a letter from the Connecticut Committee of Correspondence to John Hancock, President of the Provincial Congress of Massachusetts Bay. It says, "Our accounts are so various, we do not know what to rely on. . . . The ardor of the people is such, that they can't be kept back. . . ."<sup>3</sup>

In the meantime, back at the center of activities, on April 21 the Committee of Safety met formally and drew up a form of enlistment for the army and resolved to enlist out of the Massachusetts forces eight thousand men.<sup>4</sup> On April 22 Joseph Palmer wrote a letter to the New Hampshire Congress by the order of the Committee of Safety, summarizing the occurrences on the nineteenth. His letter indicates that events have passed into a new era of definite action, "As the Troops have now begun hostilities, we think it our duty to exert our utmost strength to save our Country from absolute slavery, and we pray you to afford us all the assistance in your power; and we shall be glad that our brethren, who may come to our aid, may be so supplied with all

<sup>1</sup> Force, ser. 4, vol. 2, p. 362.

<sup>2</sup> *Massachusetts Gazette*, April 20, 1775.

<sup>3</sup> Force, ser. 4, vol. 2, pp. 372-373. Lebanon, April 21, 1775.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 744. Proceedings of the Massachusetts Committee of Safety.

necessary provisions and military stores, as we have no more of either than what is absolutely necessary for ourselves. We pray God to direct you to such measures as shall tend to the salvation of our common liberties."<sup>1</sup>

On the same day the Massachusetts Provincial Congress met and asked the Committee of Safety to present what plans they had in readiness. They also appointed a committee to take depositions from which a full account of the transactions of the troops under General Gage in their route to and from Concord could be made to send to England. These same depositions were presented to the Continental Congress on May 10, 1775.<sup>2</sup> General Gage also made a report of the affair which was printed as a broadside by John Howe in Boston on April 21, 1775.<sup>3</sup> With these formal actions the echos of the first shot became lost in the clamor of the wheels it set in motion and the united colonies were faced with the problems of organization for a nation in civil war.

Considered in the light of subsequent events and as one link in a chain of occurrences which led to revolution, Palmer's message played a most significant part. It was probably the first message of an official character to carry the news outside of the immediate vicinity of Boston and one of the reports which set in motion the machinery of the highly organized system of Committees of Correspondence. It made the people aware that something had happened and stimulated them to go out to learn more of these affairs. It is no longer important to distinguish which message carried the news but that it was spread far and wide and that this news was the immediate cause for bursting into flame a fire which had been smoldering for a century.

<sup>1</sup> Force, ser. 4, vol. 2, p. 374.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 765. Proceedings of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress, April 22, 1775.

<sup>3</sup> *A CIRCUMSTANTIAL account of an attack that happened on the 19th of April 1775* [Boston, 1775]. Evans No. 13869.

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