

THE MIDNIGHT RIDE OF PAUL REVERE: FROM HISTORY TO FOLKLORE

The midnight ride of Paul Revere is one of the best known events in American history and Paul Revere one of the most familiar historical figures. But all most of us know are clichés: “The British are coming!” and “One if by land, two if by sea.”

The development of Paul Revere as a folk hero has gone through various phases: the contemporary view of Revere as a respected member of the community and minor Revolutionary figure, Longfellow’s typically 19th century view of Revere as a national idol and patriotic symbol, and the present cynical perception of Revere as an overrated hero and butt of jokes.

To understand Revere and his ride we must look at the surprising wealth of surviving documentary material, including Revere’s own accounts, and not rely on secondary sources like Longfellow’s poem, newspaper articles, history texts, or television game shows. To understand the misinterpretations and changing perceptions of Revere we must look at the varying political, social, and cultural climates which have influenced our views.

An examination of our popular history and art will show that the 1775 Revere is not the 1875 or 1975 Revere. And the process of re-interpretation and re-invention continues.

The Ride

Within three days of the Battle of Lexington, the Massachusetts Provincial Congress set up a committee to determine what had happened at Lexington and answer the question, “Did the British fire first?” Paul Revere, among others, was asked for a deposition. As he hadn’t seen who fired first, his deposition was filed but not published by the Congress in their report, *A Narrative of the Excursion and Ravages of the King’s Troops Under the Command of General Gage Together with the Depositions Taken by Order of the Congress to Support the Truth of It* (published May 22, 1775).

An account of the ride was first made public when, in 1798, Jeremy Belknap of the Massachusetts Historical Society published a letter from Revere. Revere was fulfilling a promise of “giving you some facts, and Anecdotes, prior to the Battle of Lexington, which I do not remember to have seen in any history of the American Revolution.”

Based on the unpublished deposition and the published account, we start our story of the ride on Saturday, April 15th, 1775, about midnight. Revere and other patriots “who formed ourselves into a Committee for the purpose of watching the Movements of the British soldiers . . .” noticed that the soldiers

had been removed from routine patrol and their boats repaired and launched. “From these movements, we expected something serious [was] to be transacted . . .”

The likely objects of this activity seemed to be either the arrest of patriot leaders John Hancock and Samuel Adams in Lexington (staying with the Reverend Jonas Clark while attending a meeting of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress in Concord) or the destruction of colonial munitions in nearby Concord. Dr. Joseph Warren, President of the Massachusetts



**“Noise!
You’ll have
noise enough before long!
The Regulars are out!”**



Provincial Congress, who remained in Boston, sent the forty-year-old Revere (not quite the dashing youth we imagine) to Lexington on Sunday, April 16th to warn Hancock and Adams of a suspected British march. The news was also forwarded to Concord. Thus, the warning of an impending attack was delivered by Revere two days before the famous midnight ride.

On his return to Boston, Revere met with Colonel Conant of the Charlestown Committee of Safety. They agreed "that if the British went out by Water, we would shew two Lanthorns in the North Church Steeple; and if by Land, one as a Signal, for we were apprehensive it would be difficult to Cross the Charles River, or git over Boston neck." The signals therefore were not to Revere (as Longfellow wrote) but rather to the Charlestown Committee of Safety, whose job it would be to deliver the intelligence to Hancock and Adams should Revere be unable to get out of Boston.

The suspicions of April 15th were confirmed three nights later when British soldiers were observed marching toward Boston Common. About ten o'clock, a worried Dr. Warren sent for Revere, an experienced messenger as well as gatherer of intelligence. Revere's assignment: "to go to Lexington, and inform Mr. Samuel Adams and the Honl. John Hancock Esqr. that there was a number of Soldiers. . . marching to the bottom of the Common, where there was a number of Boats to receive them. . . it was supposed, that they were going to Lexington. . . to take them. . . or to Concord, to destroy the Colony Stores." No one told Revere to go to Concord or (as Longfellow wrote) "every Middlesex village and farm." Revere also learned that Dr. Warren had already sent "an express by land to Lexington—a Mr. Wm. Daws."

Revere could not leap on his horse, but was first rowed across the Charles River to Charlestown by two friends. Safe in Charlestown (confirmed in a letter by Richard Devens of the

Charlestown Committee of Safety), Revere borrowed a horse from Deacon John Larkin, and set off about 11 o'clock. Near Charlestown Common, a British soldier tried to overtake him but Revere got away. He continued to Medford where he awakened Captain Isaac Hall of the Minutemen. Then, Revere "alarmed almost every House, till I got to Lexington."

Arriving about midnight, Revere found Sergeant William Munroe of the Lexington Militia blocking his entrance to Reverend Clark's parsonage. In a deposition filed fifty years later, Munroe said he refused admittance to Revere, saying the family had retired and wanted no noise. Revere reportedly replied "Noise! You'll have noise enough before long. The regulars are coming out." This is Revere's only documented warning cry. Despite the popular image, it seems unlikely that Revere would have shouted "The British are coming!" or anything else for fear of alerting not only patriots but soldiers trying to stop the news from reaching the countryside.

Munroe let Revere in to deliver his message to Hancock and Adams. William Dawes arrived about a half-hour later. Both men had thus completed their assignments from Dr. Warren, but decided to continue to Concord to "secure the Stores &c. there." On the road to Concord, Revere and Dawes were overtaken by Dr. Samuel Prescott of Concord. Prescott, a "High Son of Liberty," offered to help spread the alarm.

About halfway between Lexington and Concord, the riders were intercepted by a British patrol. Prescott jumped his horse over a stone wall and got to Concord, a fact confirmed by Revere and other witnesses. Dawes, according to a traditional family story, turned back towards Lexington, pursued by a couple of British soldiers. He led them to a deserted farmhouse where he yelled, "Halloo, my boys, I've got two of 'em." The soldiers, fearing ambush, retreated. (This story resulted when a great-grandson of Dawes, Henry Ware Holland, interviewed

Paul Revere of Boston, in the Colony of the Massachusetts Bay in New England, of Lawfull Age, doth testify an say, that I was was sent for by Doct. Joseph Warren, of said Boston, on the evening of the 18th of April, about 10 Clock; when he desired me, to go to Lexington, and inform Mr Samuel Adams, and the Hon. John Hancock Esq, that there was a number of Soldiers marching out of Boston towards Concord.

Revere's deposition on ride, 1775

A CIRCUMSTANTIAL ACCOUNT

Of an Attack that happened on the 19th of April 1775, on his
MAJESTY'S Troops,

By a Number of the People of the Province of MASSACHUSETTS-
BAY.

General Gage's account of Battles of Lexington and Concord

Dawes's daughter and granddaughter about his Revolutionary activities. The story was presented by Holland in an 1876 essay and an 1878 privately printed book.) Dawes's further movements that night are unrecorded; the claim that he got to Concord is unsupported by documentation.

According to Revere's accounts, the soldiers grabbed his bridle and "put thier pistols to my Breast, ordered me to dismount, which I did." During interrogation, Revere told the soldiers they had "missed their aim" and he had "alarmed the countryside all the way up, that their Boats were catch'd aground, and I should have 500 men there soon." He exaggerated, but the soldiers had no way of knowing that there were only fifty Minutemen at Lexington Green.

Based on Revere's "news" the soldiers returned towards Lexington, taking Revere and four other men they had stopped earlier in the evening. One of the other prisoners, Elijah Sanderson, filed a deposition which verified that Revere told the soldiers they had "missed their aim" and that information about their expedition had been sent from Boston, and that Dr. Prescott had escaped.

Sanderson and the other men were released outside Lexington. Revere was released within sight of the Lexington Meeting House, after being ordered to exchange his good horse for the tired horse of a British sergeant.

He returned to Reverend Clark's to inform Hancock and Adams of what had happened. He then helped them move out of Lexington before the soldiers arrived. On his way back to town to retrieve Hancock's trunk containing important political papers, Revere saw the militia and the King's troops. "They (King's troops) made a Short Halt; When I saw, and heard a Gun fired. . . ." The Battle of Lexington had begun.

*Saddlebags owned
by Paul Revere*



The publication of *History of the Battle of Lexington on the Morn of the 19th of April, 1775* by Elias Phinney in 1825 marked the first time that Revere's ride was noted in a history book. The book was the result of an historical commission set up in Lexington to prove that their town, not Concord, was the site of the first battle of the Revolution. Two survivors of the Battle of Lexington who filed depositions, Sergeant William Munroe and Elijah Sanderson, also mentioned Revere's ride. That year, orator/statesman Edward Everett gave the first fairly extensive account of the ride in commemorative activities in Concord, apparently based on depositions by Munroe and Sanderson.

ON Tuesday the 18th of April, about half past 10 at Night, Lieutenant Colonel Smith of the 10th Regiment, embarked from the Common at Boston, with the Grenadiers and Light Infantry of the Troops there, and landed on the opposite Side, from whence he began his March towards Concord, where he was ordered to destroy a Magazine of Military Stores, deposited there for the Use of an Army to be assembled, in Order to act against his Majesty, and his Government. The Colonel called his Officers together, and gave Orders, that the Troops should not fire, unless fired upon, and after marching a few Miles, detached six Companies of Light Infantry, under the Command of Major Pitcairn, to take Possession of two Bridges on the other Side of Concord: Soon after d many Signal Guns, and the ringing of Alarm Bells, which convinced them that the Country was in Arms, and that it was a preconcerted Design of the King's Troops, wherever there was a Party of them, to advance within two Miles of Boston, that about

Interpretations

Revere's contemporaries dealt with the ride as part of the larger issue: the opening of the American Revolution. Most contemporary accounts of the events of April 18-19, 1775 placed Revere's ride in the category of "intelligence." Only one newspaper, the *New York Weekly Gazette*, mentioned Revere by name. Unfortunately, the newspaper erred in reporting that Revere was slain on his ride.

His obituary didn't even mention the ride. At his death on May 10, 1818, the *Boston Intelligencer* called him an "indefatigable Patriot and Soldier of the Revolution" and one of the country's "most zealous and active" sons.

From then on, Revere received mention in several history books, articles, and speeches. In 1833, statesman Daniel Webster proclaimed Revere "a man of sense and character, and of high public spirit, whom the mechanics of Boston ought never to forget."

**"Listen my children, and
you shall hear
of the midnight ride
of Paul Revere. . . ."**



Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Tales of a Wayside Inn, 1863

Revere's transition from minor Revolutionary figure and working-class hero to national folk hero was achieved with the publication of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem, "Paul Revere's Ride" in the January 1861 issue of the *Atlantic Monthly* (also published in "Tales of a Wayside Inn," 1863).

According to his diary, on April 5, 1860 Longfellow and George Sumner visited Copp's Hill Burial Ground and Old North Church. Longfellow seems to have been inspired by his visit to the Church where he envisioned himself hanging the lanterns of April 18, 1775. The next day he began work on "Paul Revere's Ride." He could have used a number of sources: Revere's accounts

Paul Revere, Dan. Thompson, J. M. W. Barber's Son, Isaac Simonds, John Hays, H. W. Putnam, Ab. Russell, D. Townsend, W. L. G. . . .



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and those of witnesses, 19th century history books and articles, his own knowledge of local history, or a combination of these sources. As perhaps the most popular poet of the day, his words had a wide impact.

By the Centennial, Revere had become a national hero. In an 1875 speech at Centennial activities in Boston, George B. Loring, President of the Massachusetts Senate, described Revere as “the great leader of the mechanics and the vigilant and sleepless defender of popular right. . . He was a genuine representative of Revolutionary Boston, and his deeds will always remain as a part of the annals of his native town. . .”

In 1887, the Reverend Edward G. Porter, author of *Rambles in Old Boston*, said: “His courage, agility, and tact were unsurpassed. He never betrayed the confidence of his friends nor blundered in the execution of a trust. . . His Lexington ride. . . will always be considered his greatest achievement, though it was only one of a series of exploits, some of which were more arduous, and many of which were equally brilliant and successful.”



Folk painting, mid-19th century, (courtesy CBS)

single act alone, but for the numerous noble acts of Revere, it will be many years yet before history will cease to ring with his silvery name.”

The patriotism and overstatement of the late 19th century continued in the early 20th century with a couple of exceptions. On April 19, 1914, the *Boston Globe* used two approaches: a straightforward, heavily documented account of the ride by Horace Fisher and a humorous parody of Longfellow’s poem: “The Ride of the Ghost of Paul Revere, by Two Long Fellows.”

*It was two by the village clock
When his innertube gave a hiss.
He felt the car come down with a shock,
He jacked, and pried, and pumped, and said,
‘I wish I’d come on a horse instead. . .’*

The poem is one of the earlier attempts to parody Longfellow and update Revere for the 20th century.

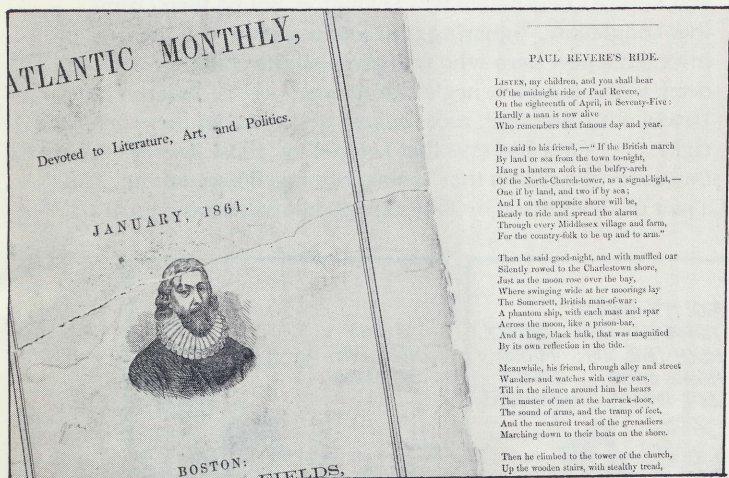
In 1915, Revere’s ride was re-enacted for the first time although Patriots’ Day, the commemoration of the events of April 18-19, 1775, had been a state holiday since 1884.

The first celebration of Patriots’ Day after World War I (1919) still characterized Revere as the heroic rallying figure bringing a timeless message of patriotism. Colonel Edward L. Logan, Commander of the 101st Infantry, said, “I traveled over the same route which that noble patriot. . . took on his memorable ride. . . It is a particular pleasure for me. . . to assure you that his patriotism still lives in the division with which I had the honor to be connected.” The *Boston Herald* reported, “The Paul Revere of ’75 carried the warning ‘The British are coming’; the Paul Revere of yesterday carried the message ‘Democracy has been realized.’”

**“For a guy on the far shore
stood alone,
cached in shadows as
black as jet,
takin’ a
drag at a cigarette”**



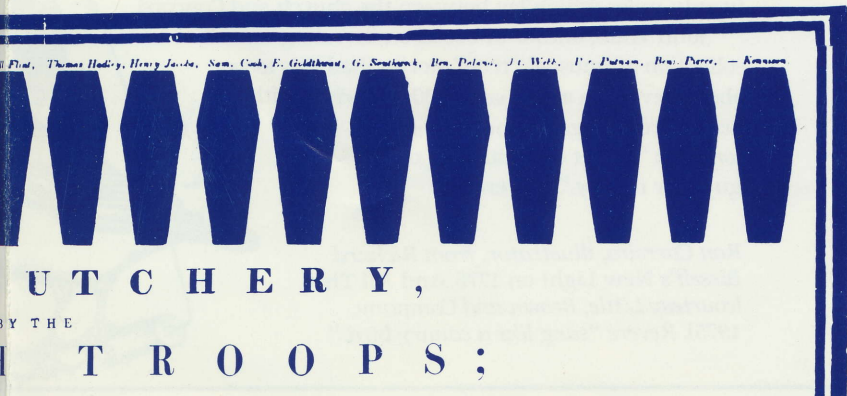
Boston Globe article, 1925, “That Bird Revere”



Longfellow’s “Paul Revere’s Ride,” *Atlantic Monthly*, January 1861

The first full-length biography, *The Life of Colonel Paul Revere*, was published in 1891. The author, Elbridge Goss, dedicated the book “to the people of Boston, in whose service he spent his life; whose rights he always championed; and whose liberties he aided so nobly in preserving.”

Paul Revere’s house (built c. 1680, owned by Revere 1770-1800) began to receive attention during this period. In 1895, the Paul Revere Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution dedicated a plaque at the house, at the time a tenement building. In a dedication speech, Colonel H.A. Thomas spoke of Revere, who, “by his example, tells us to be always at our post, ready to do our duty, faithful to state, to the nation, and to humanity.” On April 19, 1908, the Paul Revere House (restored by architect Joseph Chandler, for the Paul Revere Memorial Association) was opened to the public. At the opening ceremonies, Revere’s great-grandson, John P. Reynolds, Jr., said: “and so, not for one



In the 1920s and 1930s public perception of Revere shifted. Although Patriots' Day celebrations were still marked by patriotism, there were growing attempts at humor and irreverence by writers, increasing attention to William Dawes, some disregard for documentation and a few historically accurate accounts of the ride.

The ride of William Dawes was first re-enacted in 1920. The following year, the *Boston Globe* reported that "only of late years has the memory of the equally heroic act of the less celebrated patriot been rescued from oblivion." Dawes only now began to receive the attention of journalists, but he had received the attention of a poet thirty-five years earlier.

In 1896, *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* had published the humorous poem, "What's in a Name?" by Helen F. More.

*I am a wandering bitter shade;
Never of one was a hero made;
Poets have never sung my praise,
Nobody crowned my brow with bays;
And if you ask me the fatal cause,
I answer only my name was Dawes . . .*

Both the *Boston Globe* and the humorist Robert Benchley used humor to make Revere a more modern hero. In a 1925 poem, the *Globe* updated Revere's dialog from "The British are coming!" to "Shake your shanks outa last year's hay, the kink's beef-tossers is bound this way . . ."

Also in the 20s, Benchley wrote "Paul Revere's Ride: How a Modest Go-Getter Did His Bit for the Juno Acid Bath Corporation." Thaddeus Olin, a salesman from the Juno Corporation, travels to Boston to get an order for engraving supplies from Revere, who unfortunately is making the ride. Olin spends several days trying to catch up with Revere. In Medford, he meets a man who "seemed pretty sore and said that some crazy coot had just ridden by and knocked at his door and yelled something that he couldn't understand and that if he caught him he'd break his back . . ."



Sheet music, 1905, Composer calls ride "undoubtedly, the greatest ever made in the history of the world."

Olin finally catches up with Revere, who is "busy right at the moment," in Lexington and gets his order.



The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere, Grant Wood, 1931, (courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art)

In 1925, the *Globe* ran two articles on Revere's ride by Willard DeLue and Donald B. Willard. The authors chose historical accuracy over the more frequent period attitudes of either overstatement or irreverence. Another accurate description was offered by Harriet E. O'Brien in 1929. In *Paul Revere's Own Story*, which told the story of the ride based on Revere's account, she presented a realistic portrait of Revere ("a man of forty years, short, thick-set, and chubby-faced") and his ride ("What he did, we must assume, appeared to him as a commonplace adventure in rather exciting days.")

Disregard for historical information was evident in a 1935 *Globe* interview with Professor Jarvis H. Morse of Brown University. Morse claimed that Revere spread the alarm too fast and too soon. He referred to the fact that the patriots dispersed when British troops did not appear on schedule; when they finally arrived, only half of the patriots had reassembled in Lexington. Morse chose to blame Revere, ignoring the fact that Revere left Boston at the time he was ordered by Warren.



In the 1940s, with America at war, irreverent humor was out and patriotism was in. The period was characterized by a respectful attitude towards Revere and other Revolutionary heroes and an attempt to draw analogies between the problems faced by Americans during the Revolution and now during World War II. War propaganda was introduced in Patriots' Day ceremonies, as shown by newspaper headlines: "Revere, Dawes' Sound Call Today Against U.S. Foes" and "Patriots' Day Riders Warn 'Buy Bonds!'"

The standard Revere biography, *Paul Revere and the World He Lived In* by Esther Forbes, was published in 1942. Forbes, who presented an admiring view of Revere and his ride, expressed concern that people were now claiming that William Dawes "really did all the work" on the ride. During the writing of the book, Forbes was asked "if it is true that Paul Revere never took that ride at all." This sentiment was an interesting departure from the general patriotism of the time.

As the war drew to a close in April 1945, press coverage of Revere's ride was naturally overshadowed by war news. But, in a last burst of patriotism, Massachusetts Governor Maurice Tobin called for a Patriots' Day observance "to consecrate ourselves to the preservation of the liberties for which the heroes of 1775 so bravely shed their life's blood—the same liberties for which the heroes of 1945 are fighting and dying on the far-flung battlefronts of today's world-shaking war."

The post-World War II period through the mid-1960s was represented by several themes: patriotism, often becoming synonymous with anti-communism ("tyranny of Red Coats takes new form—Communism"), Revere bearing more new messages to Americans, humorous approaches to the ride, including updating the mode of transportation to car or plane, and Dawes once again being saved from oblivion. A number of children's books on Revere were also written, generally providing children with a flattering and simplistic view of the perfect patriot who "went riding, riding, riding for liberty."

In its coverage of the 1946 celebration of Patriots' Day the *Boston Herald* reported a new twist: "instead of lanterns being hung aloft in the belfry of the North Church . . . electric bulbs blazoned their historic message, 'One if by land, and two if by sea.'" The next day, the *Herald* reported that the rider portraying Dawes got tired and rode part of the way in the

Bicentennial medal, sculptor, James Berry, Franklin Mint, 1975



livestock van with his horse. ". . . would-be spectators speculated that maybe 'Dawes' was a bit nettled by the neglect he suffered for 171 years because of the carelessness of Paul Revere's press agent, Longfellow. . . ."

In 1946, *Life* assigned a photographer to retrace Revere's route by car. The story was fairly accurate except for the statement that, at the moment shots were fired at Lexington, "Revere, not realizing the importance of this skirmish, picked up the trunk (Hancock's) and calmly walked away." (The trunk contained political papers of interest to both the British government and the colonists whose names were on the papers. There is no evidence that Revere considered the Battle of Lexington unimportant.)

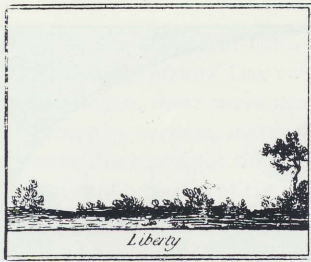
A new theme was introduced during the 1950s: downplaying the ride in favor of Revere's accomplishments as a craftsman and industrialist. A 1951 article in *Newsweek* focused on Revere's founding of the first copper-rolling mill in North America, implying that this event was perhaps more significant than the midnight ride. In 1955, *Life* said, "Paul Revere . . . is an excellent example of the American Revolutionist: a craftsman who infused the look of liberty in his handiwork; a patriot who did much more for his country than risk his neck on a midnight ride."

One of the more unusual re-enactments of the ride occurred in 1954 when Captain Luther J. Sands of the National Lancers (the Massachusetts Governor's ceremonial guard) collapsed and the ride was stopped in Charlestown. The *Globe* headline was "'Paul Revere' Collapses, Stops in Charlestown." This event may have led to the frequent misconception that Revere collapsed or fell off his horse and didn't finish the ride. The *Globe* also noted that two dogs attacked the horse of "William Dawes". When members of the National Lancers, "wearing flaming red coats," tried to get the horse going, a little boy in the crowd screamed, "The Red Coats have got him. . . ."

History's Hundred Greatest Events by William A. DeWitt (1954) is an interesting juvenile book that ranks Revere's ride with the crucifixion of Christ, the discovery of America, the invention of penicillin, and the U.N. vote to "fight Korean aggression." Revere is depicted as a self-starting patriot "who proved a heady inspiration to the Americans who wanted independence." DeWitt concluded that Dawes and Prescott got through, but Revere was captured before reaching Concord. "Too many messengers might have spoiled the effect of the poem. . . ."

During the late 60s and early 70s, a period when Americans were questioning patriotism and other traditional values, Revere's ride got very little coverage, with a couple of exceptions.

In 1968, the *Globe* ran an editorial, "He Woke 'Em Up," in which documentation was sacrificed in favor of humor. The writer noted that Revere stopped at the home of Captain Isaac Hall of the Medford Minutemen (a fact also noted in Revere's accounts) "who was also a distiller in a town then famous for its rum." The conclusion was that possibly, "in the normal practice of hospitality, Captain Hall gave Paul a little something to warm his bones." Thus, it was "a little rum poured on top



“He was quite a despicable man...he turned stool pigeon and betrayed his two companions...”

John Train, quoted by Lewis Grossberger, *Boston Globe*, 1980

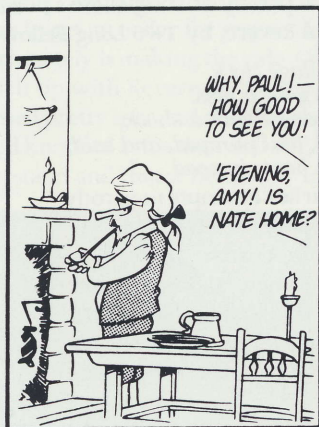
of patriotic fervor that caused Paul to sound his cry of alarm... This story may also be one source for the recent cynical belief that “Revere was drunk when he made the ride.”

A *History of the American Revolution* by John R. Alden (1969) anticipated the Bicentennial attitude of downplaying Revere’s importance (Revere was released by the soldiers “because he was of no importance.”). The goal of the ride was cited as warning the countryside that “the British are coming” and then advising Hancock and Adams to get out of Lexington, although “they were not in great danger.” (curious statement in view of contemporary sources, including Revere’s, which allude to the threat to Hancock and Adams).

A delightful and accurate children’s version of Revere’s story, *And Then What Happened, Paul Revere?* by Jean Fritz, was published in 1973. Fritz relied heavily on documentation to explain the ride. She also did an admirable job of presenting

or Adams nor the munitions in Concord. Whom did he jeopardize but himself?

“What About the Midnight Ride of William Dawes?”, an article in Wallechinsky and Wallace’s *The People’s Almanac* (1975), is yet another effort to save Dawes from oblivion. The author, Charlie Jones, has obviously looked at enough documentation to know that Revere was a member of an intelligence committee, the lantern signals were to Colonel Conant, and Revere’s destination was Lexington. But he then claims that Longfellow, “ignoring the facts or unaware of them... invented a new hero who was given all the credit for a daring deed, to the complete neglect of the real hero... in truth it was Dawes who rode first, rode longest, and who did the whole job right...”. Jones also says that Longfellow chose Revere over Dawes for the reason that “nobody bragged because they had a pair of shoes made by Billy Dawes, no matter how good a



Doonesbury by G.B. Trudeau (courtesy Bantam Books)

Revere as a real person with an active political, business, and family life but who “Sometimes... was in such a hurry that his writing looked sloppy. Sometimes... was late for work. Once... built a barn and by mistake put part of it on a neighbor’s property.”

The present perception of Revere probably started with the Bicentennial and can be summed up by general disregard or ignorance of documentation and an attempt to make history relevant by presenting heroes as liars, cheats, or buffoons. This might be termed “The Nobody Ever Did Nuthin’ School of Popular History.”

New Light on 1776 And All That by humorist Richard Bissell (1975) is an amused look at the American Revolution. The section on the ride, which used the Smithsonian Institution as its source, is quite accurate up to a point. But the details of Revere’s encounter with the soldiers are concluded with the statement: “Six British officers seized Revere shortly afterwards, laid a gun to his noggin and told him to start talking. Sad to relate, Longfellow’s pride and joy sang like a canary bird...” The documentation shows that Revere gave the soldiers his name, not the names of his companions, Dawes and Prescott. Nor did he give the location of either Hancock

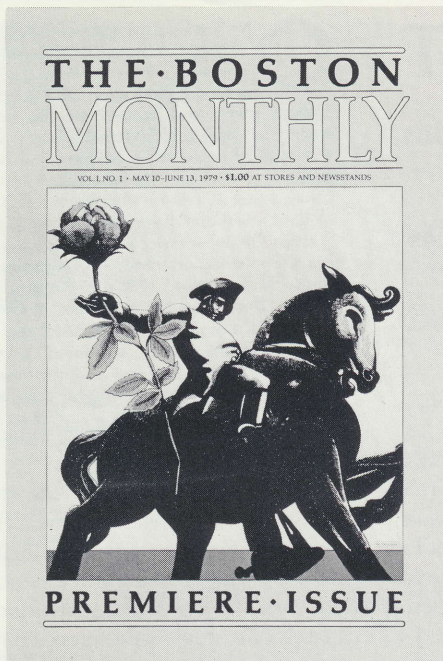
cobbler he was.”

Virginius Dabney, prize-winning editor of the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (1936-69), edited *The Patriots*, a 1976 book commemorating fifty American patriots. Revere was omitted because “... although... an ardent patriot... his ‘midnight ride’ was of little or no importance, despite the fantastic assertions of... Longfellow.” In a related newspaper article, Dabney said, “Moreover, the revolutionists at Concord had already been warned by the lanterns in... Old North Church before Revere jumped into the muddle,” conveniently forgetting the twenty miles which lay between the church and Concord.

John Train, author of books on investing as well as a collection of unusual “true” stories, had this to say about Revere in a January 1980 interview with Lewis Grossberger of the *Washington Post*: “He set out with two other guys for money.” (Revere

Ron Carreiro, illustrator, from Richard Bissell’s *New Light on 1776 And All That* (courtesy Little, Brown and Company, 1975). Revere “sang like a canary bird.”





Boston Monthly, illustration by Milton Glaser, 1979, (used by permission).

set out alone. Dawes met him in Lexington. Prescott met them on the road to Concord. *None* of the three men was paid.) "He was quite a despicable man. . . He was arrested enroute by the British. He turned stool pigeon and betrayed his two companions." (see rebuttal to same charge in *New Light on 1776*) "And at the battle of Kennebunk he was cashiered for cowardice. . ." (Revere was tried for his part in the Penobscot Expedition and was acquitted when the man who made the charges denied them under oath.)

Newspaper stories throughout the Bicentennial and beyond continued their distortion: "Some books hail it [the ride] as a total success, omitting any reference to his capture at Lexington and his inability to reach Concord, the main objective of the English assault." (Revere and his contemporaries thought the British objective was *either* Lexington or Concord; Revere's objective was Lexington only.) — "Funky Facts About the Bicentennial," syndicated column, 1976. ". . . Paul Revere, whose fame rests largely on fanciful myth since he was arrested by the British before he could finish his ride to alert the countryside of approaching English troops." (But not before warning Hancock and Adams as so ordered.) — "The Story of Another Rider" by Jon W. Warner, Bicentennial Administrator, *Seattle Daily Times*, February 22, 1976.

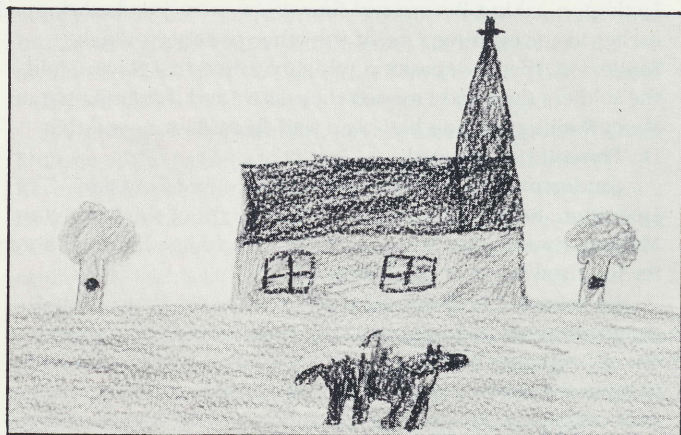
Fortunately, there have been successful efforts by the media, historians, and history teachers to cover Revere's ride. The reason for success is that the people involved took the time to look at documentation and question the traditional views.

Revere... a name you can trust.



Our examination of the primary sources on this well-documented event and the popular interpretations of it tell us first that the ride was not the ill-defined patriotic act of one man, but was a specific intelligence mission carried out by Revere in conjunction with other patriots. Second, that Revere, with other heroes, can be all things to all people and is subject to re-interpretation; and, third, that Revere, like all heroes, is fair game for cynical distortion. The process began well before the present.

Yes, he really made the ride, but let's be sure we know what "the ride" was, and how it has passed from history into folklore. It's a long way from "The British are coming!"



Drawings by Charlestown Boys' Club, 1981

The Paul Revere House
19 North Sq.
Boston, MA 02113

Credits

Written by Jayne Triber
 Designed by Carol Ely

Assistance from Bryn Evans, Krista McLeod, Leslie Lindenauer, Matthew McKeon, Lee Farrow, Ann Roelofs, Elizabeth Grundy, Robert Gavin.



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Conceived by Ken Turino

