

## Midnight Ride of Paul Revere 250th anniversary

# Myth, history collide on Revere's ride

BY JOEL BARRETT

CNHI North of Boston

Paul Revere galloped into American history 250 years ago April 18, on a ride that's become part of the American psyche thanks to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem, "The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere."

The factual events of the ride in 1775 are far different from those

penned in the 1860 poem, however, which was written to promote unity and patriotism just a year before the Civil War.

Generations of Americans may have heard the tale in classrooms or around kitchen tables, but it was filled with historic inaccuracies and myths.

The Paul Revere House in Boston's North End is a starting point for the

real story behind that night, although even experts say it's a tough task to know for sure.

"The challenge with Revere is we don't have as many personal letters, diaries," says Nina Zannieri, executive director of Paul Revere Memorial Association, a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving and interpreting the history of Paul Revere and the

Boston area.

"The problem with the (April 18, 1775) timeline is that it's not perfect. No one has a perfect timeline, only because there are points where nobody tells you what time it is. I'm not sure it's possible to know it exactly."

Here's what historians believe happened in the hours before the skirmish that set off the Revolutionary War:

**9 p.m.:** British Gen. Thomas Gage, the military governor of the Province of Massachusetts Bay, orders 700 British regulars to raid a stockpile of military supplies in Concord.

**Also around 9 p.m.:** Dr. Joseph Warren, a top patriot leader, learns of the troop movement. He beckons members of the Sons of Liberty's network of messengers.

**9:30 p.m.:** Warren, who would later die in action at Bunker Hill, dispatches patriot rider William Dawes to spread the alarm to Lexington and Concord. Dawes leaves Boston over Boston Neck. Zannieri says Warren dispatched Dawes, at the time, with only the knowledge that the British troops were on the move.

**10 p.m.:** Revere, also summoned by Warren, is tasked with riding to Lexington, then on to Concord. He leaves Warren's rented property near today's Hanover Street and calls on a friend at nearby Christ Church to instruct him to hold two lit lanterns in the tower of the church, now called the Old North Church. The lanterns would be a signal for fellow Sons of Liberty across the Charles River in case Revere was unable to leave town.

For Revere, that famed "ride" begins on foot as he walks to his North Square home for riding boots and an overcoat, and then hurries to the North End waterfront. In the darkness, two friends row Revere past the warship HMS Somerset and across Boston Harbor to Charlestown. After landing on the north bank, he informs Sons of Liberty members about the looming British threat.

**11 p.m.:** Revere borrows a horse from John Larkin, a Charlestown merchant and a Patriot sympathizer. Revere is warned that British patrols in the area might try to intercept him. After barely avoiding capture outside Charlestown, Revere



PAUL REVERE'S RIDE, ILLUSTRATION COURTESY NATIONAL ARCHIVES

switches up his route.

**11:30 p.m.:** Revere arrives in Medford, where he informs Isaac Hall, the captain of the local militia, of the British movements. Revere rides through Arlington, then known as Menotomy.

**12:30 a.m.:** Revere arrives first at the Hancock-Clarke House, where Patriot leaders Samuel Adams and John Hancock,

whose grandfather built the house, are staying.

**1 a.m.:** Dawes arrives in Lexington. He and Revere "refresh" themselves before continuing on to Concord.

**1:30 a.m.:** Leaving Lexington on the way to Concord, Dawes and Revere fall in with Dr. Samuel Prescott, a Concord physician and a member of the Sons of

Liberty, on his way home. Prescott agrees to ride with them, as he knows the lay of the land in the darkness. A short time later, Revere and his two companions are captured by a British patrol on the road — now Route 2A — near the Lexington-Lincoln town line. Revere's companions escape and ride off toward Concord.

**2:30 a.m.:** Prescott arrives in Concord and alerts the colonial rebels of the advancing Brits. Revere's captors release him after questioning, but confiscate his horse. The hero of the midnight ride is forced to walk back to Lexington, alone, on foot in the dark.

**3:30 a.m.:** Hancock and Adams leave Lexington in the direction of nearby Woburn. When Revere gets back to Lexington, he rescues Hancock's trunk containing Patriot documents from the Buckman Tavern on the Lexington Common and carries it with the help of John Lowell to the Hancock-Clarke House.

"We don't know what was in it," Zannieri says. "It's always described as important papers. It could have been something personal, again, something they didn't want to fall into the wrong hands."

**5 a.m.:** Minutemen confront advancing British troops on the Lexington Common, setting off a running battle all the way to Concord and back to Boston. "He's in the vicinity, he hears the shots on the Green," Zannieri adds. Revere's April 18, 1775, ride, along with the efforts of others, eventually draws an estimated 20,000 militia members from across New England to face off against the British in Boston.

## Who was Paul Revere?

**Born:** Jan. 1, 1735, Boston's North End

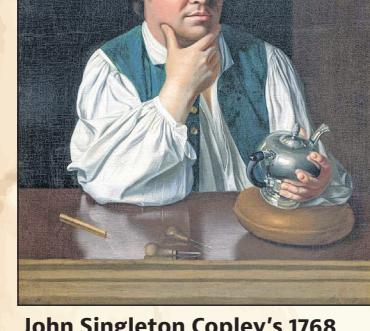
**Died:** May 10, 1818, Boston

**Family Man:** Revere had 16 children (five died in infancy) with two wives, Sarah Orne (1736-73) and Rachel Walker (1745-1813).

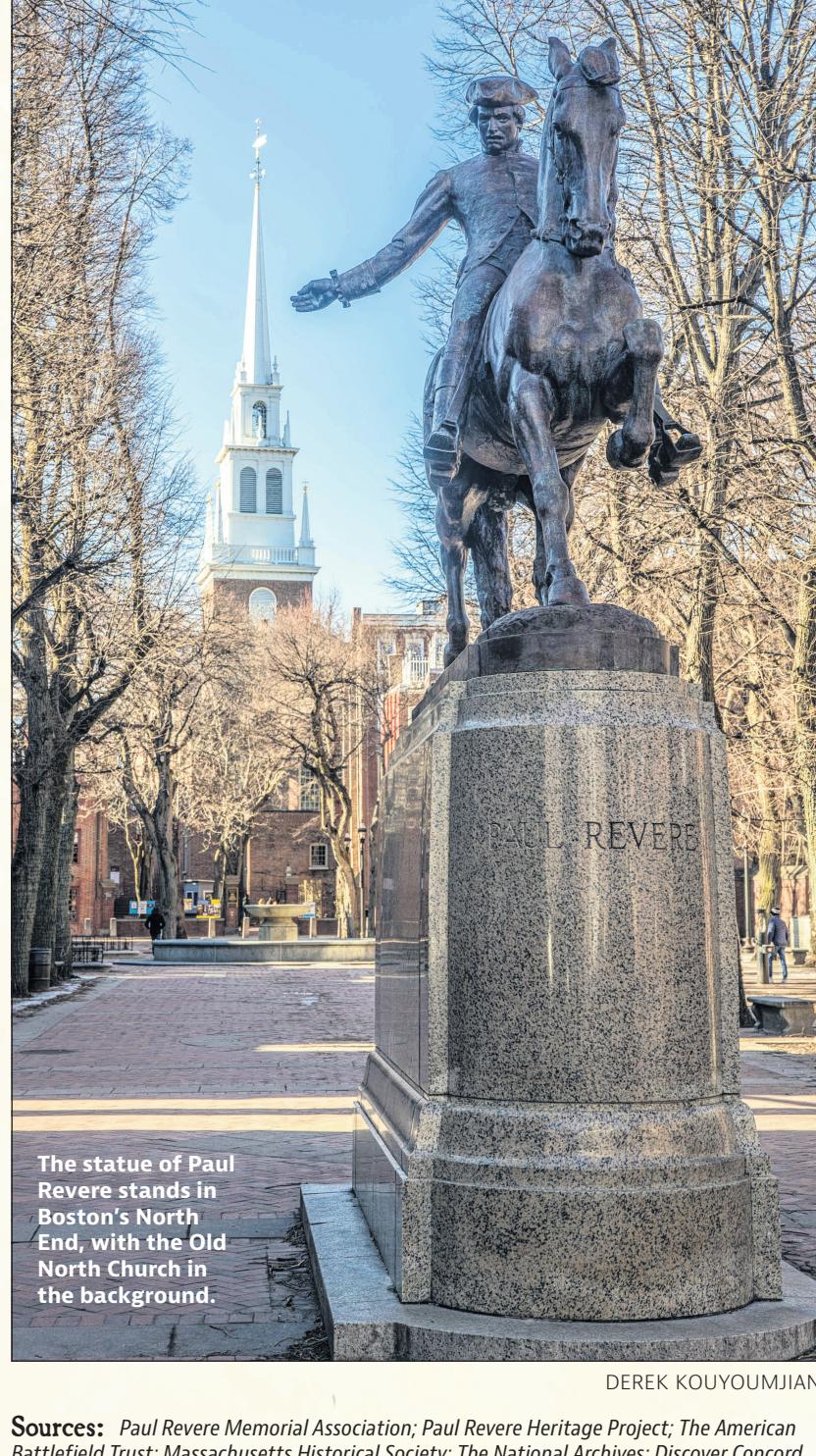
**Industrialist:** An American silversmith, military officer and industrialist, Revere played a major role during the opening months of the American Revolutionary War in Massachusetts. He learned silversmithing from his father, took a small operation and transformed it into a foundry and copper mill which produced items ranging from ornate silverware to 1,000-pound church bells.

**Known for:** Bells (146 still exist), the Boston Massacre engraving called "The Bloody Massacre perpetrated in King-Street Boston on March 5th 1770," and hundreds of examples of his silverware — teapots, flatware, platters — located in museums such as MFA in Boston, The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, The Paul Revere House in Boston, and the Worcester, Massachusetts, Art Museum.

**Iconic Image:** In popular culture, Revere's image is "always taller, younger and better looking" than in reality, according to Nina Zannieri, executive director of the Paul Revere House. "There's the (John Singleton) Copley portrait, so we know what he looks like. That's not what you see in these (popular) images."



John Singleton Copley's 1768 portrait of Paul Revere on exhibit in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



The statue of Paul Revere stands in Boston's North End, with the Old North Church in the background.

## Express rider spreads the warning

In 1774 and 1775, Paul Revere served the Boston Committee of Correspondence and the Massachusetts Committee of Safety as an express rider, carrying news, messages and copies of documents as far away as New York and Philadelphia.

As a colonial courier, Revere proved that quick delivery of accurate information can make the difference between victory and defeat.

The fledgling network was put to the test on Sept. 1, 1774, when the British moved to seize gunpowder stored in Somerville. By the time warnings were received and provincial militias responded, the king's mission was complete.

But a successful Dec. 13, 1774, operation, with Revere riding almost 70 miles to the area of the Oyster River in New Hampshire, proved the value of the couriers. That day, he warned locals of British plans to reinforce Fort William and Mary in New Castle, N.H., and 400 militia members raided the fort, overcame a handful of British soldiers, and captured arms stored there before the king's troops could arrive.

By April 18, 1775, the network of surveillance, communications and action by the Sons of Liberty was ready to counter the British aggression with speed and precision as the alarm spread from Boston, outward with multiple riders dispatched in many directions to spread the word.

In fact, two days before that fateful Tuesday night, Revere rode the route from Boston to Concord "almost as a dry run," according to Nina Zannieri, executive director of the Paul Revere House.

Even after his famed midnight ride and his commission in the colonial artillery, Revere continued on as a courier for the cause, she said.

## Didnt yell 'The British are coming'

That's a myth. Instead, the warning Paul Revere shared was, "The Regulars are coming out," according to the historic record.

Many colonists still sided with the British, so Revere was probably discreet in his messaging and did not yell at the top of his lungs. Besides, the warning "the British are coming" would have been confusing to the colonists, who still considered themselves British citizens.

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## 'Mechanics' laid groundwork of US intelligence prowess

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Paul Revere and a small cadre of compatriots laid the groundwork for what's become America's intelligence community.

Revolutionary War historians call them the "mechanics," a small group of members of the Sons of Liberty — 30 or so artisans or crafters like Revere — who kept tabs on the British occupation of Boston. They also

set up America's first organized surveillance and communication network that proved so effective April 18, 1775.

After the Boston Tea Party in 1773, the British ratcheted down control of Boston and the Sons of Liberty took turns day and night keeping watch over British Regulators and loyalists in Boston. After the dissolution of the Provincial Assembly in March 1774, Revere and others began meeting

at the Green Dragon, a hotspot of anti-British sympathizers. With

others would purposely sabotage or steal British military equipment around Boston. Revere may have blazed the trail on intelligence gathering and rode his way into the history books, but he was far from a spy master, says Nina Zannieri, executive director of the Paul Revere House in Boston's North End.

They were basically keeping "outdoor work," serving as a tabs on what needed to be kept

courier, Zannieri says.

Revere was not part of this massive spy network that George Washington used later. I

wouldn't want to conflate those

two," Zannieri says.

After the midnight ride, Revere earned a commission in the Massachusetts State Train

of Artillery, serving as a lieu-

served in the nation's nascent

tenant colonel and eventually as

military. Revere, however, con-

tinued what he described as

Boston Harbor.