

The Materials of Masonry: Interview with Hilary Anderson Stelling

Harpsichord 00:00

(Intro Music)

Tegan 00:08

Welcome back to Revere House Radio. I'm here with Hilary Anderson Stelling, who is the director of collections and exhibits at the Scottish Rite Masonic Museum and Library in Lexington. Welcome to the show, Hillary!

Hilary 00:19

Thank you! Thank you for having me.

Tegan 00:21

Absolutely. Could you give us an introduction to what the Scottish Rite Museum and Library is, and a brief introduction to what Freemasonry is, for listeners who aren't familiar with it?

Hilary 00:31

Alright! Well, the Scottish Rite Masonic Museum and Library is a history museum. We're located in Lexington, Massachusetts. We explore different topics in American history with a special focus on Freemasonry and fraternalism, and the way those activities intersect with American history. And we do this through exhibitions, collections, programs and publications.

Tegan 00:53

That's great.

Hilary 00:54

All right, so Tegan, you asked about what Freemasonry is. Freemasonry is an oath-bound organization for men, that teaches a system of ethics using symbols and ideas taken from trade guild regulations, enlightenment philosophy, and Judeo-Christian teachings. Today, as in the past, Freemasonry seeks to enhance and strengthen a member's character by providing opportunities for fellowship, leadership, education and charity.

Tegan 01:21

That's great. And can you tell us a bit about the name "Scottish Rite"? Because I think that's a name that will mean something to many Freemasons, but isn't necessarily familiar to people not familiar with the organization.

Hilary 01:34

Well, Scottish Rite...Scottish Rite Freemasonry, is a form of Freemasonry.

Tegan 01:38

Okay.

Hilary 01:38

And the Scottish Rite Masonic Museum and Library was founded by the Scottish Rite Masons of the Northern Masonic jurisdiction.

Tegan 01:45

Okay.

Hilary 01:46

In...we opened to the public in 1975.

Tegan 01:50

Great. And can you tell me a bit about yourself and your career? How long have you been at the Scottish Rite Masonic Museum and Library, and how did you come to work there?

Hilary 01:58

Well, I've been there for a long time, over 20 years.

Tegan 02:00

Oh wow!

Hilary 02:01

I'm not a Mason, of course.

Tegan 02:02

Right.

Hilary 02:03

And I came to the museum for the exhibition program. It's unusual because we do different topics related to American history of all kinds. American history and culture are our sort of things we explore. And as I worked longer and longer at the museum, I became more familiar with the collection and have been...in an ongoing way, I've been intrigued by the questions and work that you can do related to how material culture, Freemasonry and fraternalism mix up together.

Tegan 02:31

Yeah, that's really interesting. As you know, the reason that I have you on the podcast is that Paul Revere was a Freemason. But can you tell me a little bit about typical visitors to your museum? Are a lot of them already knowledgeable about Masonry, or are they a lot of people who are just kind of curious, or even come in not knowing what to expect?

Hilary 02:51

Well, as you probably do here at the Paul Revere House, we get all kinds of visitors. So we do have people who come who are Freemasons and are interested in learning more about Freemasonry and

Masonic history. We also get people who are local. We're free to the public, so people come by if they have some time in their day and they want to take a break. We also get a lot of students and researchers who are here to use...that come to the museum to use our collections. And then we get -- because we're in Lexington -- we get a lot of tourists from all over the country and the world, who are here, usually in the area or in Lexington, to learn more about the Battles of Lexington and Concord-

Tegan 03:28

Right.

Hilary 03:28

-and the activities that were going on in a Revolutionary era. So we get all kinds of people.

Tegan 03:35

That's great. Do you have a sense of whether people are visiting -- the ones who do know a bit about Freemasonry -- whether they're looking to find out about specific Freemasons? And if so, is Paul Revere, one of the ones that you hear about from visitors?

Hilary 03:48

Sure! I think that many -- and I don't want to speak for all masons, which is completely impossible-

Tegan 03:54

Right, right. (Laughs)

Hilary 03:54

-is a lot of Freemasons are interested in connecting to the history of the organization. And that includes, you know, learning more about heroes, sort of people who've made incredible accomplishments in American history who were also Masons. George Washington is an example. And, of course, Paul Revere is another example. Paul Revere is a special case, because if you live in New England, and if you grew up in New England, especially if you grew up in Massachusetts, you are very likely a Paul Revere fan. (Laughs)

Tegan 04:22

Right. And that's something we see a lot here.

Hilary 04:24

Yeah, absolutely. And so I think Paul Revere, as a historical figure, hits on so many different topics that I think he has a special status.

Tegan 04:33

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. For a bit of background for our listeners, Paul Revere became a Freemason in 1760 when he was about 25, and he was active in the brotherhood for about 30 years. He served several offices for his local lodges and a three year term as Grand Master of the Massachusetts Grand Lodge, which is the highest position in the statewide organization of masons. And he also made a number of items for Masonic lodges, creating jewels and engraving the plates to print important

certificates. So zooming out a bit, could you tell us a bit about Freemasonry and the American Revolution? What was Freemasonry in Paul Revere's time?

Hilary 05:09

Well, that's kind of a big question. So, uh...

Tegan 05:11

I like big questions.

Hilary 05:12

(Laughs) I'll take it apart a little bit. So Freemasonry as an organization in that time, especially in the early part of the revolution, was fairly small.

Tegan 05:21

Oh, yeah?

Hilary 05:22

And so it wasn't a ton of people. But the ideas were very interesting and intersected with a lot of the ideas related to revolution. And some of those ideas, or values in Freemasonry are equality, moving forward with merit, self improvement, and bigger ideas about "how can we make a better world?" Because ultimately...sometimes Freemasonry is described as "if you as an individual, make yourself a better person, using the lessons of Freemasonry, you are contributing to your lodge and your community, and contributing to the world at large." So it's a big ask, and it's a very idealistic organization. And so I've certainly read that those kinds of ideals appealed to Paul Revere. And, if you think about it, ideas around tolerance and equality, they do touch on some of the ideals that fueled the American Revolution.

Tegan 06:11

Yeah, absolutely. If there's overlap with the Enlightenment movement and political philosophy that's also about equality and self-governance and that sort of thing.

Hilary 06:27

Yeah. And I think the idea, especially in a lodge...So if you're in a lodge, one of the ideas is that you are...your brothers are treated as equal. There are officers, and so the master of the lodge is the highest officer, and he is leading the lodge, and so is accorded special status for that. But within the lodge, everyone is a brother, so it doesn't matter what your job is in the outside world, or even your age or your social status. So that is, again, another idea which I think touches on some of the big ideas that fueled the American Revolution.

Tegan 07:01

Yeah, absolutely. And we at the Paul Revere House imagine that it was probably fairly personally meaningful to Revere to be in this brotherhood where your background didn't matter, because we have some evidence, from letters and other things and just his behavior over his life, that Revere had a goal of kind of transcending his socio-economic background. He was a tradesman. He had the equivalent of

a seventh- or eighth-grade education and a trade education, and he was certainly not ashamed of being a silversmith. But he had ambition. And that was hard for someone of a working class background to do at the time. So being able to be in a place where he was an equal with people who had, you know, gone to Harvard or something like that, is something that we kind of imagine that that was meaningful to him, in addition to being able to participate in this movement that's furthering a better society.

Hilary 07:54

Yeah, I think that's true. I might say, I might describe Paul Revere as more of an "artisan class" background than working class.

Tegan 08:00

And I think this might be how broadly we're defining "working class." He was a skilled worker, certainly, and had this trade education.

Hilary 08:07

Yes. And of the trades, being a silversmith was, you know, a higher status occupation than being a tailor or a brick maker, things like that.

Tegan 08:15

Right.

Hilary 08:15

He certainly had a lot of skills, in terms of writing and entrepreneurship. And I think two of his impressive skills was he was a mad, crazy networker-

Tegan 08:27

Yes, absolutely.

Hilary 08:28

-and he also was unafraid to do a lot of work. He seems like he was definitely a doer. And if you look at his Masonic career, he held so many offices. And this is, again, one of the values of Freemasonry. You start in a certain office, you learn about how the lodge runs, or how certain things are, and it's like a school for leadership. That was true in the 1700s as it is today.

Tegan 08:51

Yeah, that's great. So I'll link to some pictures in the show notes. But I mentioned Revere making Masonic jewels earlier, and I want to explain that these are not gemstone-type jewels. Masonic jewels are often a flat piece of silver with some engraving, and it is...the shape of it is showing a masonic symbol, like a carpenter's square. So could you tell us a little bit more about these jewels, and the roles of jewels in Masonic tradition, and about the Revere jewels in your collection?

Hilary 09:19

Sure, and stop me when it's too much!

Tegan 09:22
(Laughs)

Hilary 09:23

So in Freemasonry, there are a lot of words that have double meanings. And a jewel is both an ornament in the lodge, and described that way sometimes, and it's also as simple as a badge of office. So for example, if you are master of a lodge you wear, on a collar, a jewel that's in the shape of a square. And it's a stone mason's square, not a carpenter square.

Tegan 09:45
Okay.

Hilary 09:45

Although they look, you know, except to the eye of love, they look very much alike. So you wear that, and that's an indication that you are the master of the lodge. And it's usually made out of something that is a out of the ordinary material, to underscore the importance of these badges of office in the lodge, in the functioning of the lodge, and in the hierarchy of the lodge. So many are silver. And if you imagine how the meetings were often at night time, they would have caught the light. It would have been kind of special to see those glittery things-

Tegan 10:17
Yeah.

Hilary 10:17

-and a good reminder of the different offices that the people wearing those jewels held.

Tegan 10:23
Yeah.

Hilary 10:23

That's one kind of jewel. Those are officers jewels.

Tegan 10:26

Can I ask a question about that?

Hilary 10:27

Yeah, of course!

Tegan 10:28

Did different metals have specific significance? Was it like a "gold, silver, bronze" that we might think of for awards, or was it whatever fine metal was available to that lodge, or something else?

Hilary 10:38

Well, as you know, gold was pretty rare and super expensive-

Tegan 10:43

Yes.

Hilary 10:43

-in Paul Revere's time. So that wasn't really an option, although later, a little bit later into, I don't know, the early 1800s, some Masonic jewels that have a gold wash or sometimes a copper color...As far as I know, in most contexts in Freemasonry, that doesn't matter.

Tegan 11:02

Okay.

Hilary 11:03

That's not part of it. Sometimes in certain parts of Masonic ritual, you might hear a mention of gold as a special metal, because it doesn't tarnish. It doesn't degrade. It can, y'know, look as wonderful as it did on day one right, day 100-

Tegan 11:17

Right.

Hilary 11:17

-so that's a different kind of metal. You do sometimes hear about some things that are made out of a material that is white and that's...and, again, in a different Masonic ritual context. So many colonial, and early American, and to this day, Masonic jewels -- officer's jewels -- are silver, silver plate, or silver-colored metal.

Tegan 11:37

Okay!

Hilary 11:38

And of course, in extremis, they can be things like tin or some other material. They don't have to be a certain material to hold their ritual importance.

Tegan 11:47

Okay.

Hilary 11:47

Those are officer's jewels.

Tegan 11:48

Okay.

Hilary 11:49

There are also personal jewels. So for some degrees, or just by personal choice, some people would choose to have a jewel or ornament or badge made for themselves.

Tegan 12:00

Okay.

Hilary 12:00

This might have their name engraved on it. This might be small. This could show up as a watch fob. This could show up as something that you wear to processions -- that certainly happened in the 1700s and early 1800s. So that's a personal Masonic jewel. There are different kinds of those. And it looks like Paul Revere definitely made a few of those, although they're a little more elusive than the officer's jewels that are associated with Masonic lodges.

Tegan 12:23

Got it.

Hilary 12:23

And then there is also a class of jewels called past master's jewels.

Tegan 12:28

Okay.

Hilary 12:28

So if you were a master of the lodge, very often, especially in Paul Revere's time and into the early 1800s, the tradition was, if you served as master of the lodge, you would receive a jewel. It was a special shape, and on the back it might say "this person served as master." It may mention the date. It may mention the date of the presentation. And as a past master, you were encouraged --allowed -- to wear this jewel, and it marked you as somebody who the current master of the lodge might consult if he wished to go over questions that were coming up in the lodge. If...he could draw on this "brain trust" of past masters to help him. And again, once you had served as master in your Masonic lodge, that status goes with you for life. And those jewels were also personal jewels that were owned by the person who they were given to. That tradition has changed a little bit over time. Now they'll often go from one past master to another, so they're used for a lifetime. But in Paul Revere's time, there are many examples of past masters jewels that were engraved to the person who had served as a master, and they were owned by that individual.

Tegan 13:14

Yeah, that's really interesting. And we know from his record books that about half of Revere's clients in his silversmith business were Masons, but not all of that is for jewels and things like that. And I think it sounds like sometimes it would be the lodge purchasing those individual things, if it's for a past master. So in that case, it's really Revere's skill as a networker, and also the Masonic opportunity for networking that's the reason that so many of his clients were Masons.

Hilary 13:45

Yeah, it's true. And also Masons tended to be prosperous, and so there is some of that as well; that you did need to have some resources, some personal financial resources, to join a Masonic Lodge and, you know, continue paying your dues and participating. You know, for every meeting, they would do collections for charity or for the refreshments. So you needed to have some income to keep doing that.

Tegan 14:24
Yeah.

Hilary 14:25
And of course, that is helpful if you are a consumer of silver and engraving, the kind of products and services that Paul Revere was offering in the colonial era.

Tegan 14:35
Yeah, absolutely. Can you give me a sense of scale of that wealth? Clearly, someone of Paul Revere means was able to be a Freemason. What was the kind of financial impact of belonging to this organization?

Hilary 14:47
That's a really good question, and I don't have a good answer.

Tegan 14:50
Okay.

Hilary 14:50
I think it would need...I'd need to really take a look at the time and place and what lodge. Some lodges did more than others. So, for example, you might belong to a rural lodge, and the expenses associated with that, in terms of the charity and refreshments and different kinds of participation, might be different than an urban lodge in Boston.

Tegan 15:10
Okay, interesting. And can you give us some broader context about the relationship between craftspeople and Masons in Revere's day? I guess I should say tradespeople and craftspeople, because, of course, Masons are named after a trade. Was it common for the people making jewels and other ceremonial items to be Masons themselves?

Hilary 15:29
Certainly. Yes, it was. I think if you look at lodge records, for example records related to Washington Lodge, which was founded in the 1790s -- they were in Roxbury, originally -- if you go through there, many of the members were tradespeople. They made furniture. They did different kinds of painting, all different building. Lots of different kinds of crafts were represented in their membership, as far as I can tell. And so it is not uncommon for the lodge, when they needed work, to call upon members to get that work done. However, it's not a rule. It wasn't obligatory. There's all kinds of people that did work for Masonic lodges that were not involved as members. For example, if there was sewing to be done in a Masonic Lodge, women were involved. And they could be local seamstresses, they could be family

members. There's also a lot of records of -- for lodges that have records from the early 1800s and late 1700s -- of women being hired to clean the lodge rooms, prepare things for them. So they drew on a lot of craftspeople.

Tegan 16:33

Yeah.

Hilary 16:33

And one thing that is very exciting about looking at Freemasonry in the late 1700s and early 1800s, from a material culture standpoint, is they needed a ton of stuff. So you'd establish a lodge: you needed a charter. You needed jewels. You needed furniture, possibly. You may need tracing boards. You would need regalia. You need aprons. You might need other kinds of kind of costumeey things. You might need ritual props. You may need lodge decoration, which sometimes involved Masonic symbols. They were generators of requests for things to be made by all different kinds of craftsmen.

Tegan 17:15

Yeah, it almost sounds like, in many denominations, if a new church or temple or something is starting up, you would need all of these things. And then I find it interesting that I'm saying that in a time when a lot of the churches in Greater Boston area don't need so many things, because they have this aesthetic and value of simplicity.

Hilary 17:33

They did, but they still...they still ordered stuff.

Tegan 17:35

(Laughs) Yeah.

Hilary 17:35

So it's true. So yeah...like any kind of new institution, a Masonic Lodge needed material, and then they would...if you look at records, you tend to see that they wouldn't buy things all at once. It's not uncommon to find a record of a lodge that's newly established borrowing jewels from another lodge for, say, an officer's installation. It also depends a little bit on where they were meeting. Some lodges had a dedicated space, and others shared space.

Tegan 18:02

Okay.

Hilary 18:02

In Boston, for example, there was often a building that was shared by the city lodges.

Tegan 18:07

Okay.

Hilary 18:07

And then sometimes lodges would have their own dedicated meeting room, perhaps in a tavern. There's a lot of different models for how this worked, but it does seem that the lodges that had dedicated meeting spaces tended to acquire more things.

Tegan 18:23

Yeah.

Hilary 18:23

Because they didn't have to pack them up and lock them up when they were done with their meeting.

Tegan 18:27

That makes sense.

Hilary 18:28

Another class of objects that doesn't have to do so much with Paul Revere, but was certainly a factor for newly established lodges is they needed material culture objects. Well, they, of course, weren't thinking of it that way. But they needed things related to refreshment.

Tegan 18:41

Okay.

Hilary 18:41

Because they would have the meeting, and they would do the ceremonial work and the serious work of the lodge, and then they would close. And then they would break for refreshment, which might mean, for example, in Paul Revere's time in the 1760s, punch. And there's a lot of records for cheese and crackers, which I find very interesting. And-

Tegan 18:59

(Laughs) Some things never change.

Hilary 19:00

Yeah! Some things never change. And so they would have refreshments and enjoy fellowship and social time. And of course, that involved different kinds of dishes and cups and pitchers.

Tegan 19:09

Right.

Hilary 19:10

And over time, some of these things became...different makers made these available with special Masonic decorations, so you could have something that really was outside of regular life in your Masonic lodge that had to do with serving refreshments.

Tegan 19:25

Yeah, and we actually -- at the time of this recording, this may not be true at the time of the airing of this podcast, but -- we have on loan to us, from a local Masonic lodge, a silver ladle that Paul Revere did make, that was used for a punch bowl. I don't think that they had to be silver. That was just for fun, is my impression. But they would, you know, make something special for the lodge.

Hilary 19:46

Yes. And Paul Revere made several ladles that have a history of being used in Masonic lodges. There's a few...Gloucester...Boston area where they were ordered specifically for the lodge. We also have in our collection at the museum something that's on loan to us from the Grand Lodge of Masons in Massachusetts, which is a pair of ladles that were used at a lodge in Groton, Massachusetts. And interestingly, those ladles were made probably in the 1760s/1770s, but they were given to the lodge in the late 1700s/early 1800s to use for serving punch. And it just goes to show that this idea of serving punch in a festive and special way kind of continued through the decades, even when those particular objects would have started to be a bit old fashioned in terms of how they looked.

Tegan 20:36

Right. That's interesting! And you mentioned sometimes having Masonic symbols on some of these items, and I've certainly seen Masonic symbols on things like punch bowls or other things in museum collections, even including our own.

Hilary 20:49

Yeah.

Tegan 20:49

So my understanding is that there was no rule against having those symbols on things that are being made for personal use, or-

Hilary 20:56

There are no rules.

Tegan 20:57

(Laughs)

Hilary 20:57

There are...It's...especially in the late 1700s/early 1800s...especially in the late 1700s and before that, Freemasonry was not as regulated as it later became.

Tegan 21:08

Okay.

Hilary 21:09

It was a little bit of a wild west-

Tegan 21:12

Okay.

Hilary 21:12

-I feel. In terms of people were...how people were using symbols, how they were using objects. It was a different time. Then it became...different sort of regulation then really started in the 1820s, and then definitely after the 1830s

Tegan 21:26

Okay. And can you tell me more, a little bit, about those changes in Freemasonry? And I'm particularly interested because as we're talking about these things, I realized that some listeners might be thinking, aren't they a secret society? Why are they allowed to talk about these things on a podcast? But I understand that that secrecy is mostly a myth, and some of it was true and isn't anymore. So can you give us a little context for that?

Hilary 21:49

So, Freemasonry is an oath-bound organization. So if you become a Mason, you have an obligation to keep some things to yourself. And that can be read as you know, is it secret or not, but that is...it's oath-bound.

Tegan 22:02

Okay.

Hilary 22:02

I think that's the best way to describe it.

Tegan 22:04

Okay.

Hilary 22:04

And of course, over time, a lot of information about Freemasonry through publications, particularly through imagery, is available to any researcher.

Tegan 22:15

I've heard that the reputation for secrecy comes from kind of the 1820s-1830s when Masonry and opposition to Masonry became the big political conversation in the United States. Do you agree with that being where that reputation came from?

Hilary 22:29

I'm not sure if I can offer a simple answer for that.

Tegan 22:32

Okay.

Hilary 22:32

But I can tell you a little bit about the anti-Masonic movement.

Tegan 22:35

Sure.

Hilary 22:35

So in the 1820s -- and this does tie into some activities that Paul Revere undertook years before, for example -- in the 1820s Freemasonry had been an organization that had grown at kind of an explosive pace for...really, since the beginning of the country. And Freemasonry is a group. It's a fraternal group. And, of course, by the nature of a group, you are excluding some people.

Tegan 23:02

Yeah.

Hilary 23:03

So there was a sense that some people were excluded. There was also a sense that Freemasons were often in positions of power. And there was a backlash, and there was some reasons behind it, but it really came to a peak in event that's sometimes called the William Morgan affair, that happened in 1826. And after that time, Freemasonry suffered a real crisis, and many, many lodges were closed. Members left the organization. Many people who were involved in Freemasonry felt threatened by others. It was a very difficult time that...the anti-Masonic period sort of typically is described as lasting around 10 years. It took a while for Freemasonry to build back after that, and it was a different organization after then.

Tegan 23:53

Yeah?

Hilary 23:53

But Freemasonry did not go away. It was...for example, in Boston in the 1820s and 30s, Freemasonry was still going on. It just wasn't quite as public as it had been before.

Tegan 24:04

Yeah.

Hilary 24:04

But in some areas, like, for example, Vermont, there was a very strong backlash. And the Grand Lodge of Vermont closed for a period of time during those years.

Tegan 24:13

Oh, yeah? So returning to Paul Revere, because I think all of this context, yes, is so useful.

Hilary 24:18

(Laughs) Yeah.

Tegan 24:18

I clearly have so much to learn about Freemasonry, and I think a lot of our listeners do as well. But can you tell us about other items made by Paul Revere in your Museum's collection?

Hilary 24:26

Of course, yeah! We have lots of great things. Or, the things we have, we really cherish.

Tegan 24:31

Yeah.

Hilary 24:31

So we are lucky to have two sets of Masonic jewels on loan to us from the Masonic lodges that own them. We have a set that was used by Washington Lodge, which is now owned by Simon W Robinson Lodge. Those jewels are special because they come with a receipt. Those are the jewels that, if you want to learn more about what a Paul Revere jewel looks like, you look at those, because they're well documented.

Tegan 24:56

That's great.

Hilary 24:57

We also have another set of jewels that were used at Bristol Lodge and are on loan to us from that lodge. That set of jewels...and those are also thought to be the work of Paul Revere because there is a note in his business records about the master of that lodge coming and ordering a set of Masonic jewels right around the time that Lodge was established.

Tegan 25:17

Got it so still documentation, but not as ironclad.

Hilary 25:21

It's not quite like the receipt right there, but it's it's good. Then we also have a past Master's jewel that is attributed to Paul Revere. And then other kinds of objects: We have the ladles, which we talked about earlier. Those are part of the collection of the Grand Lodge of Masons in Massachusetts. We have a summons. We have a receipt for purchase of jewels by Columbian Lodge. We also have a number of certificates that were engraved by Paul Revere. And we also have a few charters that are on loan to us from their owners, different Masonic lodges, that were signed by Paul Revere when he was master of the Grand Lodge of Masons in Massachusetts. And I'll also add about the summons that I mentioned earlier, that is a particularly awesome object, because it is signed by Paul Revere, because during the time -- this is dated 1768 -- he was serving as Secretary of the lodge. So one of his jobs was to send out a summons, meaning a meeting notice, saying "come to the meeting. This is the time and place." So he signed it as lodge secretary. And it is also signed by Paul Revere, because he was the engraver and printer of that summons.

Tegan 26:25

Oh, nice. So he has multiple relationships with that document.

Hilary 26:29

Yes! Yeah. It's an object that sort of brings in his professional life, his lodge life. And it's sort of great looking. We're very lucky to have it. It was a very ephemeral thing that was just a note saying you should come to a meeting, so they weren't necessarily saved.

Tegan 26:42

Right, yeah. And that's something that's so cool, when a museum has something that was made to be ephemeral -- to not be saved, it was just utilitarian -- but then it got saved for one reason or another. That reason might be accident, and now we have a cool thing.

Hilary 26:55

Yeah, we're very lucky to have it. We use a lot to sort of describe the different ways that Paul Revere was involved in Freemasonry.

Tegan 27:01

Yeah, that's very cool. So you've mentioned a number of items that are on loan. And just for our listeners, museums will often have loans for one of a couple of reasons. They could be for a specific exhibit, and so it's being borrowed from another place so that it can be shown to the public as part of a particular story that they're telling. And then some museums also have things on loan from organizations that are not museums, where that museum is kind of holding it for safe-keeping. Can you describe the relationships that you have with these lodges or these items that are on loan?

Hilary 27:32

Sure! We have a long-term collaborative relationship with the Grand Lodge of Masons in Massachusetts, and we are the steward of a number of objects that are owned by the Grand Lodge. And they are cared for at the museum, and they're available to researchers at the museum. Many of them are presented on our online collections database. That number is about 10,500 objects.

Tegan 27:54

That's great.

Hilary 27:55

So that's, you know, one relationship.

Tegan 27:57

Yeah.

Hilary 27:57

And then we do have some relationships with Masonic lodges where they have objects that they would like to either make available to the public in a safe way, or, you know, for other reasons, they have material on loan to the museum. And we're very, you know, lucky to have those relationships, and love being able to share these objects with the public when they come to see us.

Tegan 28:18

Yeah, that's really cool. And like the Paul Revere House, the Scottish Rite Masonic Museum and Library has some items that we might term "revereabilia," meaning items that are created to celebrate or riff on the story of Paul Revere and the Midnight Ride. Do you have any favorite examples of this in your museum collection?

Hilary 28:35

I do have some favorite examples. One of the objects that really surprised me when I first encountered it is we have a matchbox of a brand of safety matches, and it was called "Paul Revere." The box says "Paul Revere," and there's a picture of Paul Revere on a horse, or someone who's thought to be Paul Revere. And they're vest pocket matches. And when you look on the other side, these are safety matches, meaning they're non-poisonous. And it says on the other side of the box: "non poisonous," which is-

Tegan 29:05

A good quality, in a match.

Hilary 29:06

A great quality! So safety matches, you know, came about when they changed the chemistry for matches, and they were less likely to be toxic or start fire when you didn't need them to. So these are safety matches, and a little cardboard box that has a strike on the side. And I thought, "Why Paul Revere?" Like, "What does he have to do with this?" And I had a colleague, we talked about this for a while, and she's like, "I think it's to show that the matches lit fast."

Tegan 29:32

Okay.

Hilary 29:33

That you got the fire quickly.

Tegan 29:34

Yeah.

Hilary 29:34

And that Paul Revere was associated with, you know, activity. That is a very interesting Paul Revere item in our collection, and a little bit of a mystery. And then another one -- which I cannot make heads or tails of, but it's certainly very good looking -- is we have an opened can of Paul Revere tomatoes.

Tegan 29:51

Okay?

Hilary 29:51

And the label for these canned tomatoes shows Paul Revere, church in the background. It's a color lithograph label, very handsome. The tomatoes were made by a company that was based in New York, so I don't know why they were Paul Revere tomatoes.

Tegan 30:06
(Laughs) Yeah.

Hilary 30:06
But it's a very good looking kind of packaging.

Tegan 30:09
That's great. And when is that from, roughly?

Hilary 30:11
I'd say...probably 1920s.

Tegan 30:14
That's really interesting. And I find that in our collection too, where we look at this -- especially if it's something like an advertisement, or a commercial box for something, a carton, like a, you know, match box or a tomato can, apparently -- where we just think, "Why Paul Revere?" What did Paul Revere mean to the advertisers, and to the merchandisers, and to the audiences, to the consumers? Was it speed? Was it reliability? Was it patriotism? "Buy this product because you're a patriot." You know, I just recently saw my first America 250 themed car commercial, and we're recording this in September 2025, so the 250th birthday is still several months off. So, you know, we have those questions. Sometimes we can answer those questions with research, and sometimes we can't. It was fun for me to hear you say that about what's in your collection, because that's just such a familiar thing to wonder.

Hilary 31:08
It is. It's a great question. And it just goes to show you that there's no end of questions that you can ask of Paul Revere and his reputation and keep finding out interesting things about how people viewed him, and how they viewed the past. I'll throw in about that matchbox is the coloring is red, white and blue, and I feel like they may be tied into patriotism surrounding World War I. There are a lot of safety match material culture objects related towards World War I, because I think there was some smoking going on-

Tegan 31:38
(Laughs) Yes.

Hilary 31:38
-and that may be tied into that as well.

Tegan 31:42
Yeah, I hadn't thought about, you know, matches being a big thing in World War I, but smoking was absolutely a big thing. I mean...

Hilary 31:49

Yeah, I don't know. I mean, smoking definitely happened in the trenches. And I don't know if it was a particularly big thing or just a normal thing, but the safety match era and World War I are happening in the same time.

Tegan 32:01

Yeah. I have a background in history of medicine. And so I know from the history of lung cancer-

Hilary 32:08

Oh.

Tegan 32:08

-that World War I was a time when a lot more Americans are smoking cigarettes, in particular.

Hilary 32:13

Ah, ok, alright!

Tegan 32:14

And they're sending cigarettes along with the troops. And lung cancer had been considered a very rare disease up until the decades following, like, 1930s or so, because all of these men who started smoking when they were 18 years old and they enlisted.

Hilary 32:28

I didn't know that. And how horrifying!

Tegan 32:31

Yes, absolutely.

Hilary 32:32

We also have a World War I poster in our collection that's for "Wake Up America" Day, which is the very beginning of World War I. And that's red, white and blue, and shows someone holding a lantern. It's not Paul Revere, necessarily, but it's the idea of looking back to the Revolutionary era to make sense of a war in 1917-1918.

Tegan 32:55

Yeah.

Hilary 32:55

Seeing what that's about.

Tegan 32:56

Absolutely. And we see that in items from a number of different wars that, you know, people are looking back to the revolution at many times in our history, but particularly in wars. I mean, Longfellow's poem about the Midnight Ride is on the eve of the American Civil War.

Hilary 33:10

Of course, yeah.

Tegan 33:11

But we've also seen that in other things. So before we wrap up, do you have a favorite Paul Revere fact, since he does come up in your museum life quite a bit?

Hilary 33:19

Do I have one favorite Paul Revere fact!?

Tegan 33:21

I don't know why I asked you that. I would hate if someone asked me that, because I can't choose one.

Hilary 33:21

(Laughs) So...one. Well, I would say, here's the thing about Paul Revere, especially in a Masonic context, is he served as Grand Master in the mid 1790s, starting in 1794. He did something huge for Freemasonry in Massachusetts. He chartered 23 lodges, which is a lot.

Tegan 33:43

Yeah.

Hilary 33:43

An extraordinary amount. So what he was doing was he was capitalizing on an interest in Freemasonry, meaning there were all kinds of Masons moving out to different communities, who said, "I want to establish a lodge in my community." Or "our community has gotten so big, we need another lodge in our community." So it was fueled by Freemasons and an interest in Freemasonry, but he was making it happen. And there is a point where Freemasonry could have decided to be an exclusive organization, and not an organization that is all over, and for people who are interested in it.

Tegan 33:43

Right.

Hilary 34:02

It could have been exclusive. And Paul Revere did a lot to bring Freemasonry along in Massachusetts by chartering in these 23 lodges. It's really an extraordinary accomplishment.

Tegan 34:28

Yeah, that's really interesting. And I think that kind of fits with other things we know about Paul Revere. You know, he was very public minded. He served on a lot of public committees and that sort of thing as well. So it makes sense that he would do that.

Hilary 34:40

Yeah, if you read the few things that Paul Revere left that...where he describes his sort of interaction with Freemasonry, he was a fan. He really believed in the organization, and I think he believed in a lot of the ideals around integrity, merit, charity, self-improvement. I think...I think he felt a lot for the organization and did what he could to advance it in the time that he lived in.

Tegan 35:05

Yeah, that's really interesting. So you've told us a lot about both Freemasonry and, you know, Masonic objects in museum collections. But is there any one thing that you wish more people knew or understood about Masonry or Masonic objects?

Hilary 35:18

I think if you are at all interested, it's a great area to explore, because, as we talked about a little bit earlier, nothing is really secret.

Tegan 35:26

Right.

Hilary 35:27

And it is also...Freemasonry and fraternalism, you know, other kinds of fraternal organizations, all of those activities touched so many lives: men, women, families, people from all walks of life. So if you were at all interested in community history, family history, national history, Freemasonry and fraternalism is part of that story. And even though this is sort of a well explored topic, I still think as a....my background is in decorative arts, particularly colonial Boston silver. And so there's still a lot of questions about the jewels that people could explore, you know, in terms of how they're made, who's actually making them? There's some that have cast parts. You know, where...what's up with that? What other silversmiths were making these kinds of materials? So there's still a lot that can be explored related to that topic, even though it's sort of seems like it's known.

Tegan 35:52

Yeah, that's really cool.

Hilary 36:11

There's still a lot, yeah. So it's worth exploring.

Tegan 36:23

Yeah, very cool. And speaking of exploring that, what's coming up in 2026 for the Scottish Rite Masonic Museum and Library?

Hilary 36:30

Well, in terms of exhibitions, we have a great exhibition called "Protest and Promise: Lexington and the American Revolution," which will be on view in 2026. We also have an exhibition about 50 years of collecting at the museum. As I mentioned, the museum is celebrating its 50th anniversary. We were a

bicentennial gift to the nation from the Scottish Rite of Freemasonry. So we are celebrating a lot this year. We also will have a exhibition in our library, using library and archives material of Revolutionary War related material; that's to coincide with the 200th anniversary of 1776. We also will be, later in 2026, doing an exhibition related to our fantastic collection of World War II posters. And we have special programs, tours and events. You can find out about those on our website.

Tegan 37:18

That's excellent. Thank you. Next, we'll hear from a couple of our interpreters here at the Paul Revere House. So if you will virtually follow me, we'll step inside.

Derek 37:36

Hello everyone, and welcome to our interpreter segment here on Revere House Radio. Today, I am so lucky to be joined with:

Kathryn 37:46

Kathryn.

Derek 37:47

Yes! And so what brought you here to the Revere House?

Kathryn 37:50

I don't have, like, the traditional background for coming to the history space, I don't think.

Derek 37:55

Me neither, actually, yeah,

Kathryn 37:57

Yeah. I do have an engineering background. But I have a really big interest in tourism, really in any kind; so like amusement parks, or historical sites, anything that really helps people to learn or to, like, make memories in a space.

Derek 38:10

So cool!

Kathryn 38:10

So that's sort of how I ended up here.

Derek 38:13

Yeah.

Kathryn 38:13

I had a friend of a friend of a friend who worked here, and eventually ended up applying and getting hired. See, that's how I ended up here.

Derek 38:20

Yeah, no, that's so fun. Yeah, I went to school for film and journalism, so definitely not like in the world of Paul Revere. But somehow people end up here and they stick around for quite a long time. Something that we're focusing on this season is asking our interpreters, like, what they like to bring to their interpretation, because so much of the job is about us being in there and, like, giving our own input and aspect on things. So what's something that you personally like to bring to your interpretation?

Kathryn 38:50

One thing that I am sort of a very big fan of, as I mentioned before, is tourism. And with that, I'm a very big fan of Disney and the Disney parks.

Derek 38:59

Right.

Kathryn 39:00

And we do have a small connection, kind of, sort of to the Disney parks.

Derek 39:04

Yes! It's there, though.

Kathryn 39:05

It is there. It's very small. And I've done a lot of research on it, and it's really fun to talk about. People will ask me something about Johnny Tremain. They'd be like, "was he a real person?"

Derek 39:15

Yeah.

Kathryn 39:15

"Is he the guy? Is Paul Revere the guy who burned his hand and then went through the thing?"

Derek 39:19

Yes! There's a little bit of, like...people mix them up sometimes, yeah.

Kathryn 39:24

Yes. I think often, especially...maybe not so much today, but especially like when I was a kid, and when a lot of the 25-year-old onwards read Johnny Tremain, they read it so young. And because it is based off of Esther Forbes' biography on Paul Revere, and she does such a good job with bringing that history into the book, people do kind of get a little confused.

Derek 39:44

Right.

Kathryn 39:45

And I can often use that as a little branching off point, because Esther Forbes and Johnny Tremain are the reason we have a connection to Disney.

Derek 39:51

Yeah, exactly!

Kathryn 39:52

So sometimes, especially in the gift shop, if people are like, "Oh, Johnny Tremain, I loved that book!" or, even better, "I loved that movie."

Derek 39:58

Let's get into like, what does the story focus on and I guess, like, how do people mix it up with Revere?

Kathryn 40:04

Yeah! So Johnny Tremain is about this young sort of teenage boy who, like many teenage boys during that time period, goes off to do an apprenticeship. He apprentices under a silversmith. And in the book, he's apprenticing with a couple of other kids. In the movie, it's a little different. And he's this very enthusiastic and overly sort of self-confident apprentice who's really talented at silversmithing. And he, at one point, decides to help his boss take on this one project that's really difficult. And he decides he's gonna work on a Sunday, which at that time is very frowned upon, especially by the person he's apprenticing under.

Derek 40:41

Puritans took it seriously.

Kathryn 40:43

Yes. And he is injured in an accident -- in the book, it's deliberate sabotage, in the movie, it's an accident -- by a crucible exploding and pouring silver all over his hands.

Derek 40:53

That'll do it. (Laughs)

Kathryn 40:54

And of course, he can't use his hands after that, so he's unfortunately let go from his apprenticeship, and he sort of goes out into the world trying to find new careers. Eventually, he starts working in this print shop that is run by one of the Sons of Liberty, and it talks about how he gets involved with that world-

Derek 41:10

Right.

Kathryn 41:10

-and eventually things like the coming of the Boston Tea Party, the revolution, the Midnight Ride of Paul Revere-

Derek 41:16

Yup.

Kathryn 41:17

-and sort of showing all of those events through the perspective of maybe not one of the sort of patriots that we often think of with those events, but through what a teenage boy might have seen through that time.

Derek 41:27

Yeah. I think that's...it's such a fun way to view this time period, because I think people come in with a very definitive perspective on like, "these are the characters. These are the people that we care about." But so many of the regular people throughout the city of Boston are totally, you know, lost to history at this point. And the perspective of kids is probably, like, the biggest lost perspective that we have, because we have no idea really, like, what a lot of the kids were thinking while things were going on.

Kathryn 41:55

Yeah. And that's actually why Esther wrote the book. When she was writing "Paul Revere in the World He Lived In," which is sort of still the foremost biography on Paul Revere-

Derek 42:03

It's the one all of us read when we come here, yes.

Kathryn 42:06

-she was so interested in what not even just Paul's life would have been like as an apprentice, but what his apprentices lives might have looked like. Or sort of what the other apprentices around him, and even his father, who was started off as a silversmith's apprentice, what those lives would have looked like.

Derek 42:23

Right, yeah.

Kathryn 42:24

And so she got really, really interested in this topic. And evidently, while she was writing Paul Revere in the World He Lived In, she had to stop herself and go, "no, no, I will write that book after this one, I have to finish this book first."

Derek 42:35

We can get into that later, yeah.

Kathryn 42:37

Yeah. But she does write it. And then one of the other reasons that she said she wrote this book is because around the time that she is writing, there is a major global conflict going on.

Derek 42:48

Yeah.

Kathryn 42:48

And she wanted kids to have sort of another time period to compare what's going on in their lives to that time.

Derek 42:56

Yes, yeah.

Kathryn 42:57

As we were heading towards World War II at that time.

Derek 42:59

World War II, yeah, yeah. Yeah, I think that's what's really fun about our museum in particular, is that, because it's a house, it's a domestic place. We can bring these big ideas of the revolution and these like larger than life characters -- to us, like Paul Revere -- down to a real personal level. And we can have people experience, or at least start to think about, what it may have been like to be in a different historical time period. Because I think that's a perspective that a lot of people really struggle to like put themselves in. And this is just like a really, really great place to be able to do so.

Kathryn 43:33

Oh yeah, definitely. I think it's really interesting, especially to be able to see what a middle class family's household would during that time.

Derek 43:41

Yeah. Right, not somebody rich!

Kathryn 43:42

It's...yeah. Because most of the time when we look at these places, we're like, "oh, this person was very wealthy, and this is sort of what their life looked like." And we really only ever see that one perspective. Sort of like "the George Washington perspective" I like to think of.

Derek 43:54

Exactly, yeah.

Kathryn 43:55

But through Paul and through the museum, we get, I feel like, a bit different, and maybe even a bit better of a look at that time.

Derek 44:01

100%. Yeah, you get to feel what it was like for an everyday person to go out and do life. Whereas George Washington had, let's say, a lot of people doing things for him, where, of course, most people at that time period did not.

Kathryn 44:14

Yeah.

Derek 44:14

So, I mean, thank you for talking with me, Kathryn. My name is Derek Hunter, and we will see you next time here at Revere House Radio.

Kathryn 44:24

Bye!

Tegan 44:27

Thank you for tuning in to Revere House Radio. I'm your host, Tegan Kehoe, and I am the Research and Adult Program Director here at the Paul Revere House. Our production team for this season includes Derek Hunter, Mehitabel Glenhaber and Adrian Turnbull-Riley. Thank you to RP Hale for the use of his performance on the harpsichord as our theme music. If you're listening online, we encourage you to subscribe in your favorite podcast app so you never miss an episode. Revere House Radio is a production of the Paul Revere Memorial Association, the nonprofit which operates the Paul Revere House Museum. You can find more information, subscribe to our mailing list or social media, or become a member on our website at www.paulreverehouse.org. Or, come visit us in Boston!