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# *the* REVERE HOUSE *Gazette*

PUBLISHED BY THE PAUL REVERE MEMORIAL ASSOCIATION

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SPRING 2016

ISSUE NO. 122

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## Leisure Activities in The Colonial Era

BY LINDSAY FORECAST

The amount of time devoted to leisure, whether defined as recreation, sport, or play, depends on the time available after productive work is completed and the value placed on such pursuits at any given moment in time. There is no doubt that from the late 1600s to the mid-1850s, less time was devoted to pure leisure than today. The reasons for this are many – from the length of each day, the time needed for both routine and complex tasks, and religious beliefs about keeping busy with useful work. There is evidence that men, women, and children did pursue leisure activities when they had the chance, but there was just less time available. Toys and descriptions of children's games survive as does information about card games, dancing, and festivals.

Depending on the social standing of the individual and where they lived, what leisure people had was spent in different ways. Activities ranged from the traditional sewing and cooking, to community wide events like house- and barn-raising. Men had a few more opportunities for what we might call leisure activities but even these were tied closely to home and business. Men in particular might spend time in taverns, where they could catch up on the latest news and, in the 1760s and 1770s, get involved in politics.

In his book *The Revolutionary War Era*, historian Randall Huff observes that “Chances for social interaction outside the towns of colonial America included the quilting and sewing bees organized by women to provide company in what otherwise could become a too-cloistered environment.” Most men were also required to attend periodic militia drills. As the individual aged, what was considered leisure activities changed with them. According to Huff “Before the revolution, one’s station in life tended to determine how one would spend one’s leisure. For the cultured elite, the necessity of sharpening social skills to an acceptable level occupied many hours and eventually many years of one’s life.” Children were expected to participate in

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**Lindsay Forecast** researched leisure activities in the eighteenth century while serving as an intern at the Paul Revere House in the spring of 2015. Lindsay is now a graduate of Lasell College in Newton, MA, where she majored in Humanities.

daily tasks. “Girls were typically trained in the domestic arts by their mothers. At an early age they might mimic the house-keeping chores of their mothers and older sisters until they were permitted to participate actively.”



*“But being young and shy, she [Mary Dall Hitchborn] naturally made some mistakes which irritated the old gentleman [Paul Revere] so that she never dared play with him again.” This anecdote related by Rev. Edward G. Porter in Rambles in Old Boston (1887), if true, illustrates that Paul Revere, like many people of his generation, enjoyed playing cards.*

## From the Executive Director...

Last year at this time we wondered if we would ever see bare ground again. This year even with some snow and cold, the snowdrops in our new gardens have already bloomed, signaling the upcoming visitor and school field trip season. Visitors are still arriving in record numbers and the education department is busily crafting a wonderful array of living history programs for our visitors to enjoy.

At the end of last year we bid a fond goodbye to Melanie Schwebke. We all appreciated her energy and thank her for eight years of dedicated service. Yet with change comes opportunity. I am pleased to announce that her replacement at Program Assistant, Adrienne Turnbull-Reilly, who comes to us from a position with Historic New England, is already hard at work and proving to be an indispensable member of our small but hearty crew.

Evidence from this period is difficult to procure. In a diary by Mary Osgood Sumner (1779-1801) quoted in Alice Morse Earle's *Child Life in Colonial Days*, Sumner lists some of the activities that she performed on a daily basis: "July 11 [year not shown], I improved my time before breakfast; after breakfast made some biscuits and did all my work before the sun was down" and "August 8, I stuck pretty close to my work to-day and did all that Sister gave me and after I was done I swept out the house and put things to rights." From these entries, it is clear that from the moment a child woke up, work commenced. However, it was not all work for Mary. On July 8 she wrote: "I went and said my Catechism to-day. Came home and wrote down the questions and answers, then dressed and went to the dance, endeavored to behave myself decent." Sumner wrote her diary in the late eighteenth century. Her social standing is not mentioned but when her diary is compared to those from upper-class individuals, it can be inferred that she was neither wealthy nor overtly poor.

One example of a child's point of view in revolutionary Boston can be found in Anna Green Winslow's diary. She documented her daily comings and goings from 1771 to 1773. Anna completed similar tasks to other women and young girls at the time: "28th Dec. - Last evening a little after 5 o'clock I finished my shift. I spent the evening at Mr. Soley's. I began my shift at 12 o'clock last Monday, have read my bible every day this week & wrote every day save one." Her days consisted of baking, sewing, visiting family friends, and going to school. Due to her more prominent standing in the community she also entertained guests and danced with her friends, "30th Nov. - In the evening young Mr. Waters's hearing of my assembly, put his flute in his pocket and played several minuets and other tunes, to which we danced mighty cleverly." Winslow mentions school in passing, while her sewing and bible verses are more commonly mentioned in her day to day activities: "9th March - I think this day's work may be called a piece meal for in the first place I sew'd on the

The work on our education center is progressing and I promise you the results will be worth the wait. The redesign of our web site is underway. It will be an essential part of our effort to tell all our fans and followers, our faithful donors and friends, that while the new facility will revolutionize the experience at the Paul Revere House, it will still be everything you always loved about our programs, resources and tours, just more!

So stay tuned, this is going to be a remarkable year at the Paul Revere House



Nina Zannieri

bosom of unkle's shirt, mended two pair of gloves, mended for the wash two handkerchiefs, (one cambrick) sewed on half a border of a lawn apron of aunts, read part of the XXIst chapter of Exodus, & a story in the Mother's gift." From her diary, it is clear that, although she had some time for herself, she was given little option in the activities she could pursue during her free time. In many entries, she mentions her aunt with whom she lives. This aunt expects Winslow to complete

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*"I stuck pretty close to my work today" - Mary Osgood Sumner, late 1700s. Children in the Colonial era spent a great deal of time in school and performing various household chores. Leisure time, when it existed, was limited.*

# Donnarumma and Zarrella Families Lived in the Pierce-Hichborn House

BY PATRICK M. LEEHEY,  
RESEARCH DIRECTOR

We often receive letters or e-mails from interested parties from all over the world claiming that one of their ancestors lived or worked in the Paul Revere House. Sometimes these claims turn out to be accurate; in many cases it turns out that the person lived next door, across the street, or around the corner.

One of our long time correspondents Corinne Troiano had a tradition in her family that her great-great-grandparents Marino and Maria Donnarumma had lived in the Paul Revere House. In order to verify or disprove this story, she hired a professional genealogist from AncestryProGenealogists of Salt Lake City. The meticulous research done by this genealogist showed that Corinne's ancestors did not live in the Revere House, but that they did live in the nearby Pierce-Hichborn House in 1894 and 1895. In addition, her great-grandmother Consiglia Donnarumma and her husband Ciriaco Zarrella also lived in the Hichborn House during these years.

Corinne was kind enough to share a copy of the report she received from AncestryProGenealogists with us, which is

now in our research library. The Zarrella family later moved to East Boston where Ciriaco Zarrella became a successful fruit importer and exporter (see photo). Their son Angelo Zarrella attended Tufts University Medical School, and served as a doctor in Lynn, Massachusetts, for many years.

The research uncovered the fact that Consiglia and Ciriaco were married at St. Leonard's Church in the North End on 30 October 1892. The research also showed that another relative, Giovanni Donnarumma, one of Consiglia's brothers, married Luisa DeAngelis at Sacred Heart Church on North Square in December, 1903, even though they both resided in East Boston at the time.

The Pierce-Hichborn House served as an apartment building with ground floor shops from about 1860 until 1949-50, when restoration began. Numerous families and extended families made the Pierce-Hichborn House their home during these years. The more we learn about these families, the better understanding we have of what life was like in the North Square area in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

If any of our readers have done similar research documenting their family's connections to any of our three buildings, we would very much like to hear about it. Just contact the Research Director at the Paul Revere House, 19 North Square, Boston, MA 02113; 617-523-2338; or [pat@paulreverehouse.org](mailto:pat@paulreverehouse.org). ❖



*Top left: This photograph of Consiglia Donnarumma as a young woman is from an early tintype. Top right: Ciriaco Zarrella as a young man. Bottom: Ciriaco Zarrella after the family moved to East Boston. Although listed as a peddler in census records, he was actually a successful fruit importer. Photos courtesy, Zarrella Family Archive.*

## 2016 Focus Tour presented by Three Boston House Museums\* Bostonians at Home: Servant Life in Downtown Boston

Offered on Two Saturdays: April 4 and October 22, 2016

Tours at 1:00 and 3:00 pm; Price: \$7.00 per person, per tour.

Each House conducts its own tours and sells its own tickets, For more information, contact:

- 1) Otis House Museum, 141 Cambridge Street; Visit [www.historicnewengland.org](http://www.historicnewengland.org) or call 617-994-5920.
- 2) Nichols House Museum, 55 Mount Vernon Street; Visit [www.nicholshousemuseum.org](http://www.nicholshousemuseum.org) or call 617-227-6993.
- 3) Gibson House Museum, 137 Beacon Street; Visit [www.thegibsonhouse.org](http://www.thegibsonhouse.org) or call 617-267-6338.

\*Members of the House Museum Alliance of Downtown Boston



*"We danced mighty cleverly" – Anna Green Winslow, 30 November 1771. Dancing was a popular form of recreation for both children and adults in the Colonial era. Child diarists Anna Green Winslow and Mary Sumner both record attending dances.*

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sewing and verses and to finalize letters to her parents. Education appears to be a key part of how a young girl with means spent her time. Historian Merrill D. Smith comments: "Unlike today, reading and writing were taught separately in the colonial period . . . Colonial Americans considered writing to be a specialized skill, necessary for men to master for business and legal matters, but not so necessary for women to be able to do . . . Writing was a job related skill. Because girls were being trained not to hold jobs but to be successful home makers, penmanship was an irrelevant acquisition for them. The skill that corresponded, for girls, to what writing was for boys was the ability to sew."

In a later diary from 1836, Martha Anne Kuhn writes primarily about her education – how she began her day with frivolity and leisure and then proceeded on to learning and productive activities. On "Saturday 14th 1836 -- I rose 20 minutes of five. I went out to take a walk with L. I got home at seven and eat my breakfast and then I played a little but in a short time I studied one section in the Latin reader when I had gotten [that] section I prepared for school." Kuhn received her diary in school and much of it was dedicated to writing in Latin, art and biblical verses. The more than 60 years that separate the two diaries show a vast change in life. Winslow appeared to be more concerned with her sewing, school, and writing her parents, while Kuhn focused primarily on playing with her friend and her education. Winslow and Kuhn came from wealthier families, yet for most women in either era, the tasks needed to maintain their families and households consumed most of their time, and formal education beyond the most basic reading, spelling, arithmetic, and manners was considered unnecessary.

Expectations for boys also depended on the class of the individual, and the means of their families. Some boys continued their education in a center of higher learning while most became apprentices. When they did have free moments, they would play games: cards, dominoes, and other board games, or listen to someone read the newspaper. Along with games,

came sports. In rural regions, children matched their speed, strength, and stamina in wrestling matches or foot races. In urban areas, men might wrestle, gamble, or play various ball games. Not that such games were necessarily popular with their elders. In a diary entry for March 15, 1726, Samuel Sewell records: "Sam. Hirst [Sewell's grandson] got up betime in the morning, and took Ben Swett with him and went into the Common to play at Wicket [probably a form of Cricket] . . . Sam came not to prayer, at which I was much displeas'd." On March 17, Sewell continues: "Did the like again, but took not Ben with him. I told him he could not lodge here practicing thus. So he lodg'd elsewhere." For most colonial craftsmen, however, what spare time they had was usually devoted to solving the numerous problems of their trade, according to Huff.

Although Paul Revere and his family are notoriously difficult biographical subjects, due to the limited number of personal letters and the absence of diaries, a surprising amount of information can be gleaned about their leisure time activities. The Rev. Edward G. Porter, in *Rambles in Old Boston* (1887), records the following anecdote: one of Paul Revere's female cousins by marriage, Mary Dall Hitchborn "soon after she became a bride, was invited to play cards one evening at Paul Revere's, and was his partner at whist; but being young and shy she naturally made some mistakes, which irritated the old gentleman so that she never dared to play with him again." Assuming this story is true, Paul Revere and his extended family, like many people in the years after the Revolutionary War, enjoyed playing cards. Paul Revere's estate inventory records that at the time of his death he owned two card tables and a backgammon board, further indications that, at least at the end of his life, Revere and his family enjoyed card and board games. In a poem he wrote sometime after 1800, about his life in "Cantondale" south of Boston, where he owned a house near his sheet copper rolling mill, Revere states that he sometimes took his dog and gun hunting when there was no pressing business to attend to. Paul Revere's daughter Maria, while away at boarding school in Woburn, Massachusetts, wrote a letter to her parents describing her life there that is

*Continued on page 6*



*"Then sometimes take my dog and gun" -- Paul Revere, Cantondale poem, early 1800s. In addition to providing food for the table, hunting provided useful exercise and a welcome diversion from everyday tasks.*



# Spring Events

AT THE  
PAUL REVERE  
HOUSE

Make your spring educational AND fun by visiting the Paul Revere House in April or May! Our school vacation week programs place you and your children back in the shoes of Paul Revere and his friends, family, and enemies. Unless otherwise noted, events are free with museum admission: adults \$3.50, seniors and college students \$3.00, children ages 5–17 \$1. Members and North End residents admitted free at all times. Through April 14 the Revere House is open 9:30–4:15. Beginning April 15, the site is open daily 9:30–5:15. Closed on Mondays in January, February, and March.

19 NORTH SQUARE  
BOSTON MA 02113  
WWW.PAULREVEREHOUSE.ORG  
617-523-2338

## PATRIOTS DAY AND SPRING SCHOOL VACATION PROGRAMS

*Events commemorate the 241st anniversary of Paul Revere's midnight ride and the beginning of the American Revolution.*

**Fiber Arts Day** *Saturday, April 16; 1:00–3:00.* Explore the common colonial chores of spinning shorter fibers into longer ones and weaving longer fibers into cloth with our resident experts, Fred and Zoe Lawson! Try your own hand at using a drop spindle or weaving on a handloom. The Lawsons will demonstrate and offer advice for those just starting out.



**A Visit with Paul Revere** *Tuesday, April 19; 1:00–3:00.* David Connor brings Boston's favorite patriot vividly to life. Ask him about the details of his midnight ride, inquire about his 16 children, or engage him in conversation about his activities as a member of the Sons of Liberty.



**Midnight Ride Storytelling Program** *Wednesday, April 20 & Thursday, April 21; 10:30–12:00.* Find out what really happened on Paul Revere's ride! Separate the facts from the myths, then retrace Revere's route from his home to the



banks of the Charles River. Participants don hats and carry props as they go, taking on the roles of Paul and Rachel Revere, their children, British soldiers, rowers, John Hancock and Samuel Adams. Particularly appropriate for kids in grades K–4. *Reservations are required and may be made by calling 617-523-2338. Price: \$4.50 for each adult and child age 5 and up.*

**Drop-In Colonial Kids Activities** *Friday, April 22; 1:00–3:00.* We encourage families with kids of all ages to stop by to try on clothes like Paul Revere's kids wore, play 18th century games in an informal setting, and write with a quill pen. This program is **included** with admission to the house and reservations are **NOT** required.

**Rachel Revere: A Revolutionary Woman** *Saturday, April 23; 1:00, 1:45, 2:30.* Who held the Revere family together after Paul set off on his Midnight Ride? Joan Gatturna takes on the role of Paul Revere's second wife. Enjoy her dramatic account of a woman's struggle to hold home and family together in a time of war, blockades, and shortages. This program is **FREE** with admission to the house and reservations are **NOT** required.

## PAUL REVERE'S BOSTON

*Special events on Saturday afternoons explore everyday life in early Boston. This year our May events honor Boston's participation in National Historic Preservation Month by featuring skills common in the Revere's era that are kept alive by a few talented practitioners today.*

**Colonial Basket Weaving** *Saturday, May 7; 1:00–3:00.* Fred Lawson weaves and sells reproductions of period baskets used to store items like cheese, candles, and even chickens! Just in time for last minute Mother's Day gifts.

**Patriot Fife and Drum** *Saturday, May 14; 1:00–3:00.* Enjoy a lively concert of music that accompanied colonists as they marched, danced, wooed their beloveds, and waged war. David Vose and Sue Walko provide fascinating insight into each selection they perform.



**Glass Harmonica Concert** *Saturday, May 21; 1:00-3:00.* Vera Meyer plays early American melodies on the intriguing instrument that Ben Franklin invented. The ethereal, haunting tones Meyer creates will mesmerize all who listen!

**Tinsmithing Demonstration** *Saturday, May 28; 1:00–3:00.* Who made the ubiquitous lanterns, sconces, and other tin wares of the 18th century? A tinsmith! Larry Leonard produces and sells examples of his craft while describing the techniques, tools, and materials used since the Reveres' era.

## PAUL REVERE HOUSE STAFF

**Executive Director** Nina Zannieri  
**Curator/Assistant Director** Edith J. Steblecki  
**Research Director** Patrick M. Leehey  
**Interpretation and Visitor**  
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## THE REVERE HOUSE GAZETTE

**Published quarterly by the Paul Revere Memorial Association**

**Editor** Patrick M. Leehey  
**Assistant Editor** Emily A. Holmes  
**Designer** Stephen Moniak, Lightning Design



The Paul Revere Memorial Association also receives annual support from the Massachusetts Society of the Cincinnati, Society of Colonial Wars, the Lowell Institute, Revere Copper Products, Inc., Lodge of St. Andrew, Citizens Bank Foundation, Union Oyster House, Boston Duck Tours, and in-kind support from the National Park Service.

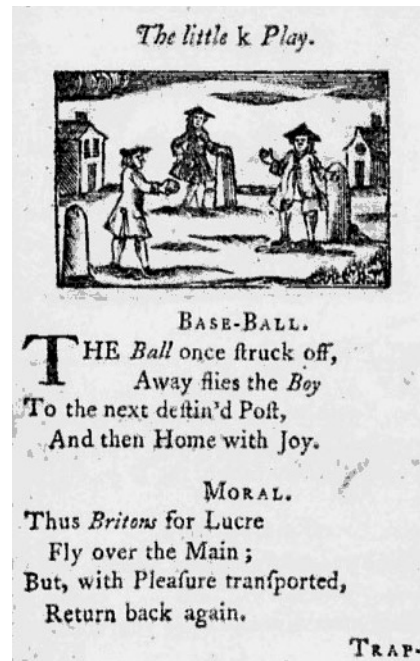
## The PAUL REVERE MEMORIAL ASSOCIATION

19 NORTH SQUARE  
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02113

## Leisure Activities *Continued from page 4*

remarkably similar to some of the entries in Anna Green Winslow's diary. Maria describes mending shirts, reciting lessons, and learning writing and "cyphering" (arithmetic). She describes the books she has read, including "Brydon's Tour" [probably a travel book] which, while not strictly speaking leisure, must have been a welcome diversion from lessons and sewing. She asks for a visit from her parents and a letter from her older sister Harriet. In a letter a few weeks later she admits that she has been a "little homesick" and asks for another visit from her mother and from her sisters Harriet and Sally. One wishes that more of Maria's letters had survived, or that she kept a diary.

"Moments that could be spared for leisure activities were far less abundant than they would later become, and were probably treasured all the more reason" in the colonial era, according to Huff. Whether the person was rich or poor, male or female, young or old, leisure times were few and far between. Girls were expected to train to become ladies of the house and received education in both housework, and reading and writing that would coincide with their standing. Boys were expected to know what they wanted to do at a very young age, whether to become an apprentice, continue their education, join the militia or the church. The wealthy could afford to spend their time at the theatre or dancing, while those



*"Sam. Hirst . . . took Ben Swett with him and went to the Common to play at Wicket."  
– Samuel Sewell, Diary, 15 March 1726. Ball games of all types were popular forms of recreation for boys. These games were not always popular with their elders, however, when they interfered with school, work, or religious duties.*

without means spent most of their limited free time with family or friends. ❖

Sources: Earle, Alice Morse, *Child Life in Colonial Days*, 1927; Huff, Randall, *The Revolutionary War Era*, 2004; Johnson, Claudia Durst, "Arts and Amusements," *Daily Life in Colonial New England*, 2002, ABC-CLIO eBook Collection; Kuhn, Martha Anne, *Journal of a girl 9 years old*, 1836; Schouler, James, *America of 1776: Daily Life in Revolutionary America*, 1976; Smith, Merrill D., "Women, Education, and the Arts," *Women's Roles in Eighteenth-Century America*, 2010, ABC-CLIO eBook Collection; Winslow, Anna Green, *Diary of Anna Green Winslow: A Boston School Girl of 1771*, 1894.