



# Through the Eyes of a Merchant: The Howards of Clark's Square

BY RU Aidhri Crofton

*Editor's Note: This article comes as the first of a two-part issue that takes a fresh look at Robert Howard's life and his role in early colonial Boston society. Part two will further analyze the Revere House's first occupant as a slaveholder and the nature of slavery in Boston during the period.*

Sometime between 1676 and 1680, a new house was constructed on the plot at 19 North Square in Boston where the preeminent Mather family residence had once stood. With spacious rooms, a third floor, and a cellar large enough for a working kitchen, the building's grandeur reflected the affluence of its initial occupant and his family. Its owner Robert Howard had, by that point, marked himself as an important figure in Boston, and his local prominence and worldwide business connections would only grow over his 37-year occupancy of the house. It is unclear whether Howard came to Massachusetts as an English immigrant or if he was born in the colony after his parents arrived during the first Great Migration.<sup>i</sup> However, his Puritan faith and eventual rise to wealth as a shipping merchant suggest his motivations for coming to, or remaining in, Massachusetts were a combination of religious freedom and a desire for entrepreneurial opportunities. These dual prongs combined to dominate Howard's life, and through them, we can paint a more complete picture of Robert Howard's world.

The first evidence of the Howards is a residential record that places the family in Boston's North End.<sup>ii</sup> As Boston emerged as a vibrant town in the mid-17th century, the North End became one of its most populated areas. As a result, given the centrality of Puritanism to the founding of Massachusetts Bay Colony, it also became one of the town's centers of religious

life. As early as the 1640s, the population of the neighborhood had increased so substantially that it was decided a new church would be needed to accommodate the spiritual needs of its residents. The Second Church of Boston was founded in 1649 with work starting on the congregation's first meeting house shortly thereafter.<sup>iii</sup> The Old North Meeting House, as it would come to be known, was located at the head of Clark's Square in the symbolic heart of the neighborhood and directly across from the future Howard household.

Within the records of the Second Church, "B[rother] Robert



*The Paul Revere House, Robert Howard's former residence, stands as the only remnant from Howard's life and time of residency in downtown Boston.*

---

**Ruaidhri Crofton** is a M.A. student in the History and Museum Studies Program at Tufts University. Ruaidhri served as the Fall 2019 intern at the PRMA and has transitioned into a role of an on-site Interpreter.

## *From the Executive Director...*

The beginning of a new year is both exciting and a bit daunting: so many opportunities, but so much planning and work to do. With that in mind, I am pleased to say that 2020 is off to a great start. On January 23rd the Boston Society of Architects honored Don Mills and Craig Whitaker of Mills Whitaker Architects for their work to achieve full handicapped accessibility for our historic complex with their elegant, creative design of our education and visitor center. By linking the new facility to the Revere House second floor with an elevated walkway and adding a ramped entry to the Revere House first floor, all visitors can easily access the entire house. We are all extremely proud of the whole team's work on this project, which has garnered four awards since opening in December of 2016.

Additionally, the much-anticipated American Antiquarian Society traveling exhibit, "Beyond Midnight: Paul Revere," fresh from its showing at the New York Historical Society, opens its local run at the Concord Museum and the Worcester Art Museum on February 15th. The Association is honored to have played a consulting role and to be a lender to this important exhibit. Special thanks to the Revere Hotel Boston Common, a corporate sponsor of the Paul Revere Memorial Association and official hotel of the Concord showing of "Beyond Midnight: Paul Revere."

I hope you will visit both venues of this show, which supports our long-standing focus on using the midnight ride's

legacy to introduce audiences to Paul Revere, the accomplished artisan, businessman, entrepreneur, and innovator. "Beyond Midnight" uses the American Antiquarian Society's vast collection of engravings, the Worcester Art Museum's spectacular collection of Revere silver, and the historical perspective and interpretive expertise of the Concord Museum to further explore these still less well-known aspects of Paul Revere's life.

As is always the case, much of what we will do in 2020 involves partnerships and collaborations. This year we look forward to forging new alliances while continuing to work with long-standing partners like the National Parks of Boston, the Freedom Trail Foundation and of course, our colleagues at the Old State House and Old South Meeting House, now reconstituted under a new name, Revolutionary Spaces.

This is just the beginning of what I hope will be another wonderful year. Over the next few months we will be hard at work imagining new programs, training interns, acquiring interesting

new artifacts, restoring and maintaining our historic buildings, pursuing research opportunities, and of course preparing to welcome visitors from up the street, across the nation, and around the world. Stay tuned, we don't want you to miss a thing!



Nina Zannieri



*Nina, seen here with Don Mills of Mills Whitaker Architects, represented the Paul Revere Memorial Association at the Boston Society of Architects (BSA) Gala on Thursday, January 23.*

Howard" is listed as having "been admitted to full communion" as a member of the congregation on November 28, 1682, less than two years after moving into his new home.<sup>iv</sup> Although all citizens were required by law to attend church services, only a small number were actually *members* of the church they attended, placing Howard among those in a privileged position within the congregation. Achieving this rank would not have been an easy task for Howard, who would have been put through an arduous process of examination and questioning of his moral failings in front of the congregation and ministers, in addition to tests of his religious experience and knowledge.<sup>v</sup> Having withstood this heavy scrutiny, the final part of Howard's admission to full membership would have involved signing his name to "A Declaration of Faith," whereby he would affirm alongside other newly admitted members that, "we do in a serious manner and as we trust in the fear of God, unite together...As the Disciples of Jesus, and engage to walk together in Love, and endeavor to promote each other's edification, in faith, in knowledge, and in purity."<sup>vi</sup> Once a member of this exclusive subset in Puritan society, Howard

and his family would have continued to be subjected to heavy scrutiny as they were now expected to serve as role models of virtue and piety.

Despite Robert's certified status within the Church, there are no records that would suggest Howard's wife or children were also admitted as full members. However, given Robert Howard's determination to become a full member of his church and his agreement to the terms of the Declaration of Faith, it is likely that both he and his family were among the most devout of Boston Puritans, committed to their faith and its role in shaping life in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. His daughter, Sarah, is listed as having been baptized in the church after her birth in 1681, and in 1701 she wed her husband, Daniel Wyborne, in a ceremony officiated by the prominent minister Cotton Mather. Both events reinforced the family's connection to, and standing within, the church.<sup>vii</sup>

Puritanism's tenets permeated every aspect of public and private life in Howard's Boston, meaning that he and his family lived in a strictly regimented and authoritative society. Indeed, the Puritans of Boston "invested their own Congregational



church and its clergy with immense and intrusive power over the...lives of citizens.”<sup>viii</sup> Every law passed or action undertaken by theocratic community leaders was done so with the notion that their society needed to be purged of any behavior and beliefs unsuitable in the eyes of God so as to avoid direct punishment in the form of plague, Native American massacres, or other misfortune.<sup>ix</sup>

As one of the elite group of God’s elect, full-church members like Robert Howard easily translated their authority within the church to Boston’s Puritan society more broadly. In turn, these “elect were under an obligation to impose restraint upon the unregenerate” through the imposition of laws that would allow society to function in accordance with their beliefs and values.<sup>x</sup> Everything from the clothes colonists were allowed to wear and the entertainment they tolerated to their attitude toward work and prayer were ultimately influenced by politics and religion. Although the Howards left no explicit records of their feelings about religion or its role in Boston society, it was in this strict and pious environment that their family not only took root, but also eventually flourished. The Howards’ success stemmed from the fact that Boston’s theocratical nature did not preclude it from interacting with the wider world of commerce.

As Boston’s growing population and expanding economy transformed it into a bustling Atlantic port town, merchants like Howard profited greatly from the transportation and trade of goods arriving and departing from Boston’s harbor.<sup>xi</sup> Thus, Howard’s business success and status within the church reinforced one another to make him a key cog in all aspects of Boston’s society. Indeed, it was merchants like Howard who were the initial signees to the Massachusetts Bay Charter, and from their initial positions of power, they were able to mold the colonial economy in their interests.<sup>xii</sup> Following a 1631 court ruling that barred anyone from buying commodities directly from an incoming ship, all trade had to go through licensed merchants who profited greatly from the exchange.<sup>xiii</sup>

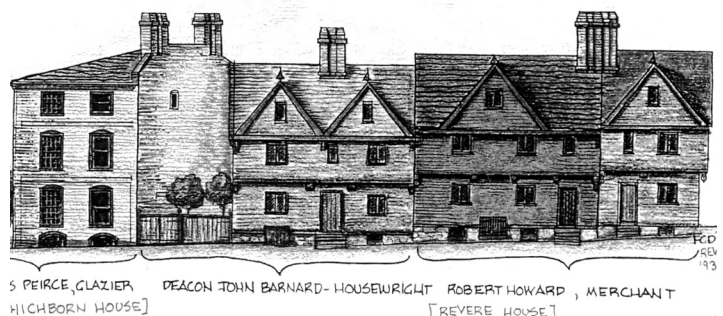
Howard accumulated his vast wealth through overseeing the trade of goods from Massachusetts to other colonies and territories throughout the Atlantic world. While Howard only owned one ship, a 110-ton vessel aptly named the *Robert*, Howard also invested in nineteen other ships based out of Massachusetts from 1697 to 1714, totaling 425 tons.<sup>xiv</sup> It was through the use of these vessels that Howard was able to profit off of the shipment of goods such as tobacco, logwood, rum, fish, and timber. Much of his trade was focused on the western side of the Atlantic, with his ships making regular voyages between Boston and the Caribbean. His focus was not exclusively on shipping routes to the South, however, as his vessels also made voyages north to today’s Canada, as well as across the ocean to Amsterdam. By 1700, Howard ranked ninth out of 69 ship owners based on tonnage owned, with an average of 70.6 tons in comparison to the Boston average of 52 tons.<sup>xv</sup>

In a society dominated by Puritan ideals that emphasized a focus on spiritual matters over worldly or material ones, it may seem somewhat contradictory that many Puritans strived to accumulate great wealth. However, merchants like Robert

Howard equated professional success and wealth accumulation not with greed, but as an indication of having gained God’s favor.<sup>xvi</sup> According to Puritan beliefs, God called men and women to perform particular roles in their lives. In the case of women like Elizabeth and her daughter Sarah Howard, they would be expected to serve as housewives and mothers or perhaps aid their husbands with their work. In contrast, men like Robert Howard would work as merchants, farmers, carpenters, shipbuilders, or in any number of other trades or professions for which God had selected them. Success in one’s profession was often judged through financial self-sufficiency, while poverty was considered a mark of laziness resulting from a lack of ambition.<sup>xvii</sup> In turn, the accumulation of wealth and material goods was not seen to be a deviation from devout spirituality, but instead a reward for having followed the word of God and proof of one’s election and salvation. Howard’s ability to afford a spacious new home for his family, fine furnishings, enslaved persons, and imported commodities like sugar and fruit confirmed to his peers that he had indeed worked hard at his job and had been recognized by God as a member of the elect.

Howard’s outward signs of election further qualified him to take an oath of allegiance to be considered a “freeman” in colonial society.<sup>xviii</sup> In turn, he would have been given a vote in town meetings and was expected to be an active political participant. For instance, in 1692 Howard protested alongside other merchants and fishermen in response to efforts to limit the mackerel catch in New England waters which would have hurt his bottom line.<sup>xix</sup> In both 1684 and 1700, Howard signed petitions to the General Court of Massachusetts protesting “that ye law for building of houses in Boston with brick and stone or to cover with slate or tile...[sic]” not be repealed, “it being a means under God, to Prevent and Stopp Devoureing fires [sic].”<sup>xx</sup> Locally, then, Howard’s interests and activism centered on keeping trade open and protecting his town from fires like the one that had destroyed the previous house located at 19 North Square.

Perhaps the largest political challenges that Robert Howard faced as a merchant, however, came not directly from the colonial government, but from the English Parliament and Crown thousands of miles away. King James II was deposed during the Glorious Revolution of 1688, through which William



*This conjectural drawing depicts what Howard’s residence likely looked in 1715 as part of the row houses in North Square. While minor additions were made in the subsequent years, roughly 90% of the post and beams from the original structure remain today. Drawing by Rick Detweiler.*

# “Beyond Midnight: Paul Revere” Comes To Massachusetts

**Beyond Midnight: Paul Revere** will make its transition from the New York Historical Society to Massachusetts this winter and spring. Beginning this February, the Concord Museum and the Worcester Art Museum will jointly present this exhibition which provides a revolutionary perspective on the artistic production of this important American patriot. Organized by the American Antiquarian Society, the exhibition will be on view concurrently in Worcester and Concord from February 15 through June 7, 2020.

“Beyond Midnight” is structured around four themes, embracing the well-known experiences surrounding Paul Revere’s Midnight Ride as well as the wider range of his artistic and commercial experiences that have often received less attention. In doing so, the exhibition contextualizes Revere’s class, consumption, and production in the 18th century American Colonies while exploring the incredible network of commercial relationships—on both sides of the

Revolution—that helped foster his business. Two of the four themes of the exhibition will be presented principally at the Concord Museum: **Revolutionary Revere** and **Revere the Legend**. The other two themes, **Revere the Maker** and **Revere’s Network**, will be explored primarily at the Worcester Art Museum. Following its run in Massachusetts, the exhibition will conclude its tour at the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art from July 4 to October 11, 2020.

As part of our involvement with this project, Nina and Robert will be featured as joint-headliners for a panel discussion hosted by the Concord Museum and facilitated by its Executive Director, Tom Putnam, on March 25th. The program, **Paul Revere: Man and Myth**, will take place from 7:00 pm to 8:00 pm. Attendance is \$5.00 for Concord Museum members and \$10 for non-Concord Museum members. If you are in the area, be sure to join us for the program! ❖

and Mary were installed as joint monarchs in England. This in turn spurred a 1689 rebellion in Boston that aimed to bring an end to James II’s reformulated Dominion of New England. The Dominion’s governor, Sir Edmund Andros, had angered the colonists by strictly enforcing the burdensome taxes of the Navigation Acts, imposing restrictions on town meetings,



*King James II of England drew the ire of his Anglican subjects for his authoritarian measures that many interpreted as harbingers of a return to Catholic rule. Following the birth of his son, i.e. a potentially Catholic male heir to the throne, plans were set in motion for his daughter Mary and her husband William to seize power in England. Image accessed via Wiki Commons.*

and promoting the Church of England.<sup>xxi</sup> A mob of angry Bostonians formed and arrested Dominion officials and members of the Church of England before restoring leaders of the former Massachusetts Bay Colony to power. Given Robert Howard’s political and social standing, his continued success after the Boston revolts and the Glorious Revolution’s conclusion indicate he supported William and Mary’s ascension and Andros’s downfall. With the re-establishment of the Province of Massachusetts Bay, Robert Howard’s profit margins increased and he continued to be a central figure in Boston’s shipping logs. With continued success, Howard’s family grew, and his name and household became more connected with the most notorious component of transatlantic trade in the 17th century: slavery. ❖

## Sources Consulted:

- i Bromley, George Washington and Walter Scott Bromley. “Atlas of the city of Boston, Boston.” Boston birth records list a contemporary “Robert Howard” as being born to Samuel and Isabel Howard on August 4, 1654. However, given the lack of detail in the record and Howard’s relatively common name it is not clear if this is the same Robert Howard that this paper examines.
- ii Alexander, Andrew. “So Who Was Robert Howard?” *The Revere House Gazette*. Summer 2003.
- iii Massachusetts Historical Society. “Second Church (Boston, Mass.) Records: Guide to the Collection.”
- iv Records of the Second Church of Boston, Volume VIII. Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society.
- v Johnson, Claudia Durst. *Daily Life in Colonial New England*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002, 19.
- vi Records of the Second Church of Boston, Volume VIII. Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society.
- vii Records of the Second Church of Boston, Volume III. Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society; Register of Publications and Marriages in Boston, 1646-1789. Book 1646, 131.
- viii Johnson, xv.
- ix Ibid, 13.
- x Konig, David Thomas. *Law and Society in Puritan Massachusetts: Essex County, 1629-1692*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1979, 4.
- xi Johnson, 59.
- xii Ibid.
- xiii Ibid.
- xiv Bailyn, Bernard and Lotte Bailyn. *Massachusetts Shipping 1697-1714: A Statistical Study*. “Table XXVII – Investors in Ten or More Vessels, 1697-1714”. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959, 130-131.
- xv Alexander, Summer 2003.
- xvi Johnson, 57.
- xvii Bailyn, 20.
- xviii Stratton, Eugene Aubrey. *Plymouth Colony: Its History and People 1620 - 1691*. Salt Lake City, UT: Ancestry Publishing, 1986. 146-147.
- xix Alexander, Summer 2003.
- xx Massachusetts Commonwealth Archives Collection (1629-1799), Volume 113, 250.
- xxi Hall, Michael, Michael Kammen, and Lawrence Leder. *The Glorious Revolution in America*. Richmond, VA: The University of North Carolina Press, 1964, 4-5.





# Spring Events

This spring we will celebrate the 245th anniversary of Paul Revere's Midnight Ride with an appearance by Paul Revere himself (played by local legend, David Connor) on the actual day – an event not to be missed! Throughout our April Vacation programming and during our Paul Revere's Boston events on Saturdays in May, other 18th c. Bostonians (played by talented local performers) will contribute their perspectives on the events of April 1775. Other events will feature art making and music, and our drop-in family activities on Earth Day invite you to explore a colonial herb garden. There is something for everyone at the Paul Revere House this spring, please bring a friend and visit!

Events are free with museum admission: adults \$5.00, seniors and college students \$4.50, children ages 5–17 \$1.00. Members and North End residents are admitted free at all times. Through April 14 the Revere House is open 9:30 am–4:15 pm. Beginning April 15, the site is open daily 9:30 am–5:15 pm. Closed on Mondays in January, February, and March.

AT THE  
PAUL REVERE HOUSE  
& OUR NEW EDUCATION  
AND VISITOR CENTER

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

## SPRING SCHOOL VACATION PROGRAMS

**A Visit with Paul Revere Saturday, April 18; 1:00–3:00 pm.** 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.

**Call Upon a Colonial: Rachel Revere at Home Tuesday, April 21; 11:00 am–3:00 pm.** Stop by the Revere House for a chat with Paul's wife, Rachel (portrayed by History At Play's Judith Kalaora) as she roams throughout the site. You may come across her in the house, the garden, or relaxing in the courtyard if the weather is fine. Learn more about the dangerous missions her husband undertakes, the many children she is raising, and life in Colonial Boston.

**Drop-In Family Activities: Colonial Kitchen Garden Wednesday, April 22; 1:30–3:00 pm.** Celebrate Earth Day by exploring the herbs and flowering plants grown in a typical Colonial Boston Kitchen garden through hands-on activities. Identify plants by sight, smell, and texture and learn their historic uses for cooking and medicine.



**Call Upon a Colonial: Rachel Revere at Home Thursday, April 23; 11:00 am–3:00 pm.** Stop by the Revere House for a chat with Paul's wife, Rachel (portrayed by History At Play's Judith Kalaora) as she roams throughout the site. You may come across her in the house, the garden, or relaxing in the courtyard if the weather is fine. Learn more about the dangerous missions her husband undertakes, the many children she is raising, and life in Colonial Boston.

**Meet Harriet, Daughter of Paul Revere Friday, April 24; 1:00, 1:45, 2:30 pm.** Diane Lent brings to life Harriet Revere, one of Paul Revere's 16 children. Join her in reminiscing about her father's dramatic life, the adventures of her many siblings, nieces, and nephews, and growing up in the historic North End.



**Patriot Fife and Drum Saturday, April 25; 1:00–3:00 pm.** 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.



## MAY PAUL REVERE'S BOSTON EVENTS

**John Adams: The Colossus of Independence Saturday, May 2; 1:00, 1:45, 2:30 pm.** Hear from John Adams himself as he discusses his earliest beginnings in Braintree through his days as delegate of the Continental Congress and foreign ambassador. Hear his opinions of his contemporaries and how he longs to be home with his "dearest friend," Abigail, and their children. Mr. Adams's singular wit is appealing to children and adults!

**18th Century Watercolor Artist Saturday, May 9; 1:00–3:00 pm.** Audrey Jones Childs will demonstrate 18th century watercolor painting using period appropriate watercolor paints and brushes. Come watch her paint and learn how the brushes and paints were made.

**Gilding Demonstration Saturday, May 16; 1:00–3:00 pm.** Watch professional gilder, Nancy Dick Atkinson, apply gossamer thin sheets of gold leaf to wooden ornaments just as craftsmen did in Paul Revere's era.

**Patriot Fife and Drum Saturday, May 23; 1:00–3:00 pm.** 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.

**A Loyalist Perspective on the Revolution Saturday, May 30; 1:00, 1:45, 2:30 pm.** Hear a first-hand account of the abuses loyalists suffered at the hands of emboldened "patriots." Michael Lepage takes on the role of Chief Justice Peter Oliver, brother of Andrew Oliver, a stamp collector.

