

Revere House Radio

Episode 18

Paul Revere's Apprenticeships

Welcome to Revere House Radio, I'm your host, Adrienne Turnbull-Reilly. A quick note about our status as of August 2020. The Revere House has reopened to the public, and we are welcoming visitors, according to state guidelines and best practices for the health of our visitors and staff. For the most accurate and up to date information, please visit our website at paulreverehouse.org, or just call us to ask. Alright! On with the show.

A major part of my role at the Paul Revere House involves working with students and teachers in our education department. In fact, one of the major reasons I began a career in museums is because I believe in the power of museum education. I love teaching with objects, artifacts, buildings and documents, and am so inspired by the amazing teachers we partner with each year. Needless to say, with the onset of COVID19 closures across the country our field trips have been shut down and many people involved in education have turned their thoughts toward how to engage students safely. As we draw closer to the start of the next school year, many communities are wrestling with how to proceed. While the in classroom, in person model of education has been the norm for generations, it hasn't always been this way. There are many models of education that have come and gone over the years, and today's episode is going to look at one in particular that Paul Revere and many of his peers experienced - the apprenticeship model.

As I alluded to in my episode about Rachel Revere and the work women were expected to know how to do, most girls did their learning in the home. Though not formalized, one could think of the education girls received as a form of apprenticeship - through practice and guidance from their elders, they learned how to run a household, which is what most women at the time could look forward to as their adult occupation. While there is evidence of women apprentices, by and large apprenticeships were meant for young men, with the intention that they would lead to productive, financially stable lives.

As a 13 year old, this is probably the conversation young Paul had with his father, Apollos Rivoire. Apollos trained under silversmith John Coney when he arrived in Boston as a French immigrant in the early 1700s. As the oldest male child of what would be 11 siblings, Paul could confidently expect to take over the family business upon his father's retirement and assuming he had completed his vocational training. But what was Paul up to before starting his apprenticeship? Revere began his education at the North Writing School, founded in 1713. Interestingly, this school later became the Eliot K-12 school, which is a part of the Boston Public School System today and one the education staff at the Revere House still work with! When the time came, Paul left this formal education in the classroom and transitioned into his apprenticeship. In the 1740s when Paul was beginning his craft training, apprenticeships

typically lasted for seven years, during which time the master craftsman would house, feed, train, and discipline his apprentice. Part of the training for an apprentice was to learn the “art and mystery” of a trade. In this case, the “art” is the technical skill, and the “mystery” makes up the trade secrets of the craft he was studying.

Unfortunately for Paul, his father died too young and he lost not only a loved one but also his mentor. At 19 years of age, Paul was not technically old enough to inherit the family business nor was his training fully complete to the satisfaction of the trade guilds. This would not happen until he turned 21. However, the Revere silver company stayed alive during those two years, we think under the legal ownership of Paul’s mother Deborah, with the help of skilled journeymen, because when he did reach 21 years of age he formally took ownership of the business and started running the shop as his own. Typically, at the end of the seven year training period, an apprentice would receive some type of parting gift, such as a set of tools or new clothing. Though the circumstances were tragic, Revere benefited more than other young craftsmen in that he inherited his father’s customer base, workshop, tools, and a highly respected professional lineage.

Paul would go on to be a well known silversmith whose pieces are still coveted today. And during the course of his career, he continued this model of education by taking on apprentices of his own. It is highly likely that he housed some of these students in his North square home. He also trained up his oldest son, Paul Jr., to take over the family business which allowed him to pursue other endeavours later in his career. Though Revere would enter into more financially lucrative work during the course of his professional life, it is his silversmithing, learned at a young age, apprenticing under his father, that is still his professional legacy today.

And this tradition of apprenticeship still exists today, in its own way. Yes, apprentices no longer live with their teachers, or rely on them for food and clothing. Instead they earn a wage while they’re learning, and this works out for a lot of people. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2016 there were as many as 500,000 active apprentices across the country learning trades and earning a living. This important model of vocational training has lasted and evolved through the years, and most likely will continue for its practical advantages. As formal education experiences extreme changes in 2020 and into the future, perhaps we’ll see new forms of alternative education develop or old forms resurface.

One final thought. For those of you who are professional teachers, and those for whom this role was a surprise to you in early 2020, a heartfelt “thank you” and “good job.” The work that you do is profoundly important, and I hope listening to this has been an encouraging reminder that learning can take place anywhere - the classroom, the workshop, the home, the museum, and even on the internet. And if you aren’t involved directly with educating students, I encourage you to send a note of support to those in your life who are. They certainly deserve it.

Finally, we appreciate your listenership and support during this time. You can follow along with all of our new content via our website, Twitter and Facebook. You can also subscribe to this podcast on Apple Podcasts and Spotify. If you like the educational work that we do, you can donate to support it via our website at paulreverehouse.org/donate. Right now all donations

coming in will be matched by an anonymous donor, so it's a great time to show your support!
And once again, thank you for listening to this episode of Revere House Radio.