

Revere House Radio

Episode 5

Revisit the Ride: Were There Other Riders?

Welcome in to another episode of Revere House Radio: Midnight Ride edition. I am your host Robert Shimp. While yesterday officially marked the 245th anniversary of Paul Revere's midnight ride to Lexington, given the content of yesterday's episode, it is clear that the entirety of Revere's activities that night stretched well into the early morning hours of April 19. In that sense, it is really a 2-day anniversary for the ride, and of course today is the day we remember the battles of Lexington and Concord that began just as Revere's story for the day bowed out.

In yesterday's episode, I discussed two other riders that evening with Revere, William Dawes coming from Boston, just like Paul, and Dr. Samuel Prescott, who joined the two Sons of Liberty as they attempted to extend the alarm to Concord. Dawes had taken the longer land route out of Boston- proceeding via Boston neck out to Lexington and arrived about a half hour after Revere. With their inclusions, it is clear that Revere was not the only rider that night, so the image of a lone rider crying out in the countryside is obviously overstated. It does beg the question of how many riders were there, and since there were other riders- how did Paul Revere become so famous?

First, by April 1775, the Sons of Liberty had a robust communication network already in place. The Committee of Correspondence had been able to efficiently and effectively move messages through their networks from 1772, and the whole concept of Minutemen turning out was based on the idea of communication spreading like wildfire through communities. Long before cell phones or Zoom calls, this of course meant physical messaging through trusted riders. The whole reason Revere had conceived of and realized the necessity for the lantern signals from Old North Church was that such a mission could NOT be entrusted to one man- many individuals needed to be involved, and fail safes needed to be built in.

There are at least several dozen other known riders that evening through all of New England, and likely many more whose names have been lost to history. Ebenezer Dorr brought the alarm to Roxbury, just south of Boston. Richard Devens informed Committee of Safety members then meeting in Menotomy (present-day Arlington), which then sent out more riders. Solomon Brown of Lexington, brought news into the town of soldiers being on the march as well.

There are stories of female riders as well, like Sybil Ludington in Connecticut. With a lot of these stories, though, many were made post-facto and are therefore hard to confirm with full accuracy, though it is possible if not likely there were women in the mix to spread the news.

With all of the riders going about that evening, then, how did Revere become so famous? First, it is important to remember that Paul Revere made three transcriptions of his ride- two as depositions for the Provincial Congress very soon after his ride, and a third for Jeremy Belknap, one of the founders of the Massachusetts Historical Society as that organization got off the ground in 1798. If you are interested in doing a little reading from the 18th century, I would highly encourage you to check out the ride in Revere's own words, and you can find a link through to Revere's report for Belknap on our website.

The clear answer for Revere's fame, however, is not with his own transcriptions, which certainly do help to round out the story, but rather with Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's 1860 poem. In 1860, Longfellow did what so many of you have done before and we hope to see many of you doing in the not too distant future- took a walking tour through Boston's North End. As the nation was about to tear itself apart in the Civil War, Longfellow reflected on the history around him in the neighborhood, and was inspired to begin what would become a nationally renowned poem with the lines "Listen My children and you shall hear, of the midnight ride of Paul Revere." While Longfellow has a few mistakes on the historical record here and there, it is of course a gripping poem that sent Revere into American lore from that day forward. So thanks to Longfellow, we all know Revere's name, but the poem in a sense has also encouraged work on the other riders who in many cases, may have been totally forgotten were it not for Longfellow's poem in the first place.

That will do it for today's episode- we will be back tomorrow on Patriot's Day in Boston to wrap up this 5-episode special edition of Revere House Radio. Be sure to stay in touch with us on social media- we greatly appreciate your responses to this program and our new content- be sure to check out the Revere Express blog as new posts come out on Mondays and Fridays, you can also find those on our website- on the home page there. Until tomorrow, stay safe, and thanks for listening.