

Revere House Radio

Episode 34

Where was Paul Revere during the Siege of Boston?

Hi everybody, welcome to Revere House Radio. I'm your host, Adrienne Turnbull-Reilly. It's summertime here in Boston and I often find myself thinking about how it felt here when the sun was hot, the flies were out, and the petticoats weren't getting any lighter. Especially after my episode about Paul Revere Jr. and what he was up to during the Siege of Boston, I kept thinking about the rest of the family and how they spent the siege. Where were they and what were they doing? Most of the information we have on the family is through Paul Revere and his activities. Unfortunately we have to make educated guesses about Rachel and the kids, though I think it's safe to assume their lives were filled with a lot of the same activities they did in Boston. Most of my research for this episode relied on Jane Triber's account, *A True Republican*, which I recommend reading for anyone who wants an excellent biography of Paul Revere. However, there are a lot of great resources online if you want to learn more about the siege in general. I'll link to some in the show notes. This episode also has a lot of cross connections with previous episodes we've done, which I'll mention when relevant. Links to all those episodes will be included in the show notes as well. Ok, on with the show!

Our story begins long before the siege and midnight ride, as a young Revere established himself as a craftsman, respectable community member, and active Freemason. His involvement with the business community and Masonic lodge exposed him to many people in and around Boston, many of whom were of the upper classes. These men were educated, some very wealthy, and many had high ambitions for both what the colonies could become and what they could achieve as individuals. Revere was no different, he kept a close eye on what various taxes and regulations would mean for his business operations, and he also very much wanted to be seen as a gentleman and to be accepted both socially and professionally by those he admired. These motivations combined with his Masonic activity meant that he fostered relationships with many of the local leaders here in the Boston area, including the person one could argue set the stage for Revere's later fame - Dr. Joseph Warren.

Before the now famous ride, Revere was doing many courier rides for the Committee of Safety, traveling around New England and even as far as Philadelphia delivering messages and letters to relevant parties. His reputation as a reliable and quick rider made him an excellent candidate for a very important, if shorter, ride that would take place in April 1775. Joseph Warren sent a messenger

to North Square on the night of April 18th to kick off what would become Revere's most lasting achievement. Revere, along with fellow rider William Dawes, had planned the routes they would take when the big moment arrived, Paul going north through Charlestown, Menotomy, and on toward Lexington. Dawes would go south through Roxbury but meet up with Revere in Lexington. Once there, the men rendez-voused with Samuel Adams and John Hancock at what is now known as the Hancock-Clarke House. You know the end of the story - Revere tried to continue to Concord but his ride was cut short by British patrolmen, eventually landing Revere back in Lexington, just before the British troops arrived to engage in the Battle of Lexington and Concord.

Revere did not fight in this battle, though no doubt he could have taken up arms. Instead, he continued his duties as courier by helping secret away a trunk of important documents. He then disappears from the historical record for a few days, and resurfaces with a letter to his wife Rachel, written in Charlestown, Massachusetts. In the few pieces of correspondence between them during these first tense weeks of the war, we learn that Paul's plan is to eventually land in Watertown MA, and he hopes his wife can secure a pass to leave Boston and meet him there. It seems like they have some bumps along the way acquiring this precious pass, but eventually, Rachel gets permission from the local government led by General Gage to leave town. We assume that she and the children leave Boston with only the items they themselves can carry, including some fresh clothing for Paul that he requested. If you want to stay in Boston and hear what we think their 15 year old son Paul Jr. was doing during this time, go back and listen to Season 1 episode 20, published October 3rd, 2020. And while you're there, listen to episode 19 to learn more about Paul Revere's relationship with Joseph Warren.

While we know that Rachel and the kids joined Revere in Watertown eventually, we're not exactly sure what happens with his Mother and two sisters, who he mentions in one letter. He writes to Rachel, "Tell Betty, My Mother, M^{rs} Metcalf if they think to stay, as we talked at first, tell them I will supply them with all the Cash & other things In my power, but if they think to come away, I will do all in my power to provide for them." Revere himself may not have known what Rachel's plans were exactly since she tried to send a letter and money to Paul via Dr. Church, a fellow Son of Liberty, when he visited Boston on April 22nd. Turns out, Dr. Church was a double agent and took the letter to General Gage instead of Revere, and the money disappeared.

Regardless, the family did reunite in Watertown just outside of Boston, and settled, however temporarily, in the Stephen Cooke house. Also residing in this house were Henry Knox and his wife Lucy Flucker. One imagines the house being very full, with multiple families crowding in for what was, at the time, an indefinite period. On the other hand, perhaps it was comforting to be around fellow colonists who had been driven from their homes, and with more hands perhaps the burdens of daily life were slightly lessened. Knox and Revere were both active in the Sons of Liberty and Knox would go on to become famous for his retrieval of dozens of cannon from Fort Ticonderoga in New York which helped drive the British out of Boston in March, 1776, among other things. He also would go on to become the first Secretary of War later. Knox deserves his own entire episode, so I'll leave his story there.

Another major asset to living in Watertown at this time was that some of the Provincial Congress had set up shop in the Edmund Fowle House. This meant that both Revere and Knox were living in very close proximity to some of those making decisions during the Siege. With his past efforts and close proximity to those in charge, Revere hoped to get a coveted commission in Washington's Continental Army. If merit alone were enough, he probably would have. Unfortunately for Revere and despite the rhetoric of many, honorable actions were not enough to move through the ranks. Adams, Hancock, Washington and others were interested in promoting men of their own class to the higher ranks of the military, so Revere was consistently overlooked for these prominent positions.

Surely disappointed, that didn't keep him from contributing to the cause in other ways. Throughout the summer of 1775 Revere continued his role as engraver by producing currency for Massachusetts. And so it went into the fall of that year. In November of 1775 he was sent to Philadelphia to investigate how to build a gunpowder manufactory. Though his trip was only mildly successful - in the sense that Oswell Eve, the man Revere was sent to visit, was very withholding about the building plans - Revere and others managed to piece together a plan for a mill, and gunpowder production began in Stoughton, MA, in May of 1776.

The six months between when he was sent to Philadelphia and when gunpowder production started were quite eventful though, and should not be overlooked. In March, 1776, the British were finally persuaded that they should leave Boston, in no small part thanks to Revere's housemate, Henry Knox. Knox and his crew had traveled hundreds of miles from Lake George in New York back to Boston, in some of the coldest and harshest months of the year. When they arrived, the cannons were installed south of Boston in Dorchester, fortifying that outpost and

threatening to bombard the city. On March 17th, General Howe and approximately 7,000 soldiers left the town forever, making Boston once again hospitable to families like the Reveres. Returning must have been bittersweet. I imagine the immense joy the Reveres must have felt at reuniting with their son Paul, and seeing their North Sq home intact. But the eleven months of the siege had been bitter and hard for the residents there, lacking regular and adequate supplies of food and firewood left many people battered and fatigued.

The adjustment back to Boston life did not prevent Revere from continuing to pursue military positions. On April 10th, 1776, almost one year after his now famous ride, he was appointed major of artillery and stationed at Castle Island in the Boston harbor. After dutiful service there, he was promoted to lieutenant colonel in November of 1776. He held this title for the rest of his military career, and used it for the rest of his life. His military career all but ended in 1779, after a failed attempt to take a fort from the British in Penobscot Bay, then part of Massachusetts, now part of Maine. For more on that expedition and the fallout for Revere, listen to Robert's episode titled "Paul Revere and Penobscot" from season one.

In the end, Revere's military career was not what he wanted it to be, and it wasn't for lack of trying. He did, however, contribute other important skills to the revolutionary cause during the siege. Meanwhile, Rachel and the kids made do with their lives in Watertown regardless of the great unknowns about their future, if their house in Boston still stood, and if they would ever return to Boston. The house did survive, and you can still visit it today. Come visit if you are able anytime from 10 am to 5 pm, seven days a week. The other exciting piece of news is that we now have transcripts of our podcast episodes! Go to paulreverehouse.org/extras to access almost every episode in writing. We'll continue to add transcripts as fast as we can get them written up. Follow us on Facebook and Twitter for all the updates on hours, operations, and events. This has been Revere House Radio, and as always, thanks for listening.