

Revere House Radio
Episode 31
Revere Family Images and Depictions

Welcome in to another episode of Revere House Radio, I am your host Robert Shimp. April is always a busy month for us at the Paul Revere House, as annual commemorations of 1775 and Paul Revere's Midnight Ride on April 18th of that year offer opportunities to reflect and investigate the origins of the American Revolution and how its participants have been remembered over the subsequent centuries. We have several lectures and other virtual content coming up, but I do want to shout out a program that connects to today's theme- we are very excited to be joining with the Cyrus Dallin Museum this upcoming Wednesday night, April 7 for a virtual event. The program, *A 57-Year Ride: Cyrus Dallin's Quest to Raise the Iconic Paul Revere Monument*, will run at 6:30 PM, and anyone can register for the event on our website. The program is free, but donations are very welcome! More to come Cyrus Dallin and his Paul Revere Statue in just a bit...

While the Revere House stands today as the most lasting physical connection to the Revere family, visitors often look for other concrete connections to Paul and Rachel. Beyond their house or possessions, visitors want to know if we have connections to them through portraits or paintings. What did they actually look like, and do we have depictions of them from different points in their lives?

In fact, there are 3 contemporary images of Paul to draw on to answer this question, and two of Rachel. Unfortunately, no depictions of Sarah Revere have survived to our time. Collectively, these known images give us a good chronological spread to work with, as they capture Paul and Rachel both in their middle age as well as their later years in life.

Beyond these images, however, some much later depictions of Paul Revere have tended to dominate the popular consciousness of the man and especially his actions during his Midnight Ride. So let's dive into these depictions, and all images will be linked in our show notes so you can draw the faces back to the names!

The first known depiction of Paul Revere is certainly the most famous painting of him conducted in his lifetime. It was done by John Singleton Copley in 1768, when Revere was around 33 years old. It is now is the first image to greet visitors in the Art of the Americas wing at Boston's museum of fine arts. Copley's Revere is one of a contemplative artisan, and in that sense, it is a very rare portrait for the period- one done of a middle-class, working individual. In it, Revere is no mere silversmith, however, as he is carefully considering what to engrave on his pot, and his working clothes are in relatively pristine condition. There has been much written on the origins of the painting, but the fact is that we just do not know for certain how it came to be. Contextual evidence suggests that Revere and Copley may have exchanged goods- Revere making or providing worked silver to Copley, and Copley making the portrait of Revere. We will likely never know with full certainty, but regardless, the famous portrait gives us an intimate look at Revere just as the American Revolution was about to begin.

The first depiction of Rachel Revere that we have is a miniature done by Joseph Dunkerly some time around 1785 when Rachel was about 39 years old. It is possible the portrait was also a quid pro quo of sorts, as Dunkerly was a renter in the Revere's home in North Square in the 1780s. It is possible that he made Rachel's miniature in exchange for a break on lodging fees, but we do not know that for certain. Rachel appears to have a slightly bemused look on her face, and we can thank Pauline Revere Thayer for the miniature's existence and condition. It was donated to the collections at the MFA in 1935, where it still exists today.

In 1800, Charles Balthazar Julien Févret de Saint-Mémin created a profile of Paul Revere that stands in stark contrast to the Copley portrait. The portrait shows Revere's left side, and depicts some material improvements for the man in the 32 years since the Copley portrait was completed. Revere looks to have put on a few pounds, and is clearly conveying that, with the opening of his copper rolling mill the same year, he has finally arrived at a Gentleman's status versus being a middling artisan, something that he strove for through his entire life.

The final contemporary depictions of both Paul and Rachel Revere were produced by Gilbert Stuart in 1813. They were commissioned by their son Joseph Warren Revere, and capture both at the end of their lives. While Paul would live for another 5 years, Rachel would sadly pass away the same year of the sitting. The portraits are also a part of the MFA's collections, and convey a final transition for the couple from middle class colonists to upper middle class Americans in the still nascent United States of America through their attire and general dispositions.

While those are the few examples of contemporary depictions of Paul and Rachel, some of the most iconic images of Paul Revere, or at least ones that really work to promote and continue the individual heroism depicted by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, come from the 20th century.

One of the first major works was done by N.C. Wyeth in 1922, and shows Revere at full tilt on a horse, yelling out to sleepy household being arisen in the idle of the night. This is one of the first depictions of Revere as a rider, a theme that would continue over the century and into our present time. It shows a harrowing moment at the start of the Revolution, and is full of energy and force.

Grant Wood's 1931 painting is an aerial scene that runs somewhat counter to Wyeth's painting nearly a decade earlier. Wood depicts Revere rushing through a small, church dominated town to raise his alarm. Wood's painting of Revere came one year after he produced his iconic and instantly recognizable American Gothic. His 1931 Midnight Ride painting shows an idyllic scene, with the small Revere working through a serpentine road amidst rolling hills. The image clearly conveys the lone rider narrative, and one of an impending, but not immediate, crisis shaking up a sleepy and safe hamlet.

In 1959, the Paul Revere Insurance company commissioned a series of paintings to be done by A Lassell Ripley. These images continue a theme of the ride, depicting Revere as the hero of the night, and even do so through including more accurate events, like his capture by British soldiers after he had completed his ride to Lexington. Even still, there are points like Revere standing up in the row boat across the Charles that remain headscratching decisions- so much for Revere staying undercover!

Perhaps the most lasting depiction of Revere, and certainly the most permanent, is the sculpture done by Cyrus Dallin that still stands in the Paul Revere Mall in Boston's North End, just a stone's throw from the Paul Revere House. The statue is one of the most featured in modern depictions of Boston, as it adorns guide books, websites, and is typically a standard B-roll shot for most nationally televised sporting contests. The saga for its creation spanned form 57 years and covered most of Dallin's lengthy career. As just another plug, if you are interested in learning more about what is truly a fascinating process for the Revere Statue to come to stand in the North End, tune in to our program this coming Wednesday night- April 7. I don't want to spoil too much of the story here- just mostly to call it out, but the entire tale has so many twists and turns, it is truly an example of truth being stranger than fiction.

I will just add that this is of course just a small sampling of Revere depictions, both in their time, and in our more modern world. Edith, our curator, has a treasure trove of political ads, cartoons, and other Revere imagery from the 20th and 21- century- you might have something that comes to mind along this front! Revere as a rider is one of the more instantly recognizable parts of American lore, so it is no surprise that his depiction has been used and appropriated for various purposes over the last century in particular. All of this is to say this episode is not meant to be a comprehensive list by any means, but an abridged version highlighting some of the ways that Revere imagery has shifted and become cemented over the years.

That will do it for this week's episode- please stay in touch via email and social media. If you have any questions you want answered on Paul Revere, the Revere House, the North end, any aspect of Boston history- let us know! Adrienne and I will be doing a mailbag episode coming up to run as part of our Patriot's day programming, so please get your questions in! You can either send them to our social media accounts, or to the email address preverehouse@gmail.com. Until next time, stay safe, and thanks for listening.