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The Revere Family's Civil War Legacy

By Nina Zannieri

We marched yesterday to near Gettysburg: and this morning moved to rear of the town. There seems a prospect of an engagement. In case one should occur, we all hope it may be a general one, as, from the position of the armies, it seems it must prove decisive. For myself, I feel that God will order what is best for us all, May he bless you and our dear children and all at home! I received Josie's letter yesterday, with our dear little heart's photograph. He looks quite like a man, and old enough to take care of his mamma. Tell him I say so, and shall depend on his doing so.

— Paul Joseph Revere to Lucretia Watson
Lunt Revere, Thursday, July 2, 1863*

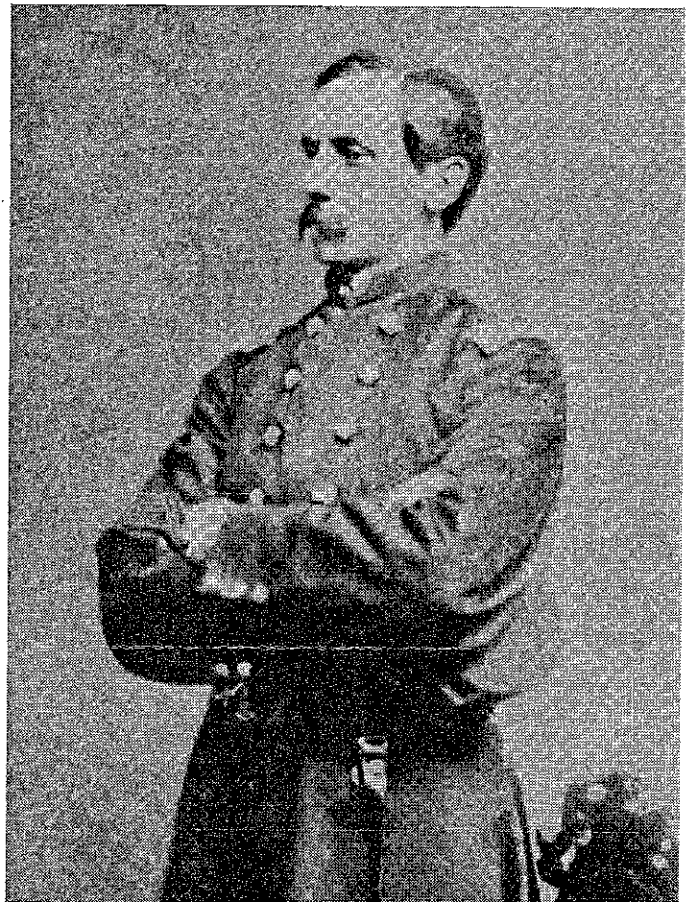
No doubt, Paul Joseph Revere wasn't the only member of the 20th Massachusetts who took advantage of a few precious moments of calm early that July morning to dash off a quick note home. In the letter he mentions fondly his two small children, Frank, three and-a-half, and sixteen-month-old Pauline, and his sister Josie (Mary Josephine). That afternoon, during the second day of fighting at Gettysburg, Revere was mortally wounded. He succumbed to his injuries two days later on July 4th, moments after hearing the news that the Union forces had prevailed. Paul Joseph Revere died just two months shy of his thirty-first birthday leaving his wife and children, his elderly parents, four sisters, and his lone surviving brother, John.

Paul Joseph Revere's death at Gettysburg was the second battlefield tragedy endured by Joseph Warren Revere and his wife Mary Robbins Revere. Paul Joseph's brother, Edward H. R. Revere, had been killed ten months earlier at the Battle of Antietam. Although the name Revere is generally associated only with the heroism of the American Revolution, the Revere family's Civil War contribution and sacrifice was perhaps

* Dated addition to a letter begun June 30, 1863 as quoted in *A Memorial of Paul Joseph and Edward H. R. Revere* (1874, 1913). All of the documents quoted in this work are now in the Revere Family Papers at the Massachusetts Historical Society, but were in the possession of the Revere family at the time the volume was prepared. Quotations in the *Memorial* sometimes differ slightly from the original documents.

much greater. Even the family business, the Revere Copper Company, felt the impact of the war. While the company benefited financially from the production of large numbers of canon for the Union army, some have speculated that the loss of two Revere males from a single generation, hastened the family's eventual loss of control of the company. Though it is impossible to know what would have happened had both Paul Joseph and Edward survived the Civil War, it has been suggested that Paul Joseph Revere would have joined his brother John in running the family copper business in Canton.

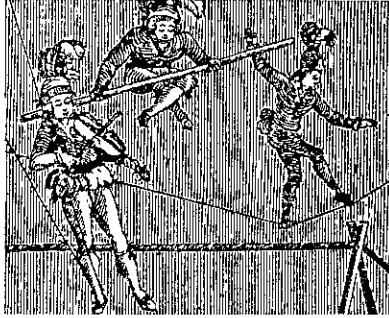
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Paul Joseph Revere (1832-1863), son of Joseph Warren Revere and grandson of Paul Revere. Taken from *A Memorial of Paul Joseph Revere and Edward H. R. Revere* (1913). Photo by Doug Vogel.

From the Director . . .

Workshops and conferences for museum professionals are focusing more and more on the benefits of collaboration in what has become a competitive industry. We compete for funding, members, audience share and press



Collaboration — a balancing act!

All around New England museums are successfully working together on exciting new programs and promotions.

coverage. It is this increased competition, however, that increases the need to form strategic alliances. The most successful collaborations allow institutions to share their strengths while protecting their individual interests.

Along the Freedom Trail, the sites are working closely with the Boston National Historical Park on a study of the Freedom Trail which we hope will provide blueprints for the long-term growth and preservation of Boston's most historic attraction. The trick is developing a structured way to work together which respects the individual mission and agenda of each participant. A great many site staff members, historians, owners of businesses located along the Trail and public officials have given considerable time to thinking about the future of the Freedom Trail.

I look forward to working with others to use the results of this study to make substantive improvements to the Trail which will ensure that in the twenty-first century visitors to the city will continue to follow the red line and enjoy discovering the fascinating history of Boston. With spring and the tourist season just around the corner, there is no better time than now to begin to move forward!

Nina Zannieri

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As one might expect with grandsons of Paul Revere, Paul Joseph and his brother Edward felt strongly the obligation to enlist and fight for the Northern cause in the Civil War. They served together in the 20th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry — one of the so-called Harvard Regiments. When Paul Joseph was preparing to leave his family in July 1861, his mother recorded these thoughts in her journal:

I made all the objections a mother has the right to express. I reminded him of his father's age, our habitual dependence on him, most of all his wife and child.

Her son's response was:

I have weighed it all; and there is something higher still. The institutions of the country, indeed free institutions throughout the world, hang on this moment. The more a man sacrifices, the more power and right he has to influence other men. I should be ashamed of myself if I were to sit down in happy indulgence, and leave such a great matter as this to take its course. I can carry other men with me; and with them must struggle for the freedom and the principles that have built up this nation. I will never go without your consent, but shall be humbled if I stay at home.

Paul Joseph entered the war with the rank of major and his brother, Edward, a doctor, was a first lieutenant and assistant surgeon. During an October 1861 engagement at Ball's Bluff, Paul Joseph received a minor wound, but more significantly both brothers were taken prisoner along with several other members of the 20th Massachusetts. They were initially held at Libby Prison, a Confederate facility for Union officers in Richmond, Virginia. While there, they were often visited by Elizabeth Van Liew, a wealthy local woman who was both a Union sympathizer and spy. She posted letters from the prisoners and brought them provisions and letters

from their families. In November, Paul Joseph was one of seven officers chosen by lot to be moved to Henrico County

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Edward H. R. Revere (1827-1862), grandson of Paul Revere and older brother of Paul Joseph Revere. From A Memorial of Paul Joseph Revere and Edward H. R. Revere (1913).

Photo by Doug Vogel.

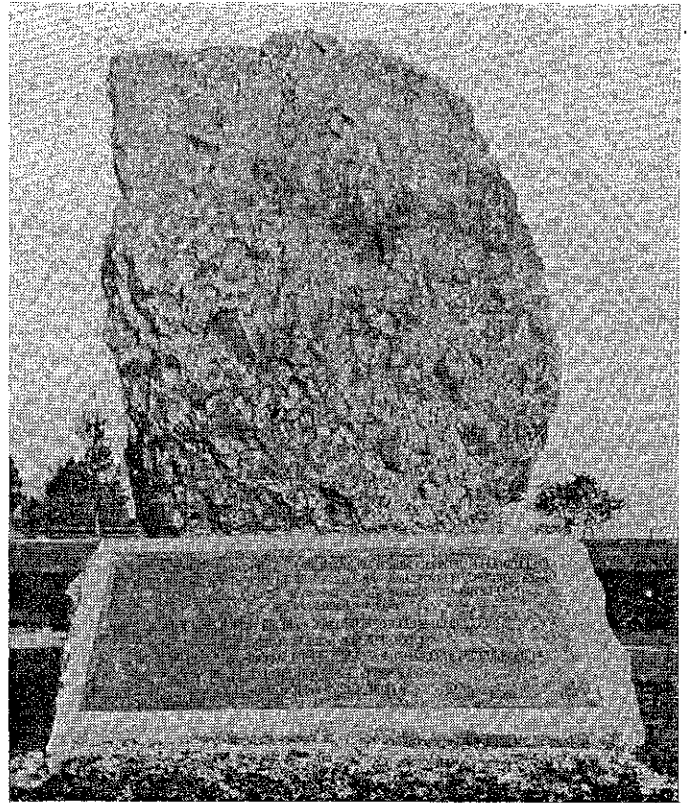
Civil War, *continued from page 2*

jail. Here he was held as a hostage to be exchanged for Confederate officers or executed in retaliation for perceived Union war crimes. The conditions endured by Union prisoners were deplorable — cramped cells with little light, no opportunity to wash or obtain fresh clothing, nightly visits from all manner of vermin, and “a dreadful state of air.” While concerned with his own plight, Paul Joseph’s thoughts were also on his wife Lucretia, pregnant with their second child. In a November 27 letter from prison, Paul Joseph admonished his wife to “remember how important it is for you to be careful of yourself and to be cheerful.” It was probably concern for his wife that kept him from revealing the fact that he had been wounded prior to his capture. In January, three months after the fact, he shared the details with her, fearing that she had somehow been notified by military officials: “a ball grazed my leg it is long since well. I don’t think I ever mentioned that in the battle I rec’vd a slight scratch it amounted to nothing.” While Paul Joseph languished in Henrico County troubled by his situation and his wife’s condition, Edward, still at Libby Prison, was afforded slightly more freedom because his services as a doctor were in great demand by both his fellow prisoners and his Confederate captors.

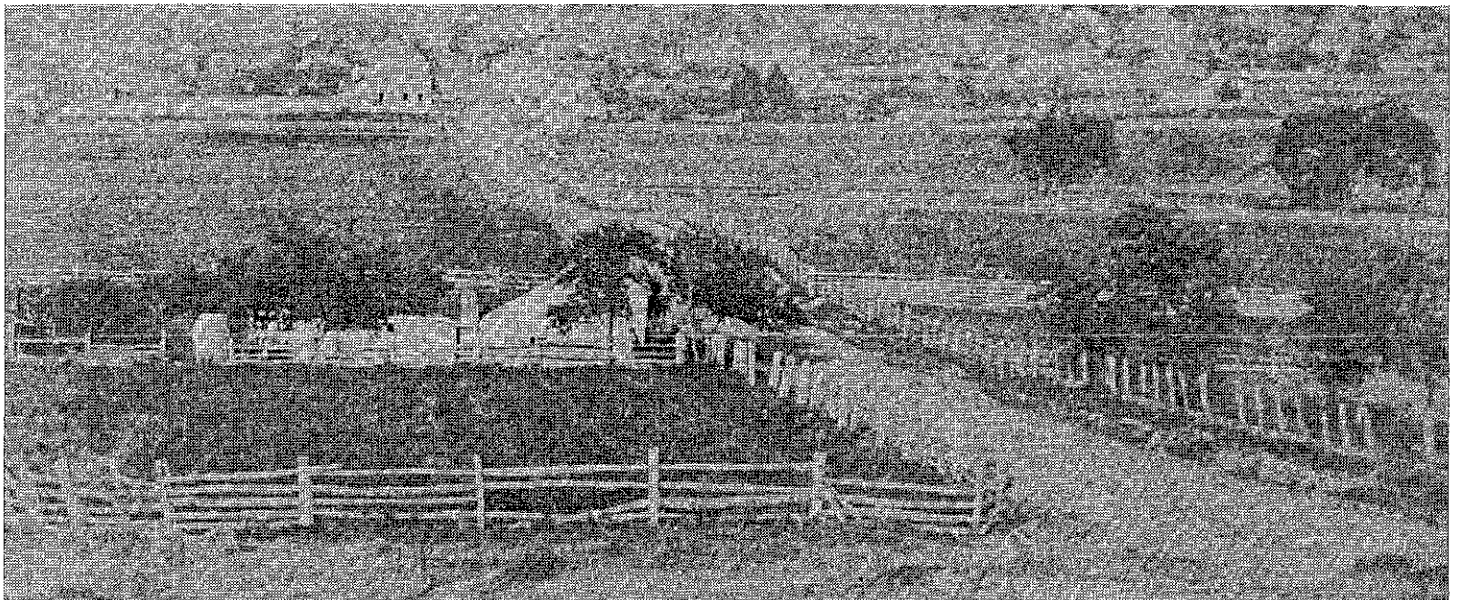
By early February 1862, Paul Joseph and Edward had both been paroled and were finally on their way back to Union territory and eventually home. A letter from their father overtook Paul Joseph as he awaited his transfer at Fort Monroe, a Union stronghold in Virginia overlooking Hampton Roads. It carried the following happy news: “You will be grateful to hear you have a daughter [Pauline] born last night. Lucretia is as comfortable as possible. You can well believe we are all delighted with the relief and pleasure this will afford you.” Paul Joseph arrived in Boston ten days latter. Unfortunately, the course of the war and the needs of the 20th Regiment dictated that Paul Joseph and Edward would have only a few short months to to enjoy their freedom and their

families. Again, their mother recorded a poignant family moment in her journal. On April 30, 1862, the day before the two brothers were to return to their unit, the family celebrated

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This monument of Roxbury puddingstone, raised to the 20th Massachusetts on the battlefield at Gettysburg reads, “This tablet is placed by their comrades in honor of Colonel Paul Joseph Revere, First Lieutenant Henry Ropes, Second Lieutenant Sumner Paine and 41 enlisted men who were killed or mortally wounded.” It stands on the spot the regiment occupied in the line of battle as they repelled “the charge of Longstreet’s corps.” From A Memorial of Paul Joseph Revere and Edward H. R. Revere (1913). Photo by Doug Vogel.



Paul Joseph Revere was mortally wounded in the Battle of Gettysburg. During three days of fighting both sides suffered a total of more than fifty-one thousand casualties. This 1863 view of the south part of town

was taken from Seminary Ridge, with the Hagerstown Road in the foreground. Courtesy, Civil War Library and Museum, Philadelphia, Penn. Photo by Blake A. Magner, C. W. Historicals.

Civil War, *continued from preceding page*

their father's 85th birthday. Joseph Warren Revere raised a toast to his two sons, confirming not only his mixed pride and sadness at their decision to return to the war, but also his staunch belief in the importance of the cause for which they fought.

September found both brothers once again preparing to face the rigors of battle. On the 17th, at Antietam, Paul Joseph was wounded in the arm. He immediately wrote home:

I am writing you a few lines in hopes of your receiving them in advance of any fearful rumors. There has been a general engagement of a severe nature today the result is not yet decided though I have every confidence in our being victorious. I have received a flesh wound through the arm just above the wrist it is but a slight affair no bone broken and not the slightest occasion for anxiety. I did not leave the field for several hours after being hit so you may suppose the wound was not very severe . . . I saw Edward in the forenoon for a moment, there are very many wounded and he must have his hands full.

When Paul Joseph arrived in Boston three days later to convalesce, he received the news that Edward had been killed. His mother notes that Paul Joseph's devastation was heightened by the fact that, before leaving the battlefield at Antietam he had asked about his brother's well-being and "had left believing, from the statement of one of the other surgeons that his brother Dr. Revere was safe on duty in the hospital." It was reported that Edward H. R. Revere had been shot in the head, "while dressing a wounded man's leg," on the battlefield near the front of the regiment, and had died instantly.* Paul Joseph's wound, which he insisted was superficial, was in fact fairly serious and proved reluctant to heal. This, added to his melancholy over the loss of his older brother and companion, slowed his recovery. His disability certificates cited reasons ranging from the initial wound, to lumbago and a bout of rheumatism. However, in April 1863, Revere responded to the needs of his regiment and returned to the battlefield. Promoted to the rank of colonel, he assumed command of his regiment.

Revere clearly described his struggle to reconcile his duty to his family and to the Union in a May 20, 1863, letter to his wife:

My dearest wife our relationship to each other was perhaps never so near certainly never nearer than during the last days of our being together and my feelings at leaving our dear children would I am afraid have proved to [sic] strong for my sense of duty had I remained much longer with them, dear little hearts.

Not long after he wrote this letter, Revere's regiment moved from Maryland to Pennsylvania to participate in one of the war's pivotal battles.

At Gettysburg, the 20th Massachusetts again experienced heavy losses. During this engagement, Paul Joseph's luck ran out as well. This time his wound was mortal. He

died two days later on July 4 at the 2nd Corps Hospital, Westminster, Maryland. His last words to his family, contained in a hastily sent telegram, read, "Am badly wounded at Westminster, come quickly." Given his normal reluctance to admit the severity of a wound, this must have been, for his family, a grave declaration. By the time the telegram reached Boston on July 5, it was already too late. Unaware of this fact, his brother, wife and sister left immediately and journeyed all the way to Maryland only to discover the sad news.

In honor of their distinguished service, both Paul Joseph and Edward were breveted posthumously to brigadier general and to lieutenant colonel, respectively. The Revere brothers are buried side by side in Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Their sacrifice, along with that of their comrades-in-arms, is commemorated in Harvard's Memorial Hall and Boston's King's Chapel where they worshipped.

Their mother recorded her sense of loss as well. Amongst the final entries in her journal, Mary Robins Revere wrote:

The lesson has been widely different from what we expected; and we know we have had no peculiar claim to so much blessing. Now the chief object is to be cheerfully resigned to the will of God; to treasure the recollection of their strong, dutiful lives . . . and remember the high motives that led them to leave so much they had to live for at home, to give themselves for what they thought the benefit of mankind. It was a willing sacrifice and I trust acceptable to God. They knew the risk they ran. They knew they carried with them our heart's blood. But the conflict must be met. It was their duty to aid in it. The claim on them was as strong as on any, and gallantly they answered it.

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This photograph appeared in the Boston Sunday Herald on April 19, 1908 and shows Pauline Revere Thayer, former Governor John P. Long, and a group of society ladies about to enter the newly restored Paul Revere House. Former Governor Long is at the far left, and Pauline Revere Thayer is to his right, in the center of the picture.

Courtesy, Boston Public Library.

* Letter from Lt. Henry Ropes to his father, William Ropes, September 20, 1862, quoted in Anthony J. Milano, "Letters from the Harvard Regiments," *Civil War — The Magazine of the Civil War Society*, Volume XIII (June 1988), p. 51.

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Much of what we know about the Revere contribution to the Civil War comes from *A Memorial of Paul Joseph Revere and Edward H. R. Revere* compiled by the family and published privately in 1874 and reprinted in 1913. It is based on letters to family members from Paul Joseph and Edward, their mother's journal, and letters from friends and fellow officers. These documents are now in the Revere Family Papers collection at the Massachusetts Historical Society. Pauline Revere Thayer supervised the 1913 reprinting of the volume. Though less than two years old when her father Paul Joseph died, she grew up understanding the importance of remembering the service and sacrifice of her father and uncle. At the beginning of the 1913 edition Pauline Revere Thayer added the following message:

To the Younger Generation

I have had this book reprinted and the pictures added, with the hope that it may keep alive in the minds and hearts of you all the knowledge of what the war meant, and what our fathers and your grandfathers and great uncles did for their country fifty years ago.

Interestingly, however, most of Pauline Revere Thayer's efforts to ensure public preservation of the family name and memory focused on her great-grandfather Paul Revere. Along with her cousin, John Phillips Reynolds, Jr., she was actively involved in the restoration of their great-grandfather's small home on North Square in Boston shortly after the turn of the century. She is the only woman listed on the May 4, 1907 Certificate of Incorporation for the Paul Revere Memorial Association. She was also named to the House Committee which planned all the festivities connected with the grand opening of the restored house held on April 18, 1908. In addition to her other commitments in Boston, Pauline Revere Thayer served on the Association's Executive Committee from 1908 to 1934. She spent years amassing a sizable, some would argue unequalled, collection of over one hundred pieces of Revere silver. Each piece was carefully checked against Revere's own silver shop ledgers. (Revere's business records are now in the collection of the Massachusetts Historical Society.) In 1931 she was instrumental in developing and installing a Paul Revere Room at Boston's Museum of Fine Arts. The reproduction eighteenth-century room served as the setting for "silver made by Paul Revere, and for portraits, prints and furniture once owned by the famous silversmith and patriot," according to the October 1931, *Bulletin of the Museum of Fine Arts*. Most of the items lent for this exhibition were eventually given as gifts to the museum, the majority in the form of a bequest which went to the museum in 1935 shortly after her death.

On reflection, Pauline Revere Thayer's focus on her Revolutionary War ancestor makes a great deal of sense given the sentiment of the times. In the wake of the Civil War, rapid industrialization and increasing immigration to America led to nostalgia for an earlier, simpler time. In addition, the Union victory in the Civil War was seen by some as a reaffirmation of the founding of the United States. All of these trends led to an increasing interest in the Colonial era in American history. By the turn of the century, the movement known as the Colonial Revival, incorporating study and evaluation of

specifically American decorative arts, architecture and painting from the colonial era in American history, was in full swing. Interest in things colonial and its attendant glorification and reaffirmation of the ideals of the American Revolution helped to justify the great sacrifices of the Civil War, the Revere family's included.

By the time that she was old enough to consider such things, Pauline Revere Thayer's great-grandfather had already been elevated to hero status. Possibly it was still too soon to evaluate the real impact of the Civil War on the Revere family and its business; whereas, Paul Revere's contribution to the founding of the United States was well known. Finally, Paul Joseph's mother implied in her words about her sons' deaths that their family hadn't been singled out for tragedy. Many families had lost sons and all were heroes in their own way. So, in what is perhaps the final irony, Pauline Revere Thayer's efforts to help preserve the legacy of her great-grandfather served to preserve as well the letters of her father and uncle. By advancing the memory of one, she helped to preserve the contributions of others.

Sources: Unless otherwise indicated all quotations in this article are from the Revere Family Papers, Mass. Historical Society, Boston.

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