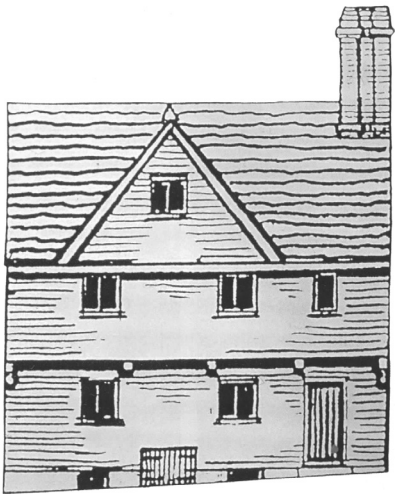
WELCOME TO THE PAUL REVERE HOUSE

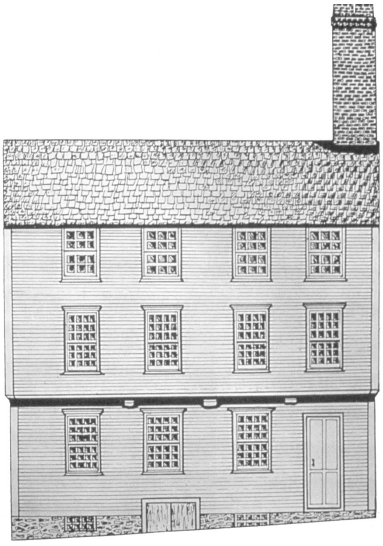
Built about 1680, the Paul Revere House is the only remaining example of 17th-century architecture in downtown Boston. At the time he moved here, Revere was a 35-year-old silversmith with a wife and growing family, and an established shop on Boston's waterfront. Paul Revere purchased the house in 1770 and sold it in 1800.



The Paul Revere House as built c. 1680

Please interact with staff members stationed throughout the site! Our staff, and text panels like this one, will lead you through four rooms in the house.

Restored in 1907–08 by architect Joseph Chandler, the Paul Revere House opened to the public as a museum on April 18, 1908. During the restoration, workers removed most later additions, returning the house's exterior to approximately its original appearance. One room, the Hall, is furnished to reflect the era of the first owner, merchant Robert Howard. The other three rooms – this Kitchen, the Best Chamber, and the Back Bedchamber – reflect the Revere occupancy of the late 18th century.



The Paul Revere House as it looked when Paul lived here c. 1790

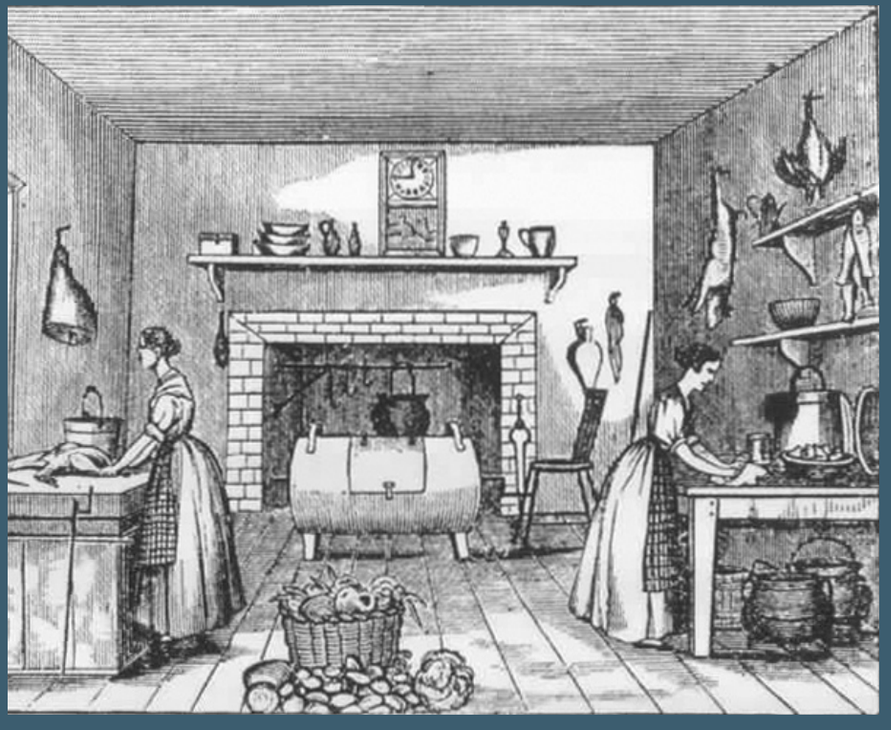
Funding for these labels has been provided by a grant from the Massachusetts Society of Colonial Wars and General Society of Colonial Wars.

THE KITCHEN

This is the kitchen used by the Revere family in the late 18th century. It is not, however, the oldest kitchen in the house. When this house was built in 1680, the kitchen was in the cellar.

Preparing meals in an 18th-century kitchen was a much different process than preparing meals today. The primary fuel was wood, and each house kept a large wood pile nearby. Cooking was done over an open fire, or wood coals, using heavy cast-iron pots and utensils such as the ones you see here. Baking, done in the brick oven located to the left of the main fireplace, involved many steps, including burning a fire to heat the bricks, clearing out coals and ashes, and finally placing the items to be baked into the heated space behind a wooden door.

For urban women such as Paul Revere's first wife Sarah and second wife Rachel, managing a household included labor-intensive and time-consuming tasks such as food preparation, cultivating a house garden, and raising poultry. Unlike rural women, urban housekeepers did not have to tend livestock or prepare as many foods from scratch. Meats, vegetables, cheese, butter, and other necessary items such as soap could be purchased at markets and shops, or from local vendors.



A typical early American kitchen. Note the foodstuffs hanging on the wall, the large roaster or "tin kitchen" in front of the fireplace, and the heavy iron kettles and other implements used in cooking. (Old Sturbridge Village B21529, Photo: Henry Peach).

THE HALL C. 1700

As the most versatile room in a Colonial house, the Hall might serve as a parlor, dining room, workshop, or business office all in the same day.

This room reflects the era of the house's first owner, Robert Howard, a wealthy merchant. The period pieces in this room that highlight his status include

- the **press cupboard**
- the **daybed**
- the **gateleg table**
- the **upholstered chair**
- the **three-corner chair**

The **press cupboard** (back wall), used to store linens, was probably made in Essex County, Massachusetts, in 1699 (note date on lower front). While characteristic of 17th-century English furniture in its heavy proportions and carved and turned ornamentation, its painted and stained surfaces were likely much brighter originally. *Lent by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.*

Bare floors were the norm in Colonial America. The wealthy few who could afford imported Turkish carpets usually used them as table coverings. **Floor carpets** became more common in Revere's time. Our Turkish carpet, made in 1985, is similar to those made in the 17th century.

Both **maps,** taken from period atlases, show the northeast coast of North America. The color map is Dutch, 1635. The black and white map is English, 1676.

The reproduction textiles in this room follow the traditional custom of decorating "en suite" – color coordinating fabrics for a unified appearance.

THE PAUL REVERE HOUSE – A 300-YEAR HISTORY

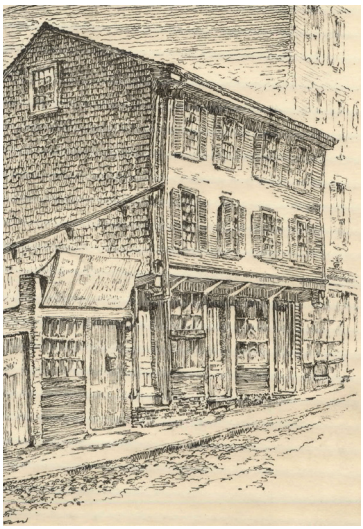
Although Paul Revere is the best-known figure associated with this house, he and his family are by no means the only people to have lived here. In the 300 plus years since its construction, several hundred people of every social class have made this house their home.

The first owner of this house, wealthy merchant Robert Howard, moved here in 1681 with his wife Elizabeth, his daughter Sarah, and Samuel, an enslaved man. After her father's death in 1717, Sarah inherited the house.

In the 1740s and 50s, the structure was owned by the Knox family who were artisans and mariners. When Andrew Knox defaulted on a mortgage in 1763, he lost the house to John Erving, a real estate speculator, although he remained as Erving's tenant. In 1770, following Knox's death, Erving sold the house to Paul Revere.

Although Revere owned the house until 1800, he and his family may not have lived here for part of the 1780s. After the Revere family sold the home in 1800, the building became a boarding house and then a tenement where the ground floor was used as shops. Throughout the 19th century, numerous sailors and immigrant families made the Revere House their home.

In 1902, a Revere descendant purchased the house with the goal of preserving it. Within a few years money was raised, the house was restored, and in 1908 it opened to the public as a museum.

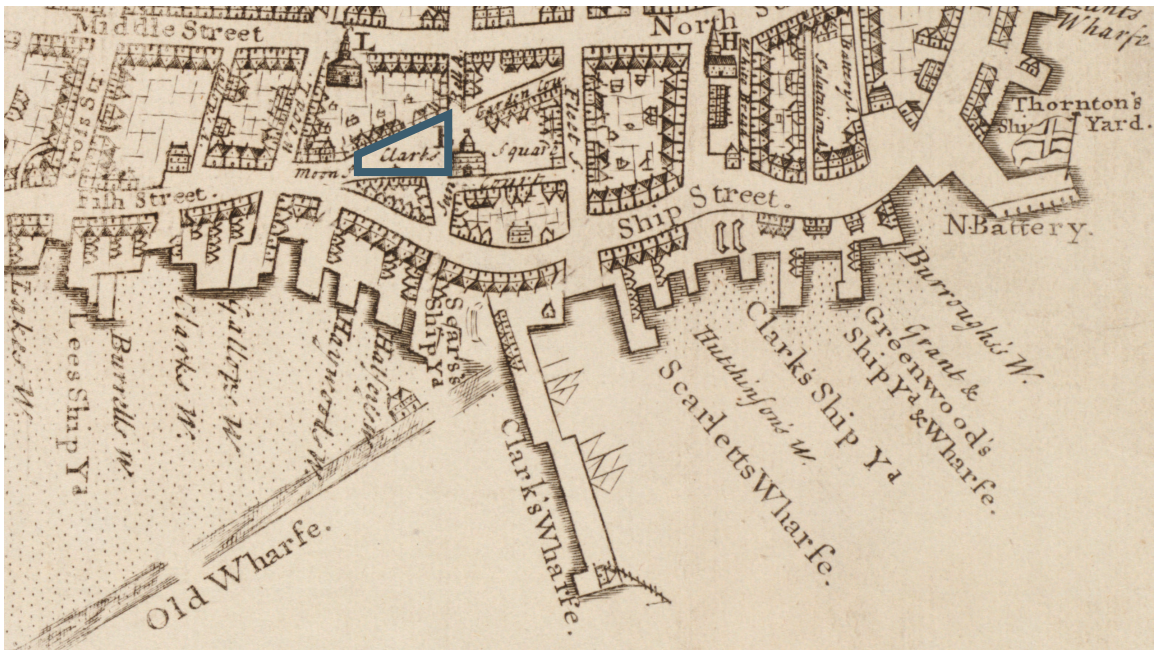


The Paul Revere House in the 1880s (from Porter, *Rambles in Old Boston,* 1887)

BOSTON IN THE 17TH AND 18TH CENTURIES

Originally home to the Massachusett people, Boston grew from a small village into an important seaport and commercial center with over 15,000 inhabitants between 1630–1770. A once tightly-knit Puritan community rapidly expanded to include significant Scots-Irish, French, West African, and Native American populations.

The thickly settled North End was among the oldest of Colonial Boston's several distinct neighborhoods. Its residents were a mix of wealthy merchants, government officials, middle-class artisans, and transient mariners. The waterfront was crowded with taverns, shipyards, shops, and warehouses – all linked together by narrow, winding streets. North Square, with its markets, public wells, and watchhouse, was the social and economic center of the North End.



Detail from the John Bonner Map of Boston, 1722, showing the North Square area (highlighted in blue).

Courtesy Norman B. Leventhal Map Center, Boston Public Library.

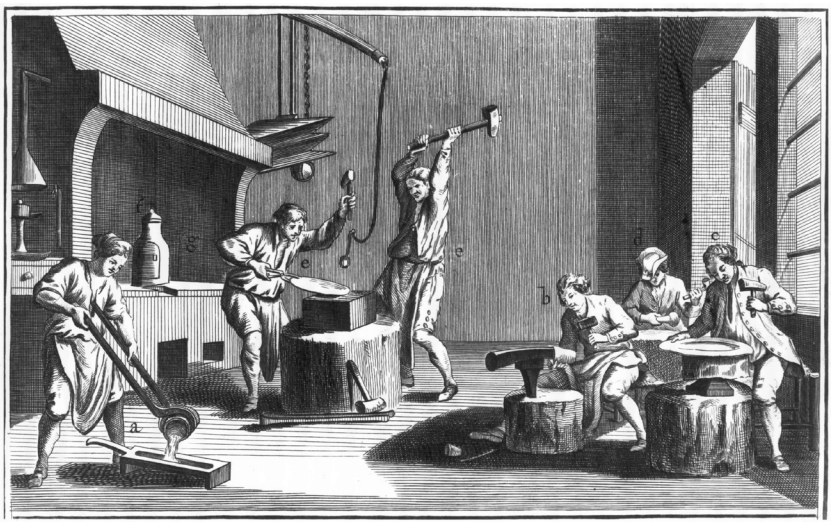
PAUL REVERE (1734–1818)

Paul Revere was born in a modest dwelling in this neighborhood on December 21, 1734. In 1770, he bought this property and made it his home.

Paul Revere was one of 12 children. He attended the North Writing School and then apprenticed with his father as a silversmith. When his father died in 1754, Paul, then 19, was too young to legally inherit the family silver shop (his mother held it until he turned 21). Paul took over the shop in his own name in 1756, following military service during the Seven Years' War.

Paul Revere's father, originally named Apollos Rivoire, was a Huguenot (French Protestant). At age 13, his family sent him to Boston, where he was apprenticed to silversmith John Coney. In the 1720s, Apollos established his own shop near Dock Square, and changed his name to Paul Revere.

Paul Revere's mother, Deborah Hichborn, descended from several New England artisan and land-owning families. Her parents, Thomas and Frances Pattishall Hichborn, owned a small wharf on Boston's waterfront, where they repaired boats and handled light cargo.



Silversmith Shop interior, c. 1771, from Diderot's *Encyclopedia.*

Courtesy, Boston Public Library.

THE BEST CHAMBER C. 1795

This room reflects the later years of the Revere family occupancy. The Best Chamber served as both a primary bedroom and an elegant parlor. The practice of using rooms for many functions was especially common in middle-class homes, which often did not have separate parlors or sitting rooms.

Five pieces of furniture in this room belonged to the Revere family:

- **the bow front chest of drawers,** to the left of the bed (mahogany veneer on pine, 1780–1800). *Lent by the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.*
- the large **upholstered chair** (late 18th c.). *Gift of Mary C. Rogers, 1953.*
- the two black painted **Windsor chairs,** used in Revere's home on Charter St. (pine and hardwood, early 19th c.). *Gift of Mary C. Rogers, 1953.*
- the **ladies' work table** with the green sewing basket (mahogany, early 19th c.). *Gift of Rachel Revere Coolidge Kimball, 1991.*

The **fabric** on the bed and chairs is a reproduction of a late 18th-century French pattern block printed on cotton cloth.

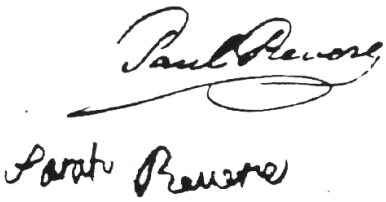
The **wallpaper** is a reproduction of a block-printed pattern manufactured in Boston between 1790 and 1810.

SARAH AND RACHEL REVERE

SARAH ORNE REVERE

(born April 7, 1736, died May 3, 1773)
Married: August 17, 1757–May 3, 1773

Little is known about Paul Revere's first wife, Sarah Orne. A member of an artisan and seafaring family of Boston and Salem, Massachusetts, Sarah married Paul in 1757 but sadly died at the age of 37, five months after the birth of their eighth child.



Signature of Sarah Revere, Paul Revere's first wife. The signature appears on a deed recording the sale of a small piece of property to one of the Reveres' neighbors.

RACHEL WALKER REVERE

(born December 27, 1745, died June 26, 1813)
Married: October 10, 1773–June 26, 1813

On October 10, 1773, five months after Sarah's death, Paul Revere married Rachel Walker, whose family likely rented a house nearby. Rachel assumed responsibility for raising Sarah's surviving children, and she and Paul had another eight children, born between 1774 and 1787. Intelligent, kind, and capable, Rachel managed to secure a pass from British authorities soon after her husband's "Midnight Ride," allowing the family to temporarily depart for the relative safety of Watertown, Massachusetts, during the 11-month siege of Boston.

This miniature portrait shows Rachel Revere in her late 30s. It was painted by Joseph Dunkerly, who rented all or part of the Reveres' North Square house at one time. Paul Revere is thought to have made the gold frame for this miniature.

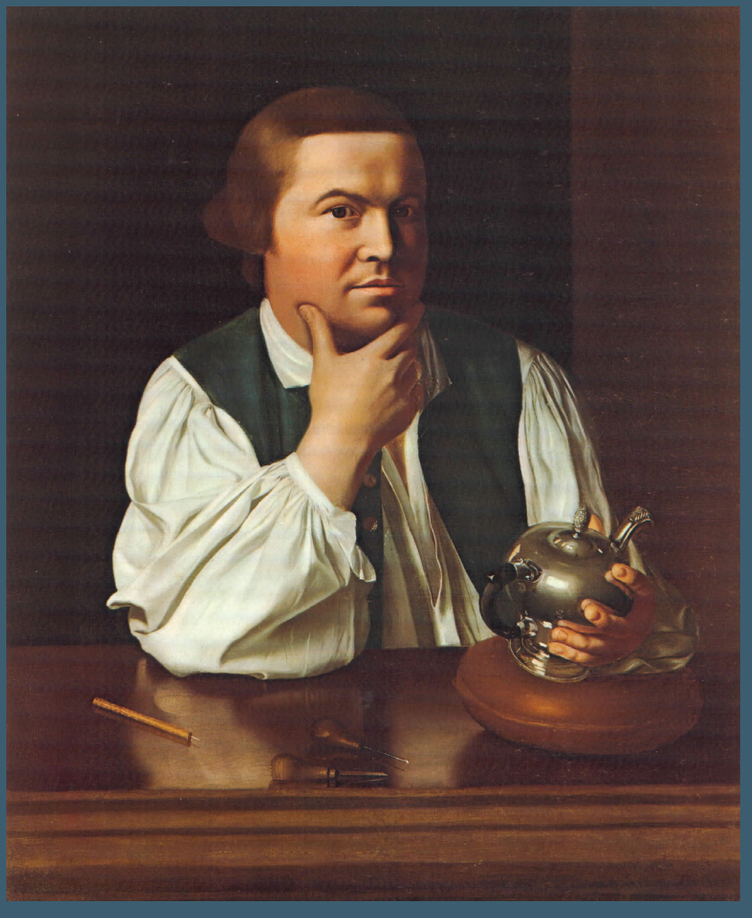
Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Bequest of Mrs. Pauline Revere Thayer.

PAUL REVERE, SILVERSMITH

Paul Revere was the owner of a large shop with both apprentice and journeyman employees. His customers included members of wealthy Boston society, as well as his own neighbors, relatives, and political associates.

Silversmiths produced items in both silver and gold. Only a few of Revere's gold pieces have survived, and today he is best known for his work in silver (examples are on display in our education and visitor center). Revere silver ranges from the highly-decorated rococo style popular in the 1760s to the more restrained neoclassical style of the 1790s, but each piece displays the elegant sense of proportion for which Revere's work is famous.

Like many silversmiths, Revere supplemented his income by producing copperplate engravings such as trade cards, bookplates, mastheads, and illustrations for broadsides and magazines. Revere also practiced dentistry occasionally from 1768 to 1775, cleaning teeth, wiring in false teeth, and selling toothpaste.



Paul Revere
by John Singleton Copley, 1768

At the time Copley painted this portrait, Paul Revere was 33 years old. He is shown in workingman's clothes with engraving tools in front of him.

PAUL REVERE, REVOLUTIONARY

Paul Revere became a principal spokesman for middle class artisans, storekeepers, and laborers in revolutionary Boston.

Paul Revere knew many of the town's radical leaders through his work as a silversmith and his Masonic connections. In the 1760s, he began engraving political cartoons satirizing British government actions. He also joined several of Boston's many underground political clubs, including the North End Caucus. According to tradition, the Boston Tea Party was planned at North End Caucus meetings at the Green Dragon Tavern in late November and December of 1773.

In 1774 and 1775, Paul Revere frequently served as a paid courier for the Committee of Safety. On the night of April 18, 1775, Revere and William Dawes left Boston by separate routes to warn patriots in Lexington of British troop movements. Following his famous "Midnight Ride," Revere aided the Patriot cause by printing badly needed paper currency and by overseeing the acquisition of gunpowder and cannon for the Massachusetts militia.

From 1776 to 1779 Revere served as an officer in the Massachusetts Train of Artillery. For most of this time he commanded the garrison on Castle Island, a fort in Boston harbor. He also took part in several local expeditions, including the ill-fated Penobscot expedition, an American military disaster. Accused of cowardice and insubordination, Revere was dismissed from the militia. In 1782, after seven attempts, Revere obtained the court-martial that finally cleared his name.

Paul Revere adapted his "Boston Massacre" engraving (1770) from the plate for a similar print by Boston artist and engraver Henry Pelham. Both Revere's and Pelham's prints show very inaccurate views of what actually happened and were intended as political propaganda.

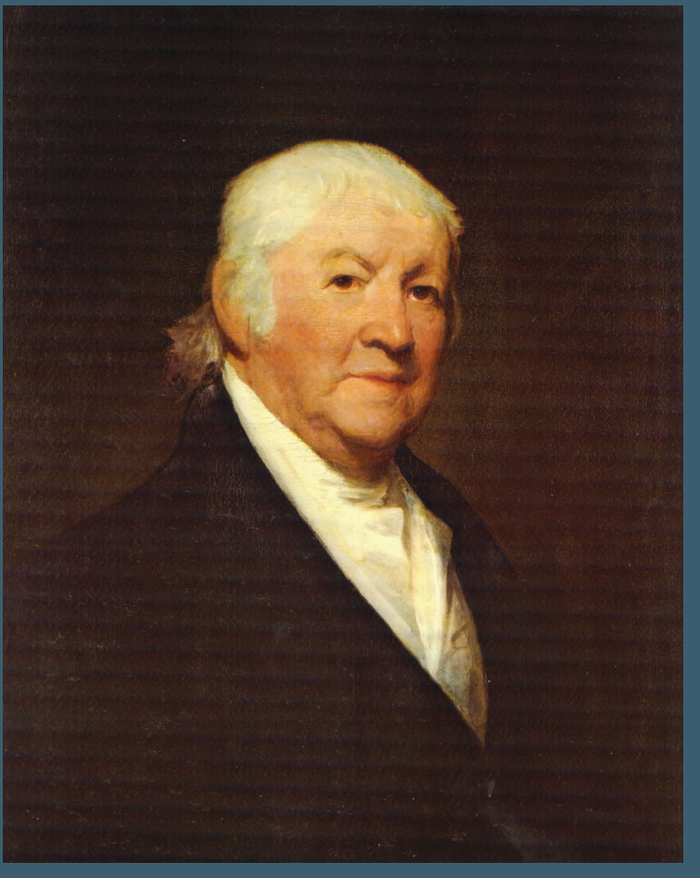
Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Gift of Miss Margaret A. Revere, Miss Anna P. Revere, Mr. Paul Revere, and Mr. John Revere Chapin.

PAUL REVERE, BUSINESSMAN

After the Revolution, Paul Revere began a series of businesses that steadily increased his personal income. These ventures included a hardware store, a foundry, and a copper-rolling mill.

Revere operated a hardware business in Boston during the 1780s. He sold locally-made and imported goods as well as items made in the family silversmith shop (by then under the supervision of his son, Paul, Jr.). In 1788 Revere opened a foundry on the North End waterfront, where he cast cannons and bells, and manufactured large quantities of copper and brass fittings for local shipyards. Revere established the first successful copper-rolling mill in North America at Canton, Massachusetts, in 1801. Revere copper was used to re-plate the hull of "Old Ironsides" and to cover the dome of the new Massachusetts State House on Beacon Hill. Robert Fulton also used heavy gauge Revere sheets to construct the boilers for some of his steamboats.

Revere's Trade Card



Paul Revere
by Gilbert Stuart, 1813

Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Gift of Joseph W., William B., and Edward H. R. Revere.

BACK BEDCHAMBER

This room was likely used by the Revere children. They might have shared the space with their grandmother Deborah Revere, or their aunt Elizabeth Revere, who were at times part of this large multigenerational household.

With 16 children born to the family over a 30-year period, the Reveres had a full house throughout their time here, but it may not have been as crowded as it sounds. Between the five children who died as infants and the ones who married and setting up their own households, Paul likely only had five to nine children at home at any one time. Most of the children probably slept on the third floor, though *all* of the rooms in the house were likely used as bedrooms by extended family members and silver shop apprentices as needed.

The following are Revere family pieces:

- The **sampler** (linen with cotton and silk thread) was made by Maria Revere Curtis, a great-granddaughter of Paul Revere. It is dated January 25, 1819, when Maria was 11 years old. *Gift of Miss Marian Cole, 1978.*
- The **rocking chair** (Windsor, early 19th c.) was used by Revere at his copper-rolling mill in Canton, Massachusetts. *Gift of Anna Revere, 1976.*

Note the following items:

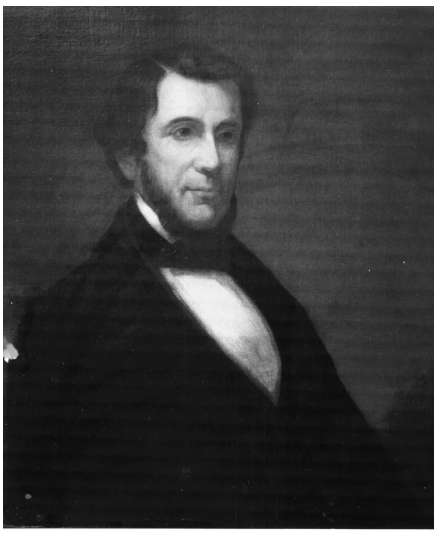
- The wooden hinges of this **bed** (maple, late 18th c.) allow it to be folded against the headboard. Folding furniture gave families the flexibility to use their limited rooms for multiple purposes.
- The wooden **bed wrench** (on the table) was used to tighten the ropes supporting the mattresses on the bed.

THE REVERE CHILDREN

Of the sixteen Revere children, eleven survived to be adults. As Revere's fortunes improved, his younger children received more opportunities than their older siblings.

Paul Revere's oldest son, Paul, Jr., apprenticed with his father at the family silver shop. His younger brothers Joshua and Joseph became involved in their father's hardware, foundry, and copper-rolling mill businesses. John Revere, Paul Revere's youngest son, graduated from Harvard and studied medicine at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland. A respected physician, he practiced in Boston, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York.

Paul Revere's older daughters were educated at home and married Revere neighbors, business associates, and apprentices. Harriet and Maria, Revere's youngest daughters, attended boarding school in the Boston area. After her parents died, Harriet, who never married, split time between her brother Joseph's and her brother John's families. Maria married businessman and diplomat Joseph Balestier and settled in Asia. In the 1840s, she arranged for the purchase of a Revere bell for a church near her home in Singapore.



Dr. John Revere
(artist unknown)
Courtesy, Archives of the School of Medicine, New York University.

PAUL REVERE, THE LEGEND

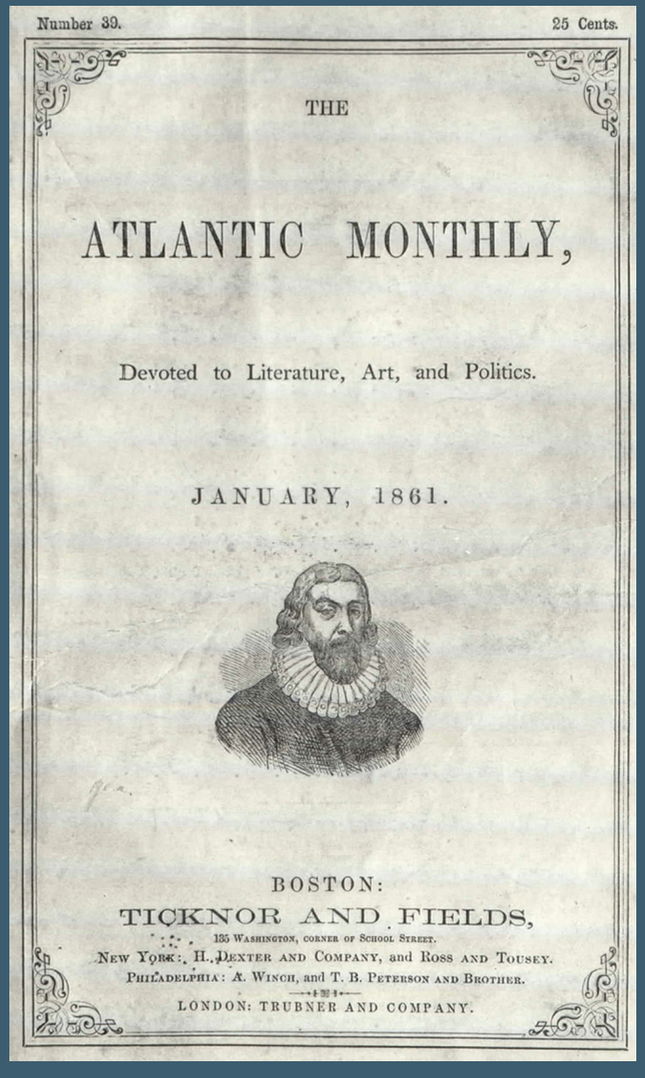
Paul Revere died on May 10, 1818, at his Charter Street home, and was buried in a tomb in the Granary Burying Ground near Boston Common.

Paul Revere received local recognition as an heroic courier in the 1820s, but the nation first heard about Revere when Henry Wadsworth Longfellow published his now-famous poem, "Paul Revere's Ride," in the January 1861 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*.

By the 1890s, popular culture considered Paul Revere as one of the American Revolution's central figures. Since that time, scholars have begun to view Revere's Revolutionary role as significant but essentially local in nature.

Throughout the 20th century, the importance of Paul Revere and his "Midnight Ride" has waxed and waned in popular memory, paralleling changes in the political climate. Advertisers and satirists have often capitalized on the popularity of the "Midnight Ride" story, appropriating it for all kinds of business and political causes.

Lunch Box c. 1930.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Devoted to Literature, Art, and Politics.

JANUARY, 1861.

BOSTON:
TICKNOR AND FIELDS,
135 Washington, corner of School Street.
New York: H. Dexter and Company, and Ross and Tousey.
Philadelphia: A. Winch, and T. B. Peterson and Brother.
London: Trubner and Company.

"Listen, my children, and you shall hear
Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere"

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem "Paul Revere's Ride" first appeared on December 18, 1860, in the *Boston Evening Transcript* as a preview for its national publication in the January 1861 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*.

SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY HOLIDAY CELEBRATIONS

Though special days for prayer, fasting, and feasting were nothing new to early American settlers, most Boston Puritans disliked the "keeping" of Christmas and other religious holidays. Massachusetts levied a fine for observing Christmas in 1646, and even made the holiday illegal in 1659. As Samuel Sewall noted in his diary:

> *[New England settlers] came hither to avoid anniversary days, the keeping of them, such as the 25th of December. How displeasing it must be to God, the giver of our Time, to keep anniversary days to play the fool with ourselves and others.*

Days of public thanksgiving, on the other hand, were important holidays in colonial Massachusetts. The procedure for establishing an official Day of Thanksgiving involved writing a resolution and obtaining the Governor's signature. This process might take as long as a month. A fall thanksgiving (usually associated with the harvest) was a particularly important occasion, and a colony-wide observance was held almost every year.

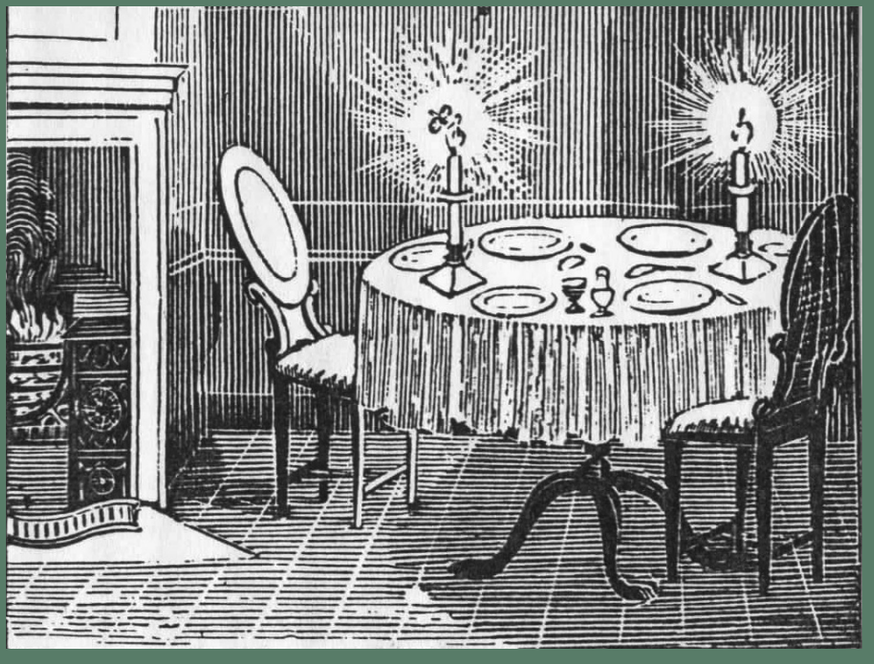
This room reflects how Robert Howard, a wealthy merchant and the first owner of this house, might have celebrated a day of thanksgiving in the early 1700s. The table is set for dessert, an important part of any colonial meal. For some Puritans, a fall thanksgiving may have served as a substitute for Christmas. Indeed, outside of New England this holiday was sometimes referred to as "The New England Christmas."

HOLIDAY CELEBRATIONS IN THE 1790s

A majority of New Englanders in the 17th and 18th centuries were Congregationalists. As descendants of Puritans, they would not be likely to celebrate Christmas. Their reasons were scriptural. Many simply completed a good day's work on December 25, and possibly recorded that fact in their diaries or almanacs.

Boston's Anglican minority observed Christmas in their Church services. Their term for observing the holiday was to "keep" Christmas.

By the 1790s, some Congregationalists, especially in urban areas, were beginning to keep Christmas in some manner. This might mean that they visited an Anglican church service or hosted a dinner or tea for friends at home.



THE BEST CHAMBER

We have decorated the Best Chamber to reflect how Paul Revere and his family might have kept Christmas in the 1790s. We can imagine Paul and his wife Rachel sitting at the card table with another couple, talking about the small New Year's gifts they might give to family and friends. The giving of gifts at New Year's was an established custom accepted by the Puritans.

The Reveres may have served their guests pastries (fruit tarts), cookies, sweet meats such as marzipan, and fresh fruit, which was difficult to come by, especially in winter. Pineapples (perhaps borrowed) were particularly rare and expensive. The wine in the decanter and glasses might be Madeira, a very popular beverage in the Americas.