



HISTORY'S MAN OF Mystery

SILVERSMITH, SOLDIER, POLITICAL ACTIVIST,
ENTREPRENEUR, BELL CASTER, COURIER,
DENTIST, FREEMASON, FATHER (OF 16).

Who exactly was Paul Revere?

BY CHERYL FENTON

LISTEN, MY CHILDREN, and you shall hear of another side to Paul Revere.

Longfellow's iconic poem "Paul Revere's Ride" recounts the tale of this Revolutionary-era patriot who took to his horse on April 18, 1775, and alerted Colonial militia of an impending British invasion.

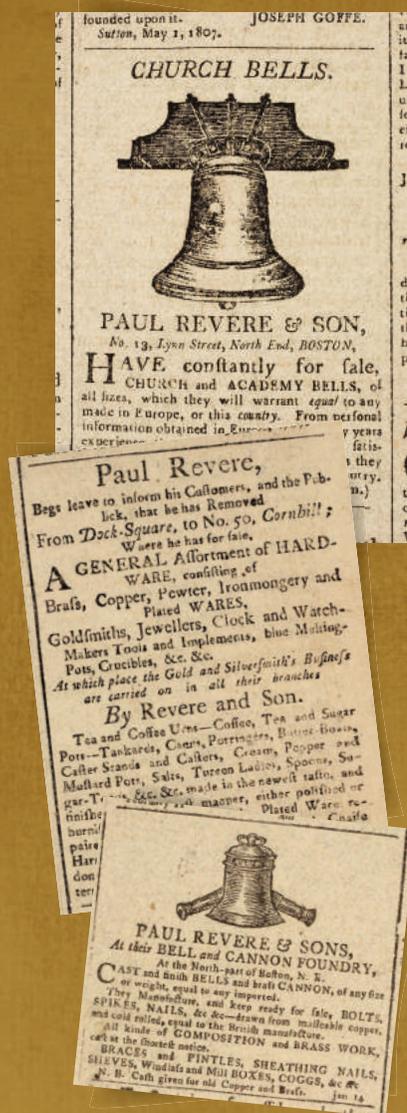
But who was this rider, beyond a voice sounding an alarm against King George?

"To me Paul Revere was the very definition of the modern gentleman," says Thomas J. Dietzel, visitor services manager at Old North Foundation, a nonprofit that operates the Old North Church of "one if by land, two if by sea" lantern fame. "He wasn't

a gentleman because of land, money nor title, but because he raised a family, worked hard, volunteered in his community, stood up for his beliefs, fought for his country, and strove for progress."

One thing is clear. Revere was a busy man with an enterprising brain and business acumen. Well-liked among the workingmen of Boston, he wore many (tri-cornered) hats and created a complex life beyond that famous ride.

SILVERSMITH After apprenticing under his father Apollos Rivoire, a 19-year-old Revere took over the family silver shop after the elder's passing in 1754. Casters, spoons and platters were commissions of choice, but there was room for odd requests, like



“Paul Revere was the prototype American, not a colonist, a true American.”

ABOVE: NEWSPAPER ADS PLACED BY PAUL REVERE. PREVIOUS PAGE: JOHN SINGLETON COPLEY'S 1768 PORTRAIT OF REVERE, ON VIEW AT THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON

pet squirrel chains and a cup for an ostrich egg.

But as Revere soon found out, all that glitters is not silver.

“As an artisan, Revere’s business suffered from the economic downturn following the French and Indian War,” says Dietzel. “The Stamp Act of 1765 (asking the colonies to pitch in to help pay for the costly war) furthered the economic strife in Boston and forced many out of work. Others, like Revere, had to re-purpose their skills.”

DENTIST Seemingly an odd side business, dentistry by silversmith was more common than someone of today’s world might think. Who else had easy access to silver wire for false teeth? Revere supplemented his income by cleaning teeth with pumice paste and wiring dentures of walrus ivory or animal teeth.

Having knowledge of something as intimate as dental work proved useful in wartime.

“After the British evacuated on March 17, 1776, Paul Revere went out to the battlefield in Charlestown with the hopes of helping to locate and identify the body of his good friend, General Joseph Warren, who was killed at the Battle of Bunker Hill,” says Ben Edwards, a relative of Paul Revere who is a Boston historian and tour guide. “In what might be considered the first case of forensic dentistry, Revere did help identify Warren’s body by spotting two artificial teeth he had wired in.”

ENGRAVER While the task of engraving tea sets helped pay his bills, it also at times fed the multitalented Revere’s outspoken creative side. He produced some of the era’s most sophisticated illustrations and political cartoons for books, magazines and, even, tavern menus.

“He took the engraving skills he used for silver items and used them in other areas, including engraving copper plates and lead metal mastheads for newspapers such as the Boston Gazette and Massachusetts Spy,” says Edwards.

Edwards cites Revere’s most famous copper plate engravings as the “Boston Massacre,” an early example of American propaganda that fueled colonial resentment with Revere’s politically charged satire of a Henry Pelham painting.

BELLMAKER “Revere’s plan after the Revolutionary War was to move up in the world,” says Patrick Leehey, research director at Paul Revere House and author

of ‘Twenty Questions About Paul Revere, Asked and Answered.’ “Silversmithing was a good trade, but one could only move up so high.” Revere opened his foundry in Boston’s North End by 1788. Starting with firebacks, window weights, Franklin Stoves, bolts and spikes, he soon channeled his childhood job of ringing Old North Church’s bells for this, his next venture.

“His first bell was cast in 1792 when he was asked to recast the bell for his own church,” Edwards says. Between 1792 and 1828, over 900 bells of all sizes were cast at his foundry.” Only 133 church bells still survive, including one in Singapore, requested by Revere’s youngest daughter for her parish in Southeast Asia after her husband became first U.S. consul to the Far East.

COPPER ROLLER Revere’s foundry was a precursor to his most ambitious effort—developing the country’s first copper rolling mill in 1800.

Leehey considers beginning a business at age 65 was, at that time, “uncommon and quite risky. He sunk a lot of money into refurbishing an old iron mill to manufacturer sheet copper,” he explains, noting the potential for bankruptcy was high as Thomas Jefferson’s political party defeated John Adams. “[Revere] was going to be given a government loan. It wasn’t clear whether a new administration would honor contracts entered into during a previous administration.”

Revere’s trademark perseverance ensured the contract was fulfilled. No hard feelings meant both state and Federal governments became his largest customers at his mill in Canton, Mass., just a few miles from Boston. His most famous projects soon followed—the U.S.S. Constitution hull and the Massachusetts State House dome (replaced with 23-carat gold leaf in 1874). Robert Fulton also commissioned Revere to cover the boilers for his famous steamships.

COMMUNITY ACTIVIST Although Revere’s activism certainly put him in the company of high profile Bostonians, for him, politics wasn’t in the cards.

“He couldn’t run for political office because he didn’t have the educational background or leisure for that matter,” explains Leehey. Instead Revere carved his way into his community as the first president of Boston Board of Health, a member of library board, one of the organizers of Boston’s first successful mutual fire insurance company, and as Suffolk County coroner.

Revere also joined the Freemasons of Massachusetts around 1760.

“[The freemasons] gave him an outlet for his political ambition,” adds Leehey. “Primarily this served as a collegial body that he could go to. It gave him satisfaction because he believed in their ideals.”

As you might expect from such an overachiever, Revere moved up in rank and became Grand Master during the 1790s. He was called upon by Governor Samuel Adams to perform the ancient Masonic ceremony July 4, 1795, of burying a time capsule at the State House. Incidentally, the capsule was recently rediscovered under the building’s cornerstone.

FAMILY MAN With such intense business acumen, it would seem unlikely that Revere had time for a family, but this wasn’t the case. Revere fathered eight kids with his first wife, Sarah Orne, and eight with his second, Rachel Walker, whom he married after Orne’s death in 1773. A whopping 51 grandkids followed.

“He loved his Rachel very much,” says Dietzel. “He wrote poetry in her honor, calling her ‘the fair one who is closest to my heart.’” His love for his children was also apparent. “His marriage to Rachel only five months after the death of his first wife was fueled by his acknowledgement that his children needed a mother’s attention,” he adds.

Their small North End townhouse saw both happy and grim days, including when his daughter came down with smallpox.

“You had a choice—send them to the pesthouse, which essentially was a death sentence, or you have the whole family quarantined,” explains Leehey. “He chose to have his whole family quarantined. There was a guard standing out front and a quarantine flag fluttering. Presumably the entire family got smallpox, but nobody died from it. This speaks to how much he loved his children. He wasn’t going to send one of them away.”

At the time of his own death at the ancient age of 83, Revere had accomplished much more than the horse ride that has secured his place in history.

“I like to think of Paul Revere as very bold,” says Dietzel. “The Paul Revere I have concocted in my mind is an honest, sturdy, caring, brave and intelligent entrepreneur. Paul Revere was the prototype American, not a colonist, a true American.”



FROM TOP: REVERE'S ENGRAVING OF THE BOSTON MASSACRE; THE SILVER 1768 SONS OF LIBERTY BOWL; THE DOME OF THE STATE HOUSE

