

3.3: The First Continental Congress: interview with Michael Norris transcript

Unknown Speaker 0:00

Music.

Tegan 0:10

Welcome back to Revere House Radio. I'm Tegan Kehoe, and today I'm joined by Michael Norris, the Executive Director of Carpenters' Hall in Philadelphia. Carpenters' Hall has a fun connection to Paul Revere, and it's also a pleasure to speak with someone at another site interpreting the American Revolution. Welcome, Michael.

Michael 0:26

Thanks, thanks for having me.

Tegan 0:27

Yeah, thank you for being here. So to start off, can you tell me about yourself and your role at Carpenters' Hall?

Michael 0:33

Sure, yeah. So well, as you mentioned, I'm the Executive Director. The hall is, you know, a museum and historic site, free, open to the public. So my role is, you know, managing our staff and making sure the the building's operational and all in good shape, and working on public programming, visitor engagement, our visitor experience. You know, we're also we have another sort of side to us, which is the Carpenters Company, which owns Carpenters' Hall, and is a vestige of the 18th century, right? We were founded in 1724, and the company, which was a guild of master builders is now a professional association of architects... of architects and engineers and contractors, right? So they are the stewards of the property. So a large part of my job is also kind of managing the company and our board as it kind of intersects with our mission and what, you know, and what we're trying to do in the community.

Tegan 1:47

Yeah, that's fascinating. That seems like a really unique juxtaposition.

Michael 1:51

Yeah. I like the, you know, the early American history, the revolution, and then you have this layer of the built environment, architecture, construction, right? And how those things connect is sort of a source of endless fascination for us, and we love to use lots of metaphors, like laying the foundation for independence, right? So that's a big one for us.

Tegan 2:18

I'm sure. And I understand that their their full name is the Carpenters' Company of the City and County of Philadelphia. Do other cities and counties have comparable organizations? Or what-what is their sort of landscape?

Michael 2:30

Yeah, so well, the reason it says city and county of Philadelphia is that at the time the organization was founded, Philadelphia was both a city and a county. We were not consolidated until about 1851, I think is the year that the, you know, the city of Philadelphia and the county of Philadelphia became the same thing. So before that, you know, the city was the city and the county, the larger county was the larger county. So that's why both words are mentioned in our name. And to answer the second part of your question, no, to our knowledge at this point, we are, we are fairly unique. There certainly were other trade guilds in the colonial period, you know, modeled on, or sort of inspired by the medieval tradition of trade guilds that just came over from from Europe. But in the 19th century, with industrialization and kind of the rise of the labor movement, you know, the guilds kind of started to to fade away. You know, we became relevant or significant for an entirely different reason, right? The First Continental Congress, which you know essentially has very little to do with the purpose of the of the Carpenters' Company, but because the building itself became famous and significant, the company kind of stuck around, and here we are.

Tegan 4:02

And that's a great segue, because I'd also like to hear a little bit about kind of the history of Carpenters' Hall as a site of the American Revolution.

Michael 4:09

Yeah, sure. So the building was built in the early 1770s and as a, you know, as a meeting hall for for the guild, for the carpenter's company. And then we were selected by the delegates of the First Continental Congress to, you know, to be here, to meet here, for them to you know, so for us to host the meeting that happened in the fall of 1774, so 250 years ago, this year. We've been thinking a lot about the connections between the first congress and the, you know, the prior events in Boston. I, in fact, was up for the 250th of the, of the Tea Party, which was quite exhilarating. And fun. And you know that event, and you know the repercussions of it really sparked the desire to have have the Congress, right? So the delegates met in our building, six weeks in the fall, and our site, also at that time, was the- we were also hosting on our second floor, Benjamin Franklin's Library Company of Philadelphia, which was the nation's first subscription library, and they rented our space all through the kind of revolutionary period and post revolution up until about 1790 but many folks, John Adams, including who, thank God, wrote down everything, made a note in his journal that the that there was an excellent collection of books, you know, on the second floor of Carpenters' Hall, and that that collection was made available to the to the delegates through a special relationship with the with the Library Company. So the Library Company calls itself the first Library of Congress. That's the reason, because they were here in our building when the First Continental Congress met. So you know, after the Congress, the building continued to be used for purposes around the revolution. We had some munitions storage, and we were occupied by the British. When Philadelphia was occupied in 1777 and '78 the British used the building as kind of an infirmary, a hospital for wounded British soldiers. And then in the post period, the Federal period, you know, from 1790, again we continued to -- the building continued to be used by, actually, General Knox, Secretary of War, had been office in the building. And so there was, until, you know, the capital moved to

Washington, there were aspects of the of the space that were being used by the new federal government. So we feel very connected to the foundings of our nation.

Tegan 7:30

Yeah, that sounds like there's many different connections to different elements of what was going on at the time. I like hearing the mention of a project of Ben Franklin's, because, of course, he was a Boston boy, but he would never let anyone, you know, remember or believe that because Philadelphia was his adopted home.

Michael 7:47

Well, I forget who it was who said, this is not verbatim, but it was basically like we all know that, you know, Benjamin Franklin was born at the age of 17 in Philadelphia.

Tegan 8:03

I love that.

Michael 8:04

We believe that, of course, I don't know if you Boston folks believe that.

Tegan 8:10

Yeah, I think a lot of Boston folks just are either a little too proud of Benjamin Franklin or also believe that he's Philadelphian. So you mentioned the First Continental Congress. And of course, that is our connection to your site, because Revere delivered an important document from Boston. But before we get into that, I think that the First Continental Congress is one that you know, most of our listeners, at least anyone who grew up in the US will have learned about in school. But my impression is that for many people, the various congresses and conventions from that era turn into a blur once you're no longer actively studying them. Could you tell us about this particular Congress and what made it significant?

Michael 8:50

So keep in mind, this is the fall of 1774 the revolution hasn't begun yet. So while some folks, particularly those from Boston, were a little more kind of down the continuum of, you know, maybe we should shake this thing up a bit, the general sense was, let you know, "We're British subjects. we're being mistreated. Let's figure out a way to resolve this, through sort of diplomacy and, civil discourse, right?" So, and that's, that's essentially what they tried to do, right? So, they created a document called the Declaration of Colonial Rights, right? And so that name alone sort of tells you, right? They weren't declaring independence. They were saying, "We have rights as colonists, as British subjects, and this is how we think you're not, you know, you're violating those rights." So they wrote a petition to King George, and they also wrote what I find really interesting. It was a letter to the- this the- the citizens of Great Britain, right? There was a deliberate attempt to try to sway the public's opinion to the side of the colonists. And then, I think most significantly, they created the Continental Association here by signing the Articles of Association, right, which was kind of the first successful attempt. This had been tried a little bit around the Stamp Act Congress, but it didn't quite click the idea of, you know, "We need to form

a coalition of colonies, and we need to be thinking strategically together and collaborating on what we do, right, and how we how we deal with this."

Michael 8:55

And so that was kind of new, and it led to this, this document, the Articles of Association, which, you know, in essence, was kind of, you know we always quote David McCullough, a wonderful historian and writer who called Carpenters' Hall "the acorn of American democracy", which I just love, but that that really refers to the idea that this is where the coalition of colonies, what essentially became the United States, first formed, right? So that's, that's pretty significant. And Abraham Lincoln, so flash forward right into the 19th century, when he was giving his inaugural, first inaugural address in 1861 which was like one month before the Civil War broke out, he said that -- in trying to state his position for why it was his responsibility to preserve the Union -- he said the union predates the Constitution, and it predates the Declaration of Independence, and it goes back to the Articles of Association in 1774. So I love to remind people about that, because we, you know, we may have, many of us, most of us have probably forgotten about the Articles of Association, right? Kind of got overshadowed by this other thing, the Declaration of Independence, right? But it was a really significant piece of the, journey, right? Or, as I like you know, to use my building metaphor, right? We laid the foundation for for American independence through through that work.

Michael 12:32

So each colony that participated in the Congress sent delegates, often chosen by that colonies committee of correspondence. Massachusetts sent John Adams, Thomas Cushing and Robert Treat Paine, all of whom were lawyers, and Samuel Adams, who was a statesman and politician. Paul Revere was not a delegate. These men were of a higher social status, well-educated and held political leadership roles that Revere was not able to attain. Could you speak to the composition of the delegates as a whole? Who were they?

Michael 13:02

I mean, I think what was true of Massachusetts was true of all the colonies that participated. I should say there were so we there were 13 colonies. Of course, only 12 participated in the First Continental Congress, Georgia chose not to participate. But, but yes, so the delegations from the other colonies matched Massachusetts and by and large, right folks who were already in political leadership roles. The kind of rogue government that was already emerging with the Committees of Correspondence and other some colonies were even creating, you know, alternative assemblies, right, as colonial legislatures. So, we don't always remember that, like all that kind of stuff was happening before the revolution, right? And there was a lot of sort of rogue political activity going on, right?

Tegan 14:07

Yes.

Michael 14:08

There is some evidence that, again, part of the reason Carpenters' Hall was chosen as the site was kind of to not disguise, but sort of, you know, because our members, we were a trade guild. Our members were, were not elites, they weren't in political power for the most part. And they weren't super rich, you know, they were successful, but they were kind of that, you know, working class, middle class...

Tegan 14:39

Much like Paul Revere.,

Michael 14:43

Right, exactly, right. So the Company and Carpenters' Hall sort of reflected that notion. And so it there, you know, there was a sense that that would sort of lend a, a patina of, this is not just about um,, you know, the elites deciding, deciding what was, what was going to happen. So, but yeah, you know, certainly most of the other delegates were, I mean, you know, George Washington was a delegate, right? You know, so, right. Most of the other folks were, were certainly in that same that same league.

Tegan 15:22

I love that phrase, rogue government, and I think that that really encapsulates the context for the Suffolk Resolves, which I want to speak to a little bit. Because the Suffolk Resolves was the document, the set of resolutions from a group from Suffolk County in Massachusetts, and that document was what Revere brought to the First Continental Congress. And so the Committees of Correspondence were a rogue government in Massachusetts. The most common way, as far as I understand, that they were formed, was the town meetings would vote sort of an extralegal, additional town meeting into existence, and that was the committee of correspondence. And so that "correspondence" in the name means that they're communicating with the other towns and counties and the other colonies, and that all kind of fed up into what you're describing in the First Continental Congress. And so after the set of acts passed after the Boston Tea Party most of them were specifically targeting and punishing the Massachusetts Bay Colony. A number of towns and counties in Massachusetts wrote formal declarations of their own feelings, of their own intents to boycott, or other similar responses to the Intolerable Acts as a group and the Suffolk Resolves became the representative document of all of those various versions of somewhat the same ideas. The Resolves included a statement of grievances, a call to boycott British goods, and a proposal that each colony set up its own militia. And this was drafted and signed in Milton, Massachusetts. And on September 11, 1774, Paul Revere rode from Boston to Milton to pick up the document, and then he rode to Philadelphia.

Tegan 15:46

So as people who have been following along about the Paul Revere House this year know, this year is the 250th anniversary of a number of Paul Revere's rides, even though the most famous one happened in 1775. And so this was not Paul Revere's first ride, but it was definitely one of the most significant I think, bringing this document to the First Continental Congress, and the Congress adopted the Resolves as one of the meeting's first official acts, and then Revere made the Philadelphia - Boston round trip again once more, before the meeting ended in late

October, and so he was carrying messages on each leg of the journey. So my question for you is, can you describe what the delegates' stays in Philadelphia were like when they're writing messages that someone like Paul Revere is carrying? Do you think that they were writing letters from their rooms at an inn after a long day of meetings? Were they writing during recesses in the meeting during the day? Is this like someone scribbling a letter while also paying attention to the debate they're having?

Michael 18:24

Well, let's hope it's not that, we've all been there, but no. So yeah. I mean, you know, I think most of the good delegates took their their responsibility very seriously, you know, while they were in session. We do know that there was plenty of time outside of session where folks were hanging out. City tavern, which was sort of Philadelphia's most sort of elaborate and fancy tavern, had just opened, right, probably about, think a year before the Congress, right? So yeah, and that's, I don't know, it's, you know, 100 yards from us, right? So, so folks certainly went there out of session to, you know, have a pint and keep talking for sure. Lots of folks stayed in private houses, right? Just because they had connections or family or what have you. So, yeah, I think it's safe to imagine that folks were writing letters to spouses or other, you know, other family members in the evenings. Our friend Mr. Adams, John, again, very famously, talked about a dinner that he went to very early at his time here, I think it was September 8, 1774, at the house of Samuel Powell -- again, right down the street from Carpenters' Hall -- and you know, there was a very lavish dinner there with lots of distinguished guests. And Adams got to meet people and they had and he lists, you can look at his journal on that day, and he lists a whole menu of of everything that they ate. He dubbed it "a sinful feast." And apparently everyone got a little tipsy, and they decided to walk up to Christ Church and climb the steeple, right? So, so one of the more sort of colorful moments from from the first Continental Congress. So the steeple of Christ Church happens to have been designed and built by the same guy, member of the Carpenters' company who built Carpenters' Hall.

Tegan 18:24

Oh, wow.

Michael 18:41

So we've been -- and actually the house where this dinner took place, Samuel Powell's house, was also designed by Robert Smith. So we have a nice kind of architectural connection to that fun incident, and we hope to be doing a little commemoration of the "sinful feast" with those partners later in the year. I don't know if we'll get to climb the steeple of Christ Church. I have a feeling they wouldn't take too kindly to that, that idea. But, you know, Philadelphia was the biggest city in the colonies at that time, and so there was a sense of, you know, people being, you know, being in a metropolitan place and having access to things that they might not have to have, you know, on their farm or in a smaller community, right? So people did value that and take advantage of it for sure. You know, Adams wrote to Abigail, sort of when he was leaving the First Continental Congress about sort of being exhausted, right? I think part of that was just like, you know, they weren't... they were working, but they were also, like, having a good time, right?

Tegan 22:13

Yeah, yeah. I imagine it was pretty heady to be able to, like, meet with these other political minds that many of them probably had not met with, but had corresponded with, at least in an official and maybe in an unofficial capacity. Plus you're in this, you know, for the colonies, major cosmopolitan area, and I imagine that... I'm not surprised if they kind of had a blast.

Michael 22:37

Yeah, for sure. I mean, I just think about myself, right when I go to a conference or something, right? You always want to check out the city. And, you know, see, see the real the real stuff, and, you know, hang out with people, and, you know, check out the sites and all of that. So, you know, it's kind of the same thing our Convention and Visitors Bureau here in Philadelphia, has sort of adopted some branding language around, you know, the first convention that took place, was us, right? Was the first Continental Congress, right? And, and, shouldn't you, if you're Xerox or whoever, right come have your convention, you know, in the place where the first convention happened. So, yeah, I think there's definitely that, that aspect to it.

Tegan 23:31

And one of the things we have very little documentation about, and I think we all here wish that we had more, is what Revere's experience of this kind of trip would have been because, you know, he certainly had to stay overnight in the places he was taking messages to. It was a multi-day journey. And he was a skilled networker, and tended to kind of make friends high and low. And he had his Freemason connections where he, you know, had Masonic brothers in many places, but he was also often on the other side of the door for a lot of these meetings. And so, you know, we don't know whether he was staying with a family friend, whether he had kind of a cozy experience, whether he was out on the town, carousing with people, talking politics over a pint. That's- that's a piece of the story that is missing for us. And you know, I'm slightly envious that you have more information about what that piece was like for many of the delegates. And I know that Revere was delivering both the political message, but also personal letters for the delegates. Were there other messengers coming with official news from other places, or was everyone else, you know, coming with personal correspondence back and forth from delegates?

Michael 24:55

Mostly it was personal, although there was a- um- sort of an incident of, you know, kind of fake news, again, coming out of Boston, and this was early in the Congress, and might have even been before Revere came for the Suffolk Resolves. I'd have to check the actual date, but somehow the Congress received word that there had been another, you know, sort of incident of violence of some sort in Boston, right? That turned out not to be true. It was like a rumor, and you know, that was delivered to the Congress, which, of course, sort of set everyone aghast, and reaffirmed the need for what they were doing. So somehow the word of that, you know, rumor came to be known. But as I said, I've called it the first incident of fake news, because it turned out not to be true.

Tegan 25:58

So one thing that I find really fun at the Paul Revere House is that many visitors arrive with only a fuzzy idea of who he was, you know, he was from the Revolution. You know, sometimes they'll ask, "Is he the "the British are coming" guy?" Like, yes, even though that's not what he said, but you have the right guy, yeah. And some people who come are Paul Revere enthusiasts, and some of them are into this time period in history. And so they know the names of a lot of the people and know which one was which. But many are just kind of doing all of the big sites in Revolutionary Boston history, or looking at all the big sites and going, "Oh, that's a house museum. That's interesting. I'll check that one out." And I know that Carpenters' Hall is also part of a revolutionary tourism circuit. Do you get a lot of visitors who know what you're about when you arrive? And do you get the visitors who arrive and say, "So, why am I here?"

Michael 26:47

Oh, for sure, all of the above. So we get a fair number of folks who, I mean, I believe them, but obviously I don't have evidence, but, you know, they say "I'm the descendant of so and so, right, who was a delegate." And so those folks, you know, relative to our general visitor, know a lot, right? They're able to understand the difference between the First Continental Congress and the Second, which not everyone understands. And so, you know, we often get the like, "Oh, is this where the Declaration of Independence was signed?" It's not, you have to go up the street for that. But, you know, so it really is all over the place in terms of what people's knowledge is. We also get a lot of visitors who are actually sort of more connected to the idea of the Carpenters' Company than they are to the history of what happened in the building, right? So if they're an architect or they're a contractor in another part of the country, those folks know about this building, right? Because it sort of was kind of a foundational site -- there, I used another building metaphor, sorry. -- You know, it was a, a key site in the in the sort of development of the industry of architecture and construction in the United States. So a lot of people know the building for that reason, right?

Tegan 28:20

Yeah.

Michael 28:20

And we also have folks who say, "Oh, my great, great, great grandfather was a member of the Carpenters' Company," right? Who, again, might not really know that much about the First Continental Congress, or even really care that much about the First Continental Congress, like they're there because of the building and the company, right? So it's really, really all over the map. So yeah, again, but I like that, right? It's fun to talk with people about what their interest is, and especially if they have a little bit of knowledge sometimes. I mean, we learn stuff right from them. So yeah.

Tegan 28:59

Definitely. So now I have two questions of kind of branching off of what you just said. So in no particular order, as you might know, Paul Revere was a Freemason, and Freemasonry had descended similarly from a trade guild that was focused on building, although it was the mason

side rather than the carpenter side. Do you know if there was any kind of overlap, relationship, rivalry, anything like that, with the Carpenters' Company?

Michael 29:26

There were yes, all of those things- right. So our- so you know, as I said, we were modeled on the London Carpenters' Company, and our sort of iconography, imagery, symbolism in our coat of arms and our logo and stuff like that comes from, from the London Carpenters' Company, but there's a lot of similarity between that and, you know, the iconography and symbolism that's connected to to Freemasonry. So we get lots of questions about that from visitors. A sort of we have- One of our members refers to the Masons and the Carpenters as the Jets and the Sharks. But there was sort of a rivalry for dominance right around controlling, you know, design and construction. You know, of sites and guilds often sort of competed in that way, for for dominance, you know, and influence. In Philadelphia, it's pretty clear that, you know, kind of the Carpenters' Company, you know, "won," quote unquote, that competition because, you know, we were so dominant, especially in the, in the 18th century, you know, around, around those issues. But I also say, like, look, we're, you know, we're a timber frame building that has a brick, you know, exterior, right?

Tegan 30:54

Uh-huh!

Michael 30:54

Like, clearly, you need both of these things in order for it to work. So, yeah, absolutely, you know. And of course, now we have, you know, a wonderful relationship with the Freemason folks, the Masonic lodge here, here in Philadelphia, so hopefully those age-old tensions are faded away somewhat.

Tegan 31:20

And my other question that your previous comment had made me want to ask was, when you and your team talk with the public about the First Continental Congress, does Paul Revere ever come up?

Michael 31:31

Oh, all the time, because --

Tegan 31:33

Really?

Michael 31:34

Well, it's usually me bringing up, but because, you know, I think, because, because Revere, you know, if you don't know anything about the revolution, you know that Paul Revere, you know, announced, you know, had his ride, in 1775. So you know, so for me, that's sort of an angle into it, right? So to be able to say to people you know this, this event, that we had a visitor, we had a

visitation by Paul Revere, people are like, "Oh, I didn't know that," right? So it just, it sort of creates an avenue into telling the whole, the whole story, right? Yeah, I use use a lot.

Tegan 32:24

Honestly, I think that that is how Paul Revere serves our site today as well. Is that we talk about family life in colonial Boston, we talk about kind of being a middle class or tradesman, we talk about what it was like for Revere's kids. Our subject is not just Paul Revere, but Paul Revere is the entry point. He's the person people have heard of. Who has heard of Rachel Walker Revere, unless they visited our site? And so he, you know, he fills that function as well. Before we close, I'd like to ask, What's one thing that you wish more people knew or understood about this period of history?

Michael 33:02

I think it's about the complexity, and the nuance. Again, the sort of dominant narrative about the revolution, comes across as sort of, you know, "Oh, right. We didn't like what England was doing. We declared independence, we fought a war. There were some challenges. But, you know, here we are."

Tegan 33:25

Right.

Michael 33:26

But like, you know that that's obviously oversimplified, and you know the, as I said, the complexities of that, of like, not everyone wanted to be independent, right? You know, there were lots of people who thought that was the worst idea that you could imagine. And, you know, people got deported, literally, for being supporters of Britain. And, you know, so all of that stuff, I think is just really, really interesting, you know, and sort of fills in the gaps, and it makes, I also feel like it sort of makes it feel like, back then was like -- we all acknowledge that today is very complicated, right? We're used to living in that complexity, because we do it all time, and so, you know, people need to understand that there was the same kind of complaint. I mean, there might be differences about what was complex, but there was complexity, right, and nuance back then. And I think that lightbulb helps people be more fascinated about history.

Tegan 34:46

Well, thank you again for joining us today. It was a pleasure.

Michael 34:50

Oh, yes, mine, mine as well. So I look forward to being back in Boston soon.

Tegan 35:00

We just heard from Michael Norris, the Executive Director of Carpenter's Hall in Philadelphia. Now here's Gabe Quealy again with a short excerpt from the Suffolk Resolves, which Paul Revere delivered to Carpenters' Hall.

Gabe 35:13

..."[T]hat whereas our enemies have flattered themselves that they shall make an easy prey of this numerous, brave, and hardy people from an apprehension that they are unacquainted with military discipline, we therefore, for the honor, defence, and security of this county and province, advise, as it has been recommended to take away all commissions from the officers of the militia, that those who now hold commissions, or such other persons, be elected in each town as officers in the militia as shall be judged of sufficient capacity for that purpose, and who have evidenced themselves the inflexible friends of the rights of the people, and that the inhabitants of those towns and districts who are qualified, do use their utmost diligence to acquaint themselves with the art of war as soon as possible, and do for that purpose appear under arms at least once every week. That during the present hostile appearances on the part of Great Britain, notwithstanding the many insults and oppressions which we must sensibly resent, yet, nevertheless, from our affection to His Majesty, which we have at all times evidenced, we are determined to act merely upon the defensive, so long as such conduct may be vindicated by reason and the principles of self-preservation, but no longer."

Tegan 36:09

A link to the full text of the Resolves will be in the show notes. Now, listeners, if you'll follow me, we'll step into the Paul Revere House for our next segment, Our Favorite Questions.

Derek 36:48

Hello, everybody. Welcome back to the segment where we interview some interpreters here at the Paul Revere Museum. Who do I have with me today?

Cadee 36:57

Hello, hello, hello. My name is Cadee. I'm an Interpreter. I've been at the Paul Revere House a little over a year now. I started out as an intern and moved into an Interpreter position in the fall, and yeah, I just love history. I studied it in school, and I'm from Massachusetts, so I love talking about Massachusetts history specifically. Makes it a lot more fun for me.

Derek 37:25

There is certainly a lot of Massachusetts history.

Cadee 37:28

You could definitely say that.

Derek 37:30

Okay, so we're here today to talk about some questions, because we deal with a lot of people in this museum. There are a lot of people asking us questions all day long. So what are some of the favorite questions that you are asked pretty regularly?

Cadee 37:44

A good one I really like is when people ask me about Paul Revere's jobs. A lot of people...

Derek 37:51
Many.

Cadee 37:52
...Of which there are many. This is true. A lot of people are familiar with him being a silversmith, or, technically, a goldsmith.

Derek 38:01
True, right?

Cadee 38:01
Is the actual term. But and, like, his silver and his work is displayed not only here, but at, like, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston as well.

Derek 38:13
Yeah, they have a ton of it.

Cadee 38:14
It's in a, yeah, or, like, sometimes you'll go visit a museum, like, in a whole other state, and they're like, and this was Paul Revere. And I was like, whoa.

Derek 38:21
My mom talks about Antiques Roadshow all the time, how people will find like, Revere silver, and she like, texts me about it furiously that she saw it on TV. I'm like, it's everywhere, Mom.

Cadee 38:32
It's literally everywhere. And that's cool, and it's cool that he has that silver legacy. But I love talking about all the other like, little odd jobs he's done. My favorite one, when I bring it up, is that he was a dentist.

Derek 38:49
Yeah, it's the most random.

Cadee 38:50
It's the most random. And people are so surprised every time. And, and then I'll go into like, explaining, like he's not making teeth. He's just, like, wiring it, them in for people. And then it's like a little bit more like clear.

Derek 39:05
He had the tools necessary to complete the job.

Cadee 39:08
Yeah, definitely. Or he, some of his horseback trips as a courier he's paid for...

Derek 39:17

Right.

Cadee 39:17

And I really just like talking about how much of like a hustler he is.

Derek 39:22

He certainly, I mean, he did, a whole lot of things.

Cadee 39:22

His nose was on the grindstone.

Derek 39:27

Absolutely. I mean, he had a couple children. He had 16 kids in total. So, you know, I feel like he kind of had to, he probably felt the fire underneath him to get some money, make the, the family pretty comfortable.

Cadee 39:40

Yeah, and you'd think like, oh, during the Revolution, he's got to take his break from being a silversmith. Like, there's more important tasks at hand, and there are, and he's minting money for people, and, like, for the new government...

Derek 39:55

For the new Massachusetts state, basically, yeah. Yeah there's so many things to talk about when people ask about the job or his jobs, because there are literally so many things to bring up. And it's always like, kind of fun, because you just add another one, and they're like, "Whoa." And then you add another one and another one, and they're always like, pretty shocked about it, yeah.

Cadee 39:55

Definitely gives some more character to him, and, like, understanding him as a person, as opposed to, like, oh, he was a silversmith who also did a midnight ride.

Derek 40:28

Yeah it can be pretty hard, I think, to, you know, put historical figures into, like a real person, because, especially Paul Revere, because I feel like he's such a, like, folk hero, like you almost just only know about the Midnight Ride and nothing else. And like, I mean, to young people, he's like a meme, like, he's not even like a real person. So I feel like when you talk about all the things he did, it just kind of helps you visualize, like, what maybe he looked like day to day.

Cadee 40:54

Yeah.

Derek 40:54

Okay, so what is your you know, maybe favorite question anybody's ever asked you, because we do get some wild questions sometimes.

Cadee 41:02

We do get some wild questions. And there's definitely, like, been a handful of times, there's definitely been a handful of times where people will ask me something, and I'm just like, "Wow." Like you really have been paying attention and listening and you thought deeply about that, but I can't think of a specific one I feel like at the moment. But I do love like there's a handful of times where people will ask what the oldest thing in our collection is, and when they ask that question and you're in the downstairs, it's so fun to point to the map that sits on the back wall. It's a map of New England. It dates back to the 1630s and everything on it is, like, written in Latin. But West is at the top of the map.

Derek 41:59

Yeah it's like, on its side, it's very weird.

Cadee 42:01

Exactly. So people are looking at it and, like, straight on, they're like, "What am I looking at?" And I always like to be like, "I know it kind of looks a little bit like a, like skinny Mexico, or like a weird version of Florida."

Derek 42:17

It definitely looks really strange.

Cadee 42:19

It definitely does. And then you just turn your head.

Derek 42:21

You gotta. That's my favorite thing to do, because...

Cadee 42:23

Exactly.

Derek 42:23

You tell people "Tilt your head," and then everybody looking at you they all tilt their head. And if it's little kids, which we get a lot of, you know, big groups of kids, they all very dramatically turn their head to look at them.

Cadee 42:35

A little 90 degrees to the right, exactly. And all of a sudden it becomes clear that you're staring at New England, and you can point out, like the cape and yeah, New York and Maine. And it's really cool to like watch that in time, like, not only people realizing what they're looking at, but to like in time, have your even just like, the picture become so much clearer.

Derek 42:59

Yeah, yeah. It's kind of like an interactive thing where, you know, a lot of times you'll go to a history museum, and maybe, you know, it's a lot of reading, it's a lot of listening, and so something like that, I think can really kind of bring people out of sort of, you know, the mode that they're probably used to in a museum, because it can be kind of hard to get people genuinely invested.

Cadee 43:19

Yeah.

Derek 43:20

A lot of people come in and they're like, "I'm bored," but you want to do things that can genuinely make people want to be here. I think it's a really easy museum to do that with, because it's pretty approachable and it's, you know, it's a small house to us today, so there's not, like, an overwhelming amount of information you have to kind of take in. Okay, so what are some questions that you wish people ask more? Like, what are some things that you wish you could talk about a little bit more?

Cadee 43:50

It's hard to bring it up all the time, and sometimes I get a chance to, but bringing up the like, full length of the history of the house itself, it like it's over 350 years old. We're looking like, it was in use from 1680 to the early 1900s that's like a very long span of time. And I get to bring it up sometimes, but it is like a lot of information that not everyone is necessarily willing to spend the time to listen to.

Derek 44:23

Yes,

Cadee 44:24

But I love talking about the house pre- and post- Paul Revere. Because although, like, you know, this is the Paul Revere House, it's the Paul Revere museum, I love talking about Paul Revere when you like, do the math, the time he spent in the house was only

Derek 44:40

30 years.

Cadee 44:40

It's only 30 years.

Derek 44:41

Less than that, even.

Cadee 44:42

It's 8% really, of the entire kind of lifespan, of the house being in use. So I love talking about, I'll talk about the Howards. I'll talk about pre-Revere, but I love talking about post Revere, and when they move out, and how, from 18, how? 100 to like 1905, essentially, the house is just like a makeshift boarding house or tenement house.

Derek 45:09

Yeah. Hundreds of people were in there. I mean, it has such a specifically interesting history.

Cadee 45:16

Yeah.

Derek 45:17

You know, because there's really nothing else I feel in the city that has that much of a story, can pass that many kind of people, kinds of people living in it?

Cadee 45:27

Yeah. So, like, people will sometimes ask, like, oh, how many people lived in this house total? And you can go through families. You can go through the Howards and the Knoxes and the Reveres, and then it's just kind of like, there's like 100 plus more. And I love, like, telling that to people.

Derek 45:45

Yeah. Paul Revere is like the trap to get people invested in the history of of the house and then, you know, the city itself. Well, thanks so much for talking with me, Cadee.

Derek 45:55

Of course, I had a lot of fun.

Derek 45:57

Thanks so much. Well, thanks for listening, everybody. See you later.

Cadee 46:00

Thank you!

Tegan 46:01

Thank you for tuning in to Revere House Radio. I'm your host, Tegan Kehoe and I am the Research and Adult Program Director here at the Paul Revere House. Our production team for this season includes Derek Hunter, Tyler McDonald, Cadee Stefani, Gabe Quealey, and Adrienne Turnbull-Reilly. Revere House Radio is a production of the Paul Revere Memorial Association, the nonprofit which operates the Paul Revere House Museum. You can find more information, subscribe to our mailing list or social media, or become a member on our website at www.paulreverehouse.org. Or, come visit us in Boston!