

Revere House Radio

Season 1 Episode 6

Revisit the Ride: Was Paul Revere's Ride Important?

Welcome to another episode of Revere House Radio: Midnight Ride edition. I am your host Robert Shimp. Though the day will be wildly different than usual this year, a Happy Patriots Day to everyone listening out there. There will be no Boston Marathon or early Red Sox game today, but we can hope that we will get a double dose of Patriot's Day this year with the Marathon this fall.

Today's episode will close out the 5-episode arch that has covered the buildup to the Midnight Ride and the Ride itself on this, its 245th anniversary in 2020. Yesterday we discussed some of the other riders on the night of April 18, 1775, so in this series, we have long established that Revere was not alone on horseback that night. This fact brings us to one of our most frequently asked questions at the Revere House, which is: If there were other riders, was Revere's ride actually important? Now, this is a slight modification on the question we tackled yesterday, of "If there were other riders, why is Revere famous?" Clearly, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow has a lot to do with the fame part, but this important question is a little bit trickier and more nuanced to tackle.

Though I absolutely realize my potential bias here, I argue that though there were other rides, yes, Revere's ride WAS important, his role was important, for a few reasons. First, though Dr. Joseph Warren's specific intelligence that the British regulars would attempt to arrest Samuel Adams and John Hancock may have been a bit off the mark, the notion that a major action was coming towards Lexington and Concord was spot on. In a sense then, Revere and Dawes were the most proximally significant riders, since they were going from Boston, the very location where the soldiers were stationed. It was important that confirmation of the intelligence made its way from Boston, which is obviously a point to both Dawes and Revere for doing so, but a double point for Revere on coming up with the lantern system and setting it into motion. Revere's importance that night is bolstered by the fact that he ensured, were he to be detained in the North End, that the message would arrive in Charlestown and could spread from there. Revere's quick thinking and ingenuity- traits that would serve him well over his long and successful business career- mark him as central planner in that communication web that emanated from the Sons of Liberty in Boston.

Further, on the ride itself, it is incredibly difficult to remove Revere from the thread of communication he set off on his ride. As he said, he stopped at almost every house along the way

to Lexington, meaning he set into motion an incalculable chain of communication that the Minutemen thrived on. Every rider had an outsized importance with perhaps exponential significance on that night. Further, Revere's deep contacts in the community and area meant he was likely making pointed contacts- he knew who would be the leaders and most effective persons to alert on his way to Lexington, so as to not waste time and give the overall mission its greatest chance of success.

I think it is also important to note the contact Revere made with Adams and Hancock. Though it is clear they were not the specific target that evening, General Gage was under great pressure from London to arrest the primary leaders of the Revolution. It would have been a bold move, but were Hancock and Adams still around Lexington or the area through the day of April 19, it is possible something could have happened to them in a way that would have derailed their important roles at the Continental Congress at that vital period leading up to the declaration of independence, about fourteen months after the events on April 1775. As a final word on Hancock and Adams- Revere's actions in removing Hancock's trunk with sensitive papers from Buckman Tavern is one of those events where we don't know if things would have been different had he not taken those actions. It seems like an afterthought in most recountings of the ride, but the fact remains that he transported important materials to a safer place mere moments before the first battle of the American Revolution commenced.

Now, it is possible in revisionist history that things would still have turned out the same, or at least close to how they did, if Revere did not make his ride, or was at least was detained in the North End before Richardson and Bentley rowed him across the Charles. William Dawes did arrive in Lexington as well, after all, though some bias does require me to note that it was a half hour after Revere. It is possible, if not likely, that the information would have reached the countryside and to most important players in time, if a bit delayed. We will never know the answer to that counterfactual, but I argue we can confirm Revere's role was important and central that night to not just the overall message, but importantly, the timeliness with which the alarm was raised. Longfellow, in that sense, got Revere's importance right.

That will do it for this 5-episode arch of Revere House Radio: Midnight Ride edition. You can look for more full episodes of Revere House radio coming up, and we will try to keep this short form format going as well for some of your questions and other topics you might want answered. Feel free to reach out on Facebook, Twitter, or email, with your thoughts on this and questions you may have going forward.

We greatly appreciate your support in this and all of our work in this period of closure to the public. If you are interested in continuing your support in these uncertain times, please consider membership or a donation to the Paul Revere House. Information on both can be found on our website, paulreverehouse.org. We are grateful for your contributions and promise to continue to

bring you great content both now and in person once we reopen. Until next time, stay safe, and thanks for listening!