

Revere House Radio

Season 1 Episode 2

Revisit the Ride: Did Paul Revere do Other Rides?

Welcome to Revere House Radio, Midnight Ride edition. I'm your host Robert Shimp, Research and Adult Program Director at the Paul Revere House. Over the next 5 days, leading up to Patriots Day on April 20th, we will be bringing you daily content on different aspects of Paul Revere's famous midnight ride of April 18, 1775. We'll be discussing some of the most frequently asked questions about the Ride, and the questions that you've let us know you want answered — burning questions like what did Paul Revere actually say, what actually happened on the ride itself, were there other riders, and, importantly, was Revere's ride actually significant? So to kick things off today, and to give a little bit of context to the buildup of the ride itself, and what we'll be talking about in the next few days, today we're going to answer the question of if Revere's famous ride was his first one? Or if he'd actually made previous rides leading up to April 18th. Was he a known rider to the Sons of Liberty, or did Dr. Joseph Warren and the leadership for the Sons of Liberty simply pull out a trusted member for that moment of emergency on the famous evening.

To answer the question directly — no. April 18, 1775 was not Revere's first ride for the Sons of Liberty. He is certainly most famous for his ride that we'll talk about and certainly commemorate this week. But the very reason that he actually rode out on April 18, 1775 was because to that point, he'd established himself not only as a central figure for the Sons of Liberty in Boston, but as a key messenger for the organization writ large. While he became more political in the 1760s, he really became essential to the Boston operation in the early 1770s. In terms of riding, Paul Revere's actually, his first major ride was actually the day after the Boston Tea Party, this being on the night of December 16th, and the ride itself on the morning of December 17, 1773. We can pretty safely assume that Revere was a direct participant at the Tea Party, though his actual role is unclear, based on a lot of overlap between his social and patriot groups that he was involved in and the spaces, the Green Dragon Tavern, Old South Meetinghouse, and of course Boston Harbor, where the events unfolded. In many ways, the Revolution, especially in this early stage, 1773 was really an information and propaganda battle between British authorities and the Sons of Liberty so it was vital that the organization in Boston got their story out to the other colonies as soon as possible. If we think Revere was there, which I think all context really points to him being there, he certainly must have been one of the more sober participants in the Tea Party as he set out for New York the next morning on December 17th, and made great time on the trip, arriving by the night of December 21, so four days to reach New York City. After resting a bit, he returned to Boston on Monday December 27, for a full round trip of 10 days and an arrival that allowed for a New Years celebration, or at least commemoration in the Revere Household as the calendar turned to 1774.

In response to the Tea Party, Parliament, of course, passed a series of measures in 1774, the Coercive Acts and Quebec Act, amongst others. The Coercive Acts essentially worked to close off Boston, and the port of Boston, from the rest of the colonial seaboard and the Atlantic for the colonies. During that tumultuous year of 1774, Revere made trips to Philadelphia, including one in which he carried the famous Suffolk Resolves, through which local leaders in Boston vociferously objected to the measures coming out of London that year. And he brought the Suffolk Resolves to the Continental Congress in Philadelphia. In fact, he became so known for his rides along the eastern seaboard that year and in general that he was reported in London newspapers, including one in which Paul Revere was referenced as “an ambassador from the Committee of Correspondence of Boston to the Congress of Philadelphia.”

In the winter of 1774, Revere famously made a trip through a blizzard to alert Portsmouth, New Hampshire of potential British actions in the area, as word was spreading that regulars were being sent to take possession of Fort William and Mary. Revere braved terrible conditions to bring the word, and though the initial reports turned out to be somewhat overblown, his actions set the Granite State patriots into motion and certainly further solidified his trustworthiness and commitment to the cause.

Finally, Revere actually made a trip to Lexington only a few days before his more famous return visit. On Sunday, April 16, Dr. Joseph Warren sent Revere to Lexington to tip off John Hancock and Samuel Adams, who were already staying out in that area, to impending actions from the British regulars. On the way back, Revere stopped in Charlestown as he was returning to his house in the North End of Boston, and realizing the forthcoming operation in whatever form it took would certainly need multiple fail safes should he be, as a single man, should he be captured or detained to some extent. He, Revere, set into motion and really conceived of the lantern signal system, that would make him famous in the Longfellow poem, and conveyed that information to Colonel William Conant and fellow trusted Sons of Liberty in Charlestown leading into of course, the history that we know and we will talk about more this week on the night of April 18th.

So while one Ride made Revere famous, it was clear he was already an indispensable part of the Sons of Liberty communication system, both in Boston and throughout the colonies, long before April 1775.

As we get into this story quite a bit more this week, be sure to follow us on Facebook, follow us on Twitter, stay in touch in your medium of choice, and really do, please, we want this to be participatory, let us know if you have more questions that you want answered, or things that you are curious about. We will be using this platform certainly this week to bring you the stories and questions on the Midnight Ride itself. But we've also recently launched the Revere Express blog as a vehicle to bring you some great content from our staff on really varied aspects whether it be on the Revere Family, the American Revolution, North End history, the legacy of the house and the Revere Family and Boston's history in general. That really will be a platform in which we can work to answer in a comprehensive form some of the questions that we most often get, and maybe some new questions that are popping up for you during this time at home. If you feel so

inspired, also, we'd like you to participate in a challenge we have for our listeners and supporters over the coming week. The challenge is to recite, to the best of your abilities, the Midnight Ride itself- so send us a photo or video of yourself or family reciting Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem about Paul Revere, and we will certainly work to share it on our social media platforms, and we are encouraging our staff to memorize the poem itself to be ready to convey some of that great information to you in person when we are able to reopen to the public. In the meantime, we will be back tomorrow to tackle that burning question of what Paul Revere actually said on his midnight ride- until then, stay safe, and thanks for listening!

Erratum:

This episode states that Paul Revere was likely a direct participant in the Boston Tea Party. We believe that there is actually insufficient evidence to support the claim that Paul Revere actually participated in destroying the tea that night – though he certainly is conformed to have participated in the action in other ways, such as his work as a messenger the next day.