

### 3.6: If not "The Black Paul Revere," Who was Wentworth Cheswill?: Interview with John Herman

Robert 00:00

Music.

Tegan 00:12

Welcome back to Revere House Radio. I'm Tegan Kehoe, and my guest today is John Herman, a writer who's an expert on the New Hampshire patriot, Wentworth Cheswill. Welcome to the show, John.

John 00:21

Thanks for having me.

Tegan 00:22

Thanks so much for being here. People today sometimes refer to Cheswill as "The Black Paul Revere." And I'm personally not a big fan of the formula of saying that one person was the marginalized equivalent of a more famous person. I think that it usually does both people a disservice. And they definitely had some similarities, but some of the stories floating around -- including that Cheswill was one of the riders on Revere's Midnight Ride -- are not true. So could you start off by giving us a high level summary of who Wentworth Cheswill really was and some of his accomplishments?

John 00:51

Absolutely. In fact, it's like you're quoting from my book, because I do make a point that it's just unfortunate that even me, I got interested in Wentworth Cheswill because I first heard him referred to as "The Black Paul Revere." And I just thought that was so unfortunate, and that he should be remembered by his name. So yes, he is referred to as the "Black Paul Revere," if you google him, but like Revere, he was a messenger for the Committee of Safety, and that's where maybe the connections subside. Wentworth Cheswill was an educator. He was a historian. He was passionate about learning. He was a pioneering archeologist. Was fascinated by indigenous populations and did some digging. He was a prolific community leader in his Town of Newmarket, New Hampshire. He you know...whether he originated some of these roles or just served in them, he served, in some capacity, his community -- whether locally or statewide -- for every year of his life, starting in 1767, when he became kind of like the local law, and then he served all the way up until his death. Went missing one year, and there's like rumors around that.

Tegan 02:08

Uh huh?

John 02:09

So he's like this prolific community leader. He was a soldier. He fought in the American Revolution. Like I said, he was a school teacher. He was inaugural school board member in his community. He was a judge, Justice of the Peace for the county, which was more like a

magistrate, in that time period. And I have gone through so many of his legal documents, and it's amazing that he'll call, like, people to his house to give testimony. I don't think judges would do that nowadays. I can invite potential, like, litigants or criminals to their house, but-

Tegan 02:42

Right.

John 02:42

-he did. He's founder of an early lending library, which is just wonderful. I love it. And he is, he is regarded as the first person of African descent elected to public office in the United States. You know, when I first heard about him, I was like, "This guy is like a...he's like a mixed race 18th Century Indiana Jones," and I just got really passionate about him.

Tegan 03:06

Yeah! You can say a lot of things about Paul Revere. You cannot say that he was an 18th Century Indiana Jones. But I think that that it is true that Revere gets reduced to his Midnight Ride when he had a lot going on and some things in common with Cheswill. But Cheswill definitely shouldn't be reduced to the Midnight Ride, especially because he wasn't a part of it...

John 03:26

Right.

Tegan 03:27

Can you tell us a little bit about yourself and your background and how you got interested in Wentworth Cheswill and his story?

John 03:33

Absolutely, I am a school teacher, and I have a passion for history, and honestly, I drove past his historical marker, which had just been established on South Main Street in Newmarket, New Hampshire, and I was so oblivious that I thought that I had just driven past it many times and not noticed it. And when I read it, I was just so fascinated. There were just different summaries of his life that I was just like, "what??" And I then Googled him, and started to really dig deeper, and was just blown away by how interesting this individual was. I ended up researching him quite a bit for years, almost just as a quirky history hobby, as we all have our quirky history hobbies. And I then realized that his 275th birthday was coming up, so I took it upon myself...I'm a bit- I do some large scale, like, community art projects and things like that in my past. And I decided that I would dedicate a year to art and creation and history education around Wentworth Cheswill for his 275th birthday, which was April...and that's the April of the pandemic.

Tegan 04:41

Oh...

John 04:42

And so everything came to a stop. His birthday is April 11, which would have kicked off everything...

Tegan 04:49  
Right.

John 04:50  
So masked, I ended up ringing the local church bell 275 times and doing all sorts of things, but a lot of the stuff was dialed back. I ended up taking all of my research, and I decided I was going to write a poem and I would take Paul Revere's lead, and I literally wrote a poem called Wentworth Cheswill's Ride.

Tegan 05:13  
Oh, wow.

John 05:13  
And I had like 90 pages of cited research and all this stuff for a two page poem, which I then performed for the community. And after that, I had 90 pages of cited research. And was like, this is just gonna die on my Google Drive...

Tegan 05:31  
Right.

John 05:31  
And I started thinking about a book.

Tegan 05:33  
Very cool. So anniversaries brings up the fact that one of the places that I've encountered Wentworth Cheswill's name is in conjunction with the raid on Fort William and Mary in December 1774. So this December is the 250th anniversary of that and that's outside of Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Paul Revere had delivered a message to Portsmouth area Patriots that military intelligence suggested that the royal forces were about to reinforce this fort and seize its gunpowder and weapons. And in response, local Patriots raided the fort, overtaking the six man garrison and taking possession of the munitions. I understand that it's not certain that Wentworth Cheswill was actually present for this raid, but he did have connections to it with the local Committee of Safety. Could you speak to those connections?

John 06:15  
Absolutely. So first of all, in New Hampshire, this is the start of the American Revolution. In fact, in our local Historical Society Museum, we have a crowbar that busted open Fort William and Mary.

Tegan 06:27  
Oh, wow.

John 06:28

That was passed down from Colonel Tash and all these individuals. I call it "America's Crowbar" in the book.

Tegan 06:35

Oh! That's great.

John 06:35

Yeah. So the history is all around us for this pivotal event. And Wentworth Cheswill was, you know, he was a rider for the Committee of Safety. He was riding in and out of Exeter. And, I mean, the orders came between Portsmouth and Exeter. The person who led the raid was John Langdon, the first day of the raid. And he led three to 400 patriots. And we know of a bunch of them. There were some affidavits afterwards, but we don't know all of them. After the raid several years later, when Wentworth Cheswill enlisted to join the revolution, he fought under John Langdon's personal company. And that...that connection is there. When Paul Revere actually came up, dialing back to the actual December 1774, he rode into Portsmouth, rode into Market Square to find Samuel Cuts, which was his counterpart, and they moved Paul to Studeley's Tavern, which was built by Wentworth Cheswill's father- -and that's where this meeting happened between the various Committees of Correspondence. And then messages went out after the raid, after the munitions and cannons and things were hidden various communities, including Newmarket -- Wentworth Cheswill's community. Wentworth Cheswill was noted as building rafts to protect Portsmouth Harbor if the regulars came up river to grab that stuff back. So we don't know if he was there. He knows a lot of the people that were there. He was on committees with the people who we know were there. But I can't, you know, after researching for the book, I couldn't, like, authoritatively claim that he was there.

Tegan 08:18

Yeah.

John 08:18

But there were a few 100 people there that we don't know. And he was likely to be there.

Tegan 08:23

Yeah, and we're not sure whether Paul Revere was there himself. It had long been believed that he did a one day or one night trip to Portsmouth and then back to Boston. But about 10 years ago, a researcher who, I think was like yourself, someone who just kind of got into something as a hobby and then got, you know, became the expert on it...

John 08:42

Right. I was looking for the expert. By the way, I keep shuddering when you call me an expert. But I spent years looking for the expert, and then I suddenly started to become that individual, I realized.

Tegan 08:54

Yeah, yeah, no, I always think it's a really cool process when that happens...but this researcher I'm mentioning -- Peter Flood -- compared the bill that Revere had, had written for his time and for his horse rental to other bills, and said "there's no way he's charging five or six times the amount as he normally does for one night for this trip. I mean, the roads were treacherous, but he wouldn't be able to get away with, with charging that much..."

John 09:19

Right.

Tegan 09:20

"...I think this was a five or six night trip, rather than a one night trip." And so he has pretty conclusively demonstrated that Revere was in New Hampshire for the raid.

John 09:29

Yeah, that's excellent. I actually hadn't heard whether or not Revere, or the research behind whether or not Revere was there. That's awesome.

Tegan 09:36

Right. And him staying in town does not prove that he was present for the raid, that he was doing the raiding,

John 09:42

Right...I don't know. The second day of the raid, there were apparently like 1600 people. The raid was two days, and the first day was 3 to 400 people. And then day two, Sullivan from Durham came -- John Sullivan -- and he had like 1600 people ready from various militias in Massachusetts and New Hampshire. So I don't know, if Paul was around...?

Tegan 10:02

Right, no...it feels like he was there. And I think that's that kind of brings us to something else I wanted to talk about, which is that people feel like certain historical figures were in certain places. I think both Revere and Cheswill get credited for being present at events that the historical record may or may not bear out for us. We often get asked whether Revere was at the Boston Tea Party...

John 10:23

Right.

Tegan 10:23

And the answer...you know, we have to say we're not sure. We do think he was, based on some circumstantial things and some information that was published many decades later, but, but we can't actually say for sure. Right. I've got something for you- Oh, yeah, please.

John 10:39

The one year that Wentworth Cheswill was not serving in some public office lines up to when John Langdon went to the Constitutional Convention. And there are rumors -- because Wentworth Cheswill was like a folk hero, and folk hero collects these rumors, just like Paul Revere -- but one of those rumors is that he was part of John Langdon's entourage and went down and was part of, you know, drafting the Constitution. And I'm just- people have asked me that, and I'm just, like, "I don't even know where that came from." It's like- but it's- people have been talking about that for over 100 years.

Tegan 11:12

Yeah, no, that's really interesting, because that's yeah, if you don't have the documentation, you can't say yes, even if you want to.

John 11:17

Right.

Tegan 11:18

Yeah. And we know that there were many riders on the night of Paul Revere's most famous Midnight Ride. And many of them, we know their names, and many -- and by "we" I mean "history" -- and many of them are not. But I haven't personally encountered any evidence that we would think, historically speaking, that Wentworth Cheswill was one of the riders. Why do you think that people sometimes say that Cheswill was a part of the Midnight Ride?

John 11:44

Right...When I first started researching, you would have thought that Wentworth Cheswill and Paul Revere, hand in hand, were riding on horses. And I think that's probably...I don't know, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's fault? I think during the, like, Paul Revere fever of the past 100 years, if there was talk of a ride -- a patriotic ride -- everybody just assumed it was this ride.

Tegan 11:51

Right. Right.

John 12:10

And to make matters even more confusing is...you have Paul Revere coming to New Hampshire and having interactions with people who were very close to Wentworth Cheswill. So, you know, I think people just assumed, like, "oh" - because I have heard, "Oh," you know, "Paul went west and Wentworth went north" and like- -I don't know where any of this comes from. But there's just so much. I have found, just so much folklore, and I think that that's almost exciting. I don't know what happens when a historical figure stops just being non-fiction, and society takes them and starts to color their life with fanciful stories. So I don't exactly, like, reject them. I try to collect them. So I do debunk a lot of those things. But they're still fun -- like they're still interesting, and they talk to the...his popularity and his, like, ability to, you know, provoke the imagination, just like Paul Revere.

Tegan 12:30

Right Yeah. And, I mean, I think that the, the Paul Revere House Museum probably would not exist if not for that sort of history folklore. the facts are important. He was important in the American Revolution. But the momentum to make his home into a historic site in a museum -- and that was in the early 20th century -- wouldn't have been there if he hadn't become a folk hero in-between Longfellow's poem at that point. And Longfellow published his poem well after Revere's death, that came out in 1860. I agree that we want to contextualize those myths and recognize when they are myths, but that doesn't mean we want them to go away or that they don't have some kind of value.

John 13:50

Yeah. I mean, I can get, I can really get going. And if we have three or four more hours, then there's a lot. There's a lot of folklore around Wentworth Cheswill, including his family's origins and associations with the Wentworth family of governors. And there's just a ton of strange and interesting things, collected over the years.

Tegan 14:10

Yeah! Well, because we have to pick one direction of a pick the many directions we could go in in talking about him: can you tell us more about Cheswill's role on the American Revolution?

John 14:19

Absolutely. So Wentworth Cheswill signed the Association Test of 1776. He's regarded as one of only two people of color to do so. And this was a document that was a way to kind of pressure individuals into saying they were for the patriotic cause or not. If you didn't sign it, there were repercussions. John Langdon immediately enters the scene. John Langdon wasn't just the person who headed the raid and eventually fought with Wentworth Cheswill. He personally bankrolled the New Hampshire militia. He was very pivotal in New Hampshire's contribution to the Revolutionary War. He ended up overseeing the organization of the continental navy. He signed the US Constitution and ended up serving as New Hampshire's governor. But Wentworth Cheswill, he joined Langdon's company of light horse volunteers and fought in John Stark's brigade and rode the 250 miles to Saratoga, New York, and was in the battles of Saratoga, which was, you know, our first major victory that really started to change things.

Tegan 15:26

Yeah.

John 15:27

And after that, I believe he came home. He had a lot of kids, he had business, and he came back to his hometown.

Tegan 15:35

Yeah. So his life is starting to parallel Paul Revere's again in talking about that, because Revere also served during the Revolutionary War, although his military career was not super successful. He spent a somewhat low-key year on Castle Island in the Boston Harbor, and was involved in the Penobscott expedition in Maine, which completely fell apart. And Revere was given, I think,

the equivalent of a dishonorable discharge for that, although he was eventually acquitted of most of the related charges. So I think that Cheswill's career is a little bit less tarnished.

John 16:09

It's less controversial, I guess. I actually address Paul Revere's exploits during the war, because we always hear about it -- the pre-war Paul Revere -- but I address that in the forward because I'm very aware that, you know, an entry point to Wentworth Cheswill is Paul Revere.

Tegan 16:26

Yeah.

John 16:26

It is. But if anybody wants to get a juicy take on Paul Revere, it's in the forward. It's like a revolutionary like...shadow government. Very much so.

Tegan 16:32

Great, yeah. And I also want to backtrack a little bit to give context for this Committee of Safety, because that's something that...a term that you and I might, you know, throw back and forth easily, because we're steeped in this stuff, but for listeners: So both Cheswill and Paul Revere worked for their respective Committees of Safety, and that was a body that was created, typically by a revolutionary branch of the town or county government. So in Massachusetts, the Committees of Safety, usually came out of the Committees of Correspondence, and then the provincial government. And so this is local people gearing up for war, and during the war when they're recognizing that they're not considering themselves subjects of Parliament anymore, and so they need to take matters into their own hands. The Committee of Safety is kind of the main administrative body for starting to do that and preparations. Yeah. And so Revere...some of the messages that he carried in the revolution were on behalf of the Committee of Safety. And so that's also Cheswill's connection to -- or the completely documented connection to -- the raid that we were talking about earlier.

John 17:43

Yeah.

Tegan 17:43

You've mentioned that Cheswill is mixed race, and I know that he's sometimes given credit for being the first Black person or person of African ancestry elected to public office in the United States. Can you tell us a little bit of the context of that, both in his life and in terms of how he's been remembered?

John 18:00

Absolutely, his family story is very interesting. His grandfather, Richard, was enslaved in Exeter, and Exeter was the provincial kind of revolutionary capital for New Hampshire. He was freed in around 1709, and he had a son named Hopstill. Hopstill went on to build, you know, sea captain's houses and taverns and all these things in Portsmouth and like, 100 years later, he



was remembered for being mixed race and being...you know, building these structures and not being able to enter the house once it had been framed for, like, a housewarming party or something, unless the owner came out and escorted him in. So, like, he was notable, like, 100 years later for his, his race. And even today, you go to historical sites in Portsmouth that mention the Cheswills, race is the first thing that they will mention when it comes to Hopestill.

Tegan 19:04

And I imagine that it had a big influence on his life. And if he's, you know, actively facing discrimination on a regular basis, can't enter the houses he's building as a housewright.

John 19:13

Right. But he was very successful, and he amassed a lot of land. He kept buying up land, and he bought up resources, like shares within mills so that he was...he didn't have to answer to anyone. This is Hopestill. And then he invested all of that into his son, Wentworth Cheswill, and literally started giving the child all of his land and invested in his education. By the time Wentworth Cheswill had come of age, he was already on the road to being one of the more educated people in his community, as well as one of the richest, and certainly died one of the richest people in his community. So we can infer a lot of things, but like, within three generations, we went from enslavement to literally, the leaders in their community. So it's, it's just a fascinating tale what sort of, you know, racism or....they endured. We, we don't know. We do know that there were, you know, in 1767, when Wentworth Cheswill married, there were 29 enslaved people in his community. We know that from the census there were many mixed race individuals enslaved. After the war, years later, George Washington toured the area -- like a victory tour -- and he visited Portsmouth. He stayed with John Langdon. And then later, the Washington's enslaved housemaid escaped in Philadelphia and found her way to Portsmouth, and John Langdon was involved in making sure she was not recaptured-

Tegan 20:55

Oh, wow.

John 20:56

- even though he loved George Washington, and everybody loved George Washington. That woman's name was Ona Judge. She had the same kind of mixed racial background as Wentworth Cheswill. So we have two people with similar family backgrounds, when it comes to race and perception, but very different lives. And it just shows the complexity of that time period when it comes to race.

Tegan 21:22

Absolutely, absolutely. And race was always the excuse and never the reason for enslavement, and the fact that, given different circumstances, they had these wildly different lives, you know, is evidence of that. Thank you for that context. Now I want to come back to another way in which Cheswill and Revere were actually similar, and that's that they both served in public service roles. For example, Revere was the first chairman of Boston's Board of Health and served a number of other roles. But it sounds like Cheswill's public service roles were bigger

and higher status than Revere, so can you tell us about Cheswill's career after the revolution in particular?

John 21:56

Yeah, absolutely. So he he owned a business. He actually had a store next door to his schoolhouse. So he was a businessman. He was also a farmer, and owned lots and lots of land and mill shares and things like that. So he was a prominent businessman, but he served as a community selectman many times, and did all of the kind of town offices, he just went through all of them. He was assessor, and auditor, and he was the coroner for multiple years.

Tegan 22:30

That's actually another Revere connection.

John 22:31

Really??

Tegan 22:32

Yeah.

John 22:32

He was a coroner?

Tegan 22:33

Yeah.

John 22:33

Wow...He was a state rep. He was the town moderator for many years, but in his- the last decade and of his life, he was a county justice of the peace, and like I said, that was a little bit more like a magistrate. When I see those legal documents, they are, they are what you expect from a county judge. And I have seen, you know, if you just wildly do online searches for Wentworth Cheswill --as I'm apt to do -- he has been named the first African American judge or the...so a lot of a lot of roads go to Wentworth Cheswill, in terms of his service, his service. And, like I said, there's that one mystery year that we don't know what he was doing.

Tegan 23:18

Right. Yeah. And I keep pointing out similarities between them, even though I opened with saying, you know, don't, don't make them too similar. But I think that really the similarity is that both of them were very civic-minded and civically involved people, and so that...being a civic-minded person doesn't make you Paul Revere any more than being a civic-minded person makes you Wentworth Cheswill. They were, they were in similar networks and similar worlds, with some differences.

John 23:22

I don't know very much about Paul Revere's education, but Wentworth Cheswill -- I said that Hopstill, like, invested in his education, didn't really quantify that: but Wentworth was part of the inaugural class of Dummer Academy, which became the Governor's Academy. Wentworth Cheswill literally shared a room. And we have a diary from one of the students that talked about these four boys sharing a bed with Samuel Phillips, who went on to create Phillips Andover Academy --

Tegan 23:45

Oh, wow.

John 23:55

-- and who's benefactor created Phillips Exeter Academy in Exeter. So when I was doing research, on Wentworth Cheswill, it was almost like...I'm gonna date myself, but like in Forrest Gump, and there's this scene where they plug Forrest Gump into a montage of historic, important historical moments. And that's how- the more I researched Wentworth Cheswill, it was like, he was probably standing right next to the person. Maybe he met...like George Washington, visited Exeter, and shook hands with some of the veterans and things like that. And one of the people that hosted that was, like, the head of the militia in that community, who also fought with Wentworth Cheswill. And I was like, Wentworth Cheswill was probably there.

Tegan 25:00

Right.

John 25:00

I keep thinking that.

Tegan 25:01

Yeah, yeah, that's interesting. And I think that he and Revere kind of came to that, to that position of being "probably there" for so many things, from a somewhat different position, because Revere actually did not have as much formal education as Cheswill. He had a writing school education. So that's kind of the equivalent of a seventh or eighth grade education. And then he was apprenticed to his father as a silversmith. His only inheritance was a silversmith shop, which certainly put him in a much better position than many in Boston, but it did not make him upper class by any stretch of the imagination. But over the course of his life, Revere was able to leverage some business connections, some mother's side of his family connections, and his Masonic connections, and was able to be someone who, you know, knew all of the people whose names we still know today, in Boston and the American Revolution.

John 25:51

Oh, I've got...okay.

Tegan 25:51

Go ahead.

John 25:52

He was...Wentworth Cheswill is a Mason as well.

Tegan 25:54

Oh, really?

John 25:55

In fact, I found among, you know, Masonic historical documents that Wentworth Cheswill was the first -- and I don't want to mis-title -- the leader of a lodge. I can't remember what the...what his title was. But he was impeached. He was the first person to be impeached. And I-

Tegan 26:15

What was, why was he impeached?

John 26:16

I know, right. And so I went through it, and I discovered that he was impeached because he quit.

Tegan 26:24

Okay...?

John 26:25

And so...and why he quit, we will never know. But he was the leader of a Masonic lodge that he attended with his son, and he eventually walked away from it, and we don't know why, but now one of his weird accolade -- not accolade, but...

Tegan 26:42

One of his "firsts"?

John 26:43

Yeah, is that he was one of the first leaders to be impeached.

Tegan 26:48

Interesting.

John 26:48

Yep.

Tegan 26:49

So you referenced your book about Wentworth Cheswill, which I think came out earlier this year. Can you tell us a little bit more about it?

John 26:54

Absolutely. So the book, it basically takes three generations of the family, and just lays it out. It is a little bit more personal. I have been given the feedback that my passion and earnestness

around history is what has inspired others in my community to be really interested. So to tell the story of how I got involved, and I discovered these things and did some research, is kind of the tone of the book. With that said, I, you know, had all of this research for a poem, and just was like, "I, I need to do something with this." This is...it felt too important to hold on to. So I crafted a book that is slim. I wanted it to be around 100 pages so people would read it. I wanted it to be readable. It's funny, when I passed it through a bunch of historians that are quoted in the book and a bunch of editors, and I found that the historians had more criticism. I'm an English teacher, so I'm not saying that I didn't have, like, grammatical errors, but, like, I I kind of knew the grammar part of it, but the historians had lots of criticisms because they wanted the history to, like, sing and be readable. And so it was really fun as a writer, to get more feedback from historians, I guess, not about the history, but about the readability of the history?

Tegan 28:22

Yeah.

John 28:23

So I can tell you, hopefully it's a readable history. And it's a...kind of a fascinating look at someone that is, you know, tragically, not very well known. Things are changing. I was inspired to come out with a book, also because the community where I live is strongly pondering building a monument in his honor. And there is a grassroots effort. We've raised 1000s of dollars at this point, but we need 1000s of dollars more, and monument is quite pricey. But I knew that I needed to help contribute to raising his profile in a way that was authoritative, that had research citations, like because there's so much folklore.

Tegan 29:11

Yeah.

John 29:12

So I went about doing that. And you know, hopefully in the next few years, you'll you'll hear that there is a monument in his honor.

Tegan 29:19

That's great. You've mentioned that he was a folk hero and also that he sort of faded into obscurity. Do you have any sense of when and why he went from folk hero to forgotten historical figure, and why that's starting to shift back?

John 29:34

Yeah...I have spoken to descendants of his. I have spoken to local historians in that region, and it's all kind of conjecture, and it's all...we can only infer. But the racial debate of the mid 20th Century did not help the situation. The community where he lived became a mill town. He died in 1817, And the first large stone mill was built in 1824, and that town self-identifies as a mill town. These are massive mills. When you drive through town.

Tegan 30:11

And his story doesn't fit in that.

John 30:13

No, no, and they're...the colonial history and the revolutionary history definitely takes a backseat to a much more visual part of the town. And when there was a resurgence in the 60s to create local historical societies, and then in the 70s, when the Bicentennial happened, everyone got inspired about local history. By then, he hadn't been a part of the story for several decades.

Tegan 30:13

Huh.

John 30:13

He never completely disappeared. There were some academic papers over the years and he would pop up. I have found many, many people kind of carried the torch on his story. But you jump to the 1910s or the late 1800s and there's articles that you know he is celebrated. He's in local histories. He's...and he's not just the facts, it's all these, like, whimsical tales of Wentworth Chiswill. So that was lost mid-century, and we can only infer why.

Tegan 31:10

Yeah. Fascinating. Well, thank you so much for joining me on Revere House Radio, John. Before we close, I'd like to ask: What has studying Wentworth Chiswell taught you about this period in American history?

John 31:21

So much. I'll admit, I've always been passionate about history, but not the American Revolution, not not even the colonial period in America. And you know, to be so passionate about this for the past decade now, I have learned personally, so much. And there are just so many things to discover about our local history, that it's out there, and people just need to find it. And I have just enjoyed that. It's a complex era. Things changed from month to month. People were on one side and then another side, and it was a very complex time period, and it's driven by philosophy and, like, values. So everybody is, like, making these decisions to be treasonous or not, or sign the associates, like sign these things or not, knowing that they they could be hanged.

Tegan 32:16

Yeah.

John 32:17

So anyway, it's just a fascinating time.

Tegan 32:20

Yeah. I always try to have people come away with, if we're talking about the American Revolution, the idea that the patriots were not defined by wanting to break away from Great Britain and independence. That's a late part of their story, and their story when they started out, very few patriots wanted independence. They wanted reform. They wanted change. They

wanted to change their relationship with parliament. It varied colony to colony and town to town and month to month, as you said. And that kind of...that complexity, if, even if someone's not coming away from the Paul Revere House with the details of that complexity, having at least the thought that that complexity exists, I think is a big part of learning about this period.

John 33:01

Yeah, absolutely. Well, thanks for having me, by the way.

Tegan 33:04

Yeah, no, thank you so much for being here. We just heard from John Herman about the New Hampshire patriot, Wentworth Cheswill. Now listeners, if you'll follow me, we'll step into the Paul Revere House for our next segment: our favorite questions. So welcome to the our favorite questions segment of the podcast. And today, I'm speaking with Dr. Robert Shimp, who longtime listeners of the podcast will, of course, remember as one of the original co-hosts of the podcast and my predecessor as Research and Adult Program Director here at the Paul Revere House. Welcome to the show, Robert. Welcome back, I should say.

Robert 33:52

Yeah! Thanks for having me, Tegan, it's great. And I'm so excited that you are rebooting this, getting, getting things going again. Revere House Radio is one of those real bright moments in some very strange times in 2020. Adrienne and I had a lot of fun with it, putting it together, and I'm really excited that you have it rolling again, and I'm thrilled to be on the episode here.

Tegan 34:15

I'm so glad so to start off, can you tell us a little bit about what you're up to these days?

Robert 34:20

Sure, yes. So I am currently in my office in Lakewood, Ohio. So I am the director of the Lakewood Historical Society. And again, I do specify Lakewood, Ohio from all the calls we get from Lakewood, Colorado and Lakewood, Washington and Lakewood, New Jersey. There are a few other Lakewood historical societies and Lakewoods, you know, bopping around the country. But, you know, basically running the show here. So we're a pretty small operation. It's just myself and one part-time office administrator. We rely heavily on volunteers to run our operations, oversee our buildings. We have three different buildings that we administer: the 1834, Oldest Stone House Museum in Lakewood Park, the 1835 Nicholson House -- It's a wood frame structure -- and then we're in a mid-century modern restored office building here from 1958. So I've transitioned to slightly newer buildings, but still some greatly historically important structures for the community. So it's been a great transition. I'm here with my wife, Megan, which many folks will know, and now our now two-year-old daughter Tilly, who's, you know, running around and helped me with building checks last week when all the all the power was out. So she's getting indoctrinated into the world of historic buildings and history at a young age. So that's great.

Tegan 35:38

That's wonderful. So thinking back to your time here at the Paul Revere House, of course, we always get all kinds of questions from visitors, and many of these interviews are with interpreters, but our senior staff are also in the house answering questions, and it's often one of the real fun parts of the job. So what was one of your favorite questions that visitors asked you regularly here.

Robert 36:01

Yeah, I think it's kind of similar, almost two sides of the same coin, but some iteration of, well, "Why don't you talk about Dawes?" and "Was the ride actually important? Or did Revere, like, actually do anything?" So, you know, it's a somewhat connected question there. And I like that because it allowed us to -- or allowed me to -- kind of branch into a few different things that I that I really love talking about. I think the Dawes angle certainly allowed us to both highlight Dawes and also remind people that in many ways, people still ask about Dawes because of Revere and the poem itself. So it's somewhat leading back to Dawes, and you wouldn't have known to ask that question, you know, in the first place. And "Was the ride important?" Or, you know, "How important was the ride?": I always like to take that and put it in context and say, like, you know, I would argue that it certainly was important, though things might have played out...you know, Nina, our Executive Director, would often say, maybe things play out the same way, but I think the ride was certainly approximately important. But I always like to use that as a launching as a launching off point of well, while we know Revere for these few hours, I would argue, certainly what he did, you know, especially in the early 19th century, had far more of a profound impact on the direction of the United States. You know, especially as I'm here right on Lake Erie and in the Great Lakes region. You know, some of the work that he did with copper rolling, really the United States Navy on such a good footing against the British and the war of 1812 you know, a conflict in which the Americans did not have much to hang their hat on. But early in the war they did in the Great Lakes region, and almost directly as a result of some of Revere's work and some of the work that he had done on that front. So I always like those as ways to, you know, somewhat challenge the people that ask those questions and lead the conversation in these directions that you know, allowed us to get into some fun conversation points that folks might not have known, and allowed us to really talk more about the broader scope of not just Revere's career, but you know, of the complexity of the Ride and the early revolution itself.

Tegan 38:09

Yeah, definitely. And yeah, we're, we're just kind of one piece of the story, but also Revere's and Dawes' Midnight Ride, and the others who were involved in the Midnight Ride, is just one piece of of each of their stories as well. And what's one of your favorite questions that a visitor has ever asked you at the Paul Revere House? And how did you answer that one?

38:28

Yeah, I had two for this one as well. One was, "Was Revere the president after Washington?" or so...you know that one, these both have pretty quick answers. And then the other one, which, which really threw me for a loop was a kid had asked -- you know, I think a third grader in the courtyard as he's looking up at the, you know, what is admittedly, a kind of a crazy roof, and, you know, going into the the apartment building, that's a very atypical structure -- but in all



sincerity, looked up and wondered if anyone had ever parkour'd off the roof before. And I said, "Not to my knowledge. I'm sure there have been some very weird things going on, and you could do some, you know, crazy action, I think, over there," but I certainly had not done it myself. I could answer that way.

Tegan 39:14

I actually I like the, you know, "Revere as president" question, because people come to us with so many different levels of knowledge. And also, you know, there is kind of this, this sense that, "Oh, famous guy from back then, that means he must have been president, right?" Because that's the type of famous guy that we have a framework for understanding what that is. So I have not gotten that question before, but I like it. And what's a question that you wish that visitors had asked you more often, or a topic you wished they had asked you about. And I think when others on the podcast, when we're talking about this, it's less of a downer, because they still might but now you've moved on. So there are different questions that visitors are asking you. But, but is there anything that you wished you could have shared more often with visitors?

Robert 39:58

Yeah! I think actually, almost directly to your point there about Revere's representativeness, you know, in early America, I wish that folks would have -- this could be a very, you know, slippery slope in terms of, careful what you wish for, especially in election years -- but I do wish that folks would have asked a little bit more, or I would have had a chance to talk about Revere's political leanings a little bit more actually, you know, in terms of where he sat within his ilk and society, thinking about mechanics and where he is...what we know about his politics of, you know, being a Federalist, and, you know, what that meant at the time, thinking about his views as a businessman, and his kind of anti-Jeffersonian tact. And just what that meant in context, and tying in some of the, you know, the highly local things, like, you know, his work on the, you know, theater bill, and supporting the repeal of the anti-theater bill in 1792 I believe, so you can, you know, go down some rabbit holes there. But I do wish that we would have had, yeah, an opportunity where I could have talked about that a little bit more, I think, to your point, breaking Revere out of this...both out of this, like, "Oh, he's a, you know, famous white guy, so must be in this, you know, camp, or, you know, of this ilk," which he certainly was not, while also, then kind of teasing that out in a more, you know, more comprehensive way than we often get a chance to to, you know, talk about representation, that he had things that he was passionate about, and maybe some of the ways that he kind of zigged off of a traditional capital "F" Federalist. So he was certainly, you know, aspiring to many of those things. But, you know, sometimes the the time that we have is is, of course, limited, but, you know, some more of those questions from visitors. And who knows? Again, maybe this is the year that they come out too!

Tegan 41:42

All right, well, those are all of my questions for you, but thank you so much for popping in on the show again. And yeah, thanks for your time.

Robert 41:51

Yeah, of course. Thank you, Tegan.

Tegan 41:53

And that is a wrap on season three of Revere House Radio. Thank you so much for tuning in. If you like what you've been hearing, please subscribe on your favorite podcast app if you haven't already, and spread the word. If you have any questions or feedback about the show, you can contact us at [staff@paulreverehouse.org](mailto:staff@paulreverehouse.org). We'll be back in 2025 with more interviews. 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, Katie Stefani, Gabe Queeley, and Adrienne Turnbull-Riley. 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@www.paulreverehouse.org](http://www.paulreverehouse.org), or come visit us in Boston!