

Paul Revere at the Crossroads of the Revolution

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Framing Question:

How did the motives of ordinary people affect their role in the revolution on April 19, 1775?

Main Ideas:

- Lexington and Concord were an extension of the goings on in Boston.
- Paul Revere's ride is immortalized in Longfellow's poem.
- Paul Revere was a tradesman and citizen in Boston whose family had lived there for several generations.
- Paul Revere was very motivated in his revolutionary activities and his responsibility in his ride to Lexington and Concord.
- One must discern between fiction and reality regarding information about Paul Revere.

Background:

With the Treaty of Paris (1763) concluding the French and Indian War, Britain now controlled an empire that spanned the globe. A result of the war (called the Seven Years War in British history), Great Britain found itself in political control of a vast empire but economically lacking in the necessary funds to administer its new holdings. A consequence of this financial situation was Great Britain's fiscal policy towards its previous and new colonies. Britain began taxing its colonies in order to help pay for the war and for their administration.

The first tax to be levied upon their Atlantic seaboard colonies (13 in number!) was the Sugar Act. While this tax actually lowered the tax on sugar and sugar products, Great Britain abandoned its policy of *salutary neglect* for a more vigorous and hands-on administration of her colonies. The Sugar Act was followed by the Stamp Act, Townshend Revenue acts, the Declaratory Act, the Tea Act and finally the Coercive (Intolerable) Acts.

Many inhabitants of these colonies stretching along the coast from modern day Maine to Georgia resented this perceived intrusion of the British Parliament into the affairs of their colonial government and economies. To show their "displeasure" with Great Britain's new policies individuals and groups of colonists organized acts of disobedience that expressed their mounting frustration and resentment to Britain's new policies. These efforts ultimately resulted in the American War of Independence, which saw the American colonies leave Great Britain and form a new nation.

In order to successfully wage this revolution against Britain, the colonies needed to have many individuals step forward and become "heroes" for the cause of American independence. One such individual among the many who stepped to the fore was Paul Revere, a prominent silversmith of Boston. Today, he is noted for his role in the Sons of Liberty and in the events of the first battle of Lexington and Concord. While Paul's actions and heroism was similar to many others of this timeframe, a poem written by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "Paul Revere's Ride" has helped make this patriot to the cause of American independence an icon in American history.

Document One: Paul Revere's Ride by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

View this document online at the EServer Poetry Collection website:

<http://poetry.eserver.org/paul-revere.html>

In 1863 as America was in the midst of her Second American Revolution, many sought to remind Americans of the tenacity and philosophy upon which the heroes of 1776 fought to create the American nation. To drive his point home, the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow penned the now famous poem "Paul Revere's Ride," which has made the silversmith and member of the Sons of Liberty from Boston an example of a Revolutionary War hero amongst the likes of George Washington, John Adams, and Benjamin Franklin.

Document Two: Paul Revere's Deposition, 24 April 1775.

View this document online at the Massachusetts Historical Society's website: <http://www.masshist.org/database/98>

In order to leave a written and "accurate" record of his role in the events of the Battles of Lexington and Concord, Paul Revere gave a deposition to the Massachusetts Provincial Government. In this deposition, Mr. Revere outlined and gave a description of his "comings and goings" on the evening of April 18, 1775, into the fateful day of April 19th. His role, in his own words, explains how the countryside was warned through his (and others') efforts to spread news of the impending British military action upon Concord, Massachusetts. In his deposition he explains how he was notified of British movements, his ride, and his ultimate capture by British authorities outside the village of Concord.

Questions:

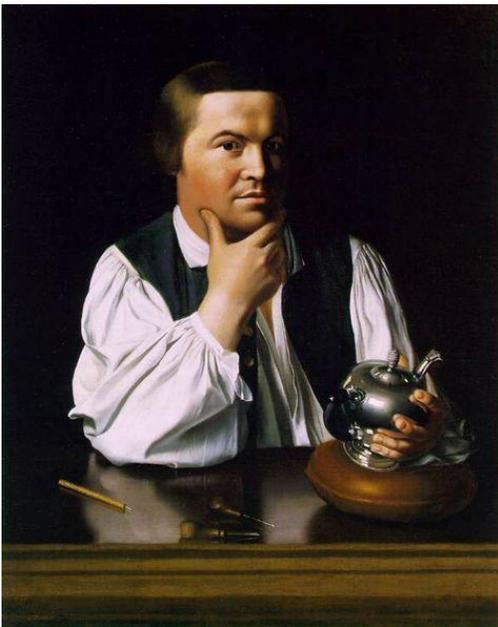
1. Identify and explain three historical similarities found in both Longfellow's poem and Revere's deposition.
2. Identify and explain three historical "differences" found between Longfellow's poem and Revere's deposition.
3. Explain why Longfellow possibly takes the "liberties" with historical facts that he does.
4. Explain why Longfellow's poem has made Paul Revere an American icon and patriot in the fight for independence despite its historical inaccuracies.
5. Should American history be remembered and or taught through poems, anecdotes, and short stories or through primary source documents and textbooks? Give illustrative evidence to support your opinion.

Artifact: Sons of Liberty Bowl (Rescinders Bowl) ca. 1768, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
<http://www.mfa.org/collections/index.asp>

Paul Revere was commissioned to make this silver bowl to commemorate the actions of 92 Massachusetts legislators in the House of Representatives who refused to rescind a letter protesting the Townshend Acts. The Townshend Acts taxed colonists on glass, paper, tea, and other goods imported from England. The legislators were labeled as the “Glorious Ninety-Two” The bowl is called the Liberty Bowl or sometimes the Rescinders Bowl.



The Liberty Bowl represents Paul Revere’s work as a silversmith and tradesman; he was very talented, and a mason, however he was an ordinary citizen/colonist of Boston. The bowl also represents Revere’s patriot leanings. Because many names of the Sons of Liberty are engraved on the Bowl, it is fascinating to think that this bowl, identifying specific men who committed treason against the Crown, was bumping around during the Revolution. In addition to the Liberty Bowl, Revere created many fine examples of silver cups, tankards, ladles, spoons, etc. The selection of the Liberty Bowl as the artifact allowed me to tie in the Paul Revere portrait (1768) by John Singleton Copley.



<http://www.mfa.org/collections/index.asp>

Questions:

1. How does Paul Revere represent the ordinary citizen?
2. How did the various taxation Acts impact Paul Revere's business
3. How did the Revolution impact Paul Revere's business as a printer?
4. How did the Revolution impact Paul Revere's business as a silversmith?
5. Can we determine to what extent Paul Revere's trade is important to his identity?

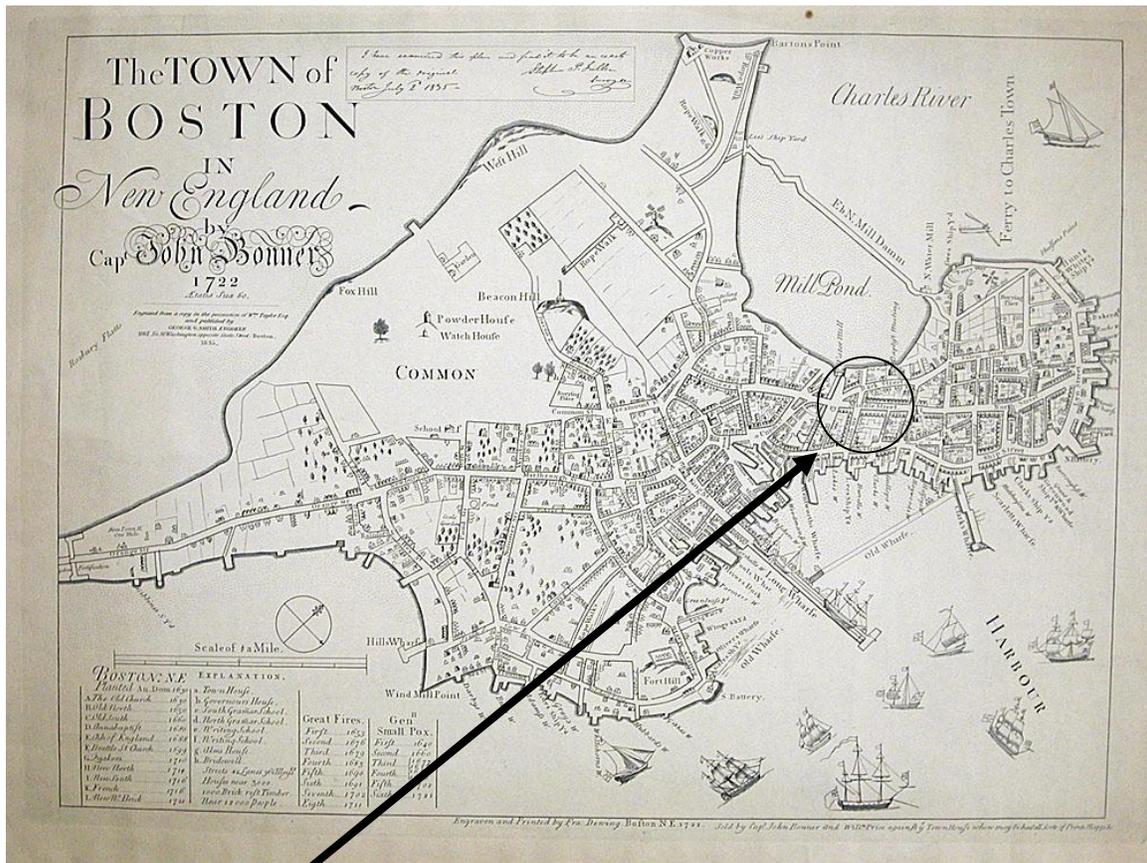
Landscape: Paul Revere home, 19 North Square, Boston, MA.

<http://www.paulreverehouse.org/>

The first owner of the new two-story townhouse on North Square was Robert Howard, a wealthy merchant. By the mid-eighteenth century, the front roof line of the building had been raised and a partial third story added. Paul Revere purchased the home in 1770, moving his family here from their Clark's Wharf residence. The former merchant's dwelling proved ideal for Revere's growing family, which in 1770 included his wife, Sarah, five children, and his mother Deborah.

Paul Revere owned the home from 1770 to 1800, although he and his family may not have lived here in some periods in the 1780s and 1790s. After Revere sold the home in 1800, it soon became a tenement, and the ground floor was remodeled for use as shops, including at various times a candy store, cigar factory, bank and vegetable and fruit business.





Paul Revere's Neighborhood

The Town of Boston in New England by Capt. John Bonner, 1722.

View this map online at the Massachusetts Historical Society's website: <http://www.masshist.org/database/1733>

Questions:

1. How does the location of Paul Revere's house relate to his impact on society?
2. What sort of rooms and items would one find in Paul Revere's home during the Revolutionary era?
3. How did the Revolution impact Paul Revere's neighborhood?
4. How does Paul Revere's home show his economic status?
5. Instead of a truck and car and the person on the phone, what would we see instead just outside Paul Revere's house at the start of the Revolution?