What a Character!

HEROES OF THE WAR FOR INDEPENDENCE

Notable Lives from History





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First printing: April 2024

Master Books, P.O. Box 726, Green Forest, AR 72638

Master Books® is a division of the New Leaf Publishing Group, LLC.

ISBN: 978-1-68344-364-3
ISBN: 978-1-61458-879-5 (digital)
Library of Congress Control Number: 2024933989

Cover: Diana Bogardus
Interior: Terry White

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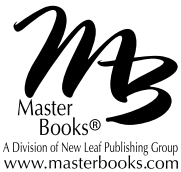

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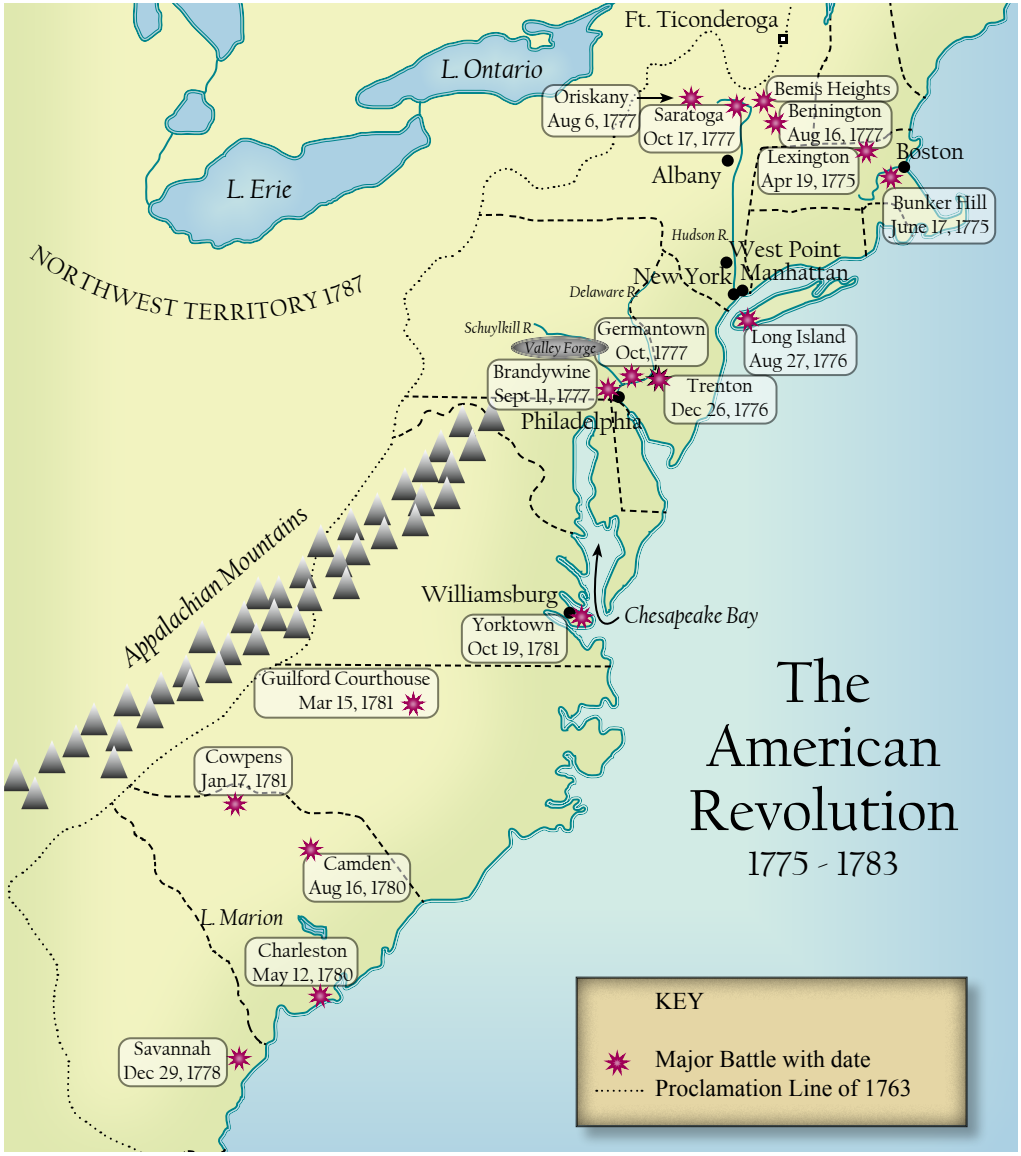
The War of Independence

The French and Indian War had been fought in the colonies. (Native peoples or Native Americans are terms used more often now.) The British were fighting the French in North America. King George III had his eye on land in Canada and the Ohio River Valley, but French settlements were already there, and the king of France intended to keep them. War seemed to be the only way to resolve the issue. Most of the Native tribes of the region sided with the French and fought fiercely, but the British forces and their native allies won. King George got what he wanted; however, the war proved very costly for Britain. The expenses he accumulated in winning would have a direct bearing on another war 13 years later.

After the French and Indian War, tensions between Britain and its American colonies began to rise. Even though Britain had won the prior war, the cost of it had hurt their economy deeply. To help pay

off these debts, Britain started taxing the colonies more. The colonists didn't like this because they felt they should have more say in the decisions that affected them. This led to protests and disagreements between the colonists and the British government. Eventually, these tensions would explode into the American Revolution, where the colonists fought for their independence from Britain.



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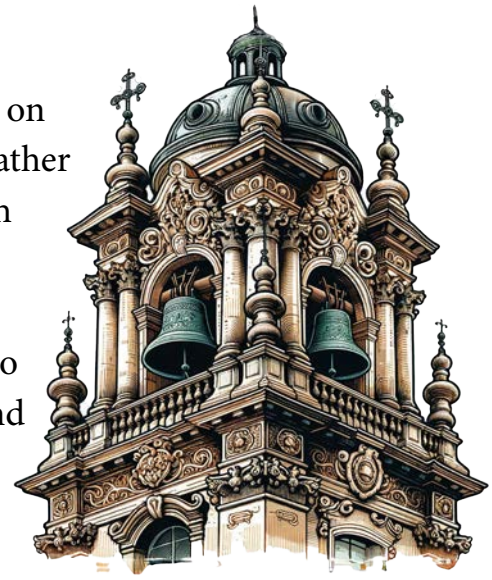
Paul Revere — Rider for Liberty

April 18, 1775	Boston, Massachusetts

Who Was Paul Revere?



Paul Revere was born in 1734 and grew up on Fish Street in Boston, Massachusetts. His father **apprenticed** him in the trade of silversmith when he was 13 years old. A silversmith makes things from silver, such as teapots, buttons, buckles, or bracelets. In addition to learning his trade, when Paul was 15, he and some friends were hired to ring the bells in the Old North Church. They learned to play songs by pulling ropes attached to the bells in the church tower. Bell ringing was used to notify the people of Boston that something important was about to happen. In a way, alerting people about crises, although it would take on different forms, became a life-long job for Paul Revere.

apprenticed: Trained

Paul Goes to War

In 1756, Paul, though an American colonist, was still a British citizen. When Britain went to war with the French over disputed territories, Paul joined the British army and went off to fight in the French and Indian War, or so he thought. He was made a lieutenant but never took part in actual fighting. Paul and his troops were sent to **Fort William Henry**, waiting for British generals to give them orders. When the generals finally did arrive, they impressed Paul with how well the troops drilled, thumping their feet down at the same instant. However,

Fort William Henry: A fort near Lake George in New York

the colonists knew that wouldn't work too well when it came to hiding in the woods from the Native peoples.

The British generals wouldn't listen to suggestions from the colonial officers. They looked down on the colonials as inferiors, disregarding the advice they gave. When they did go to battle, the result was devastating. **British General Braddock** was shot down, as were many of the experienced British officers. If it hadn't been for a young officer from Virginia named George Washington, they might all have been killed, but Washington knew how to fight the Native peoples. Paul Revere hadn't been involved in the battle, and his unit was sent home after almost a year of inactivity. He returned a bit disgusted with the British generals who had no use for the colonists and insisted on doing things their way even when common sense should have told them otherwise.

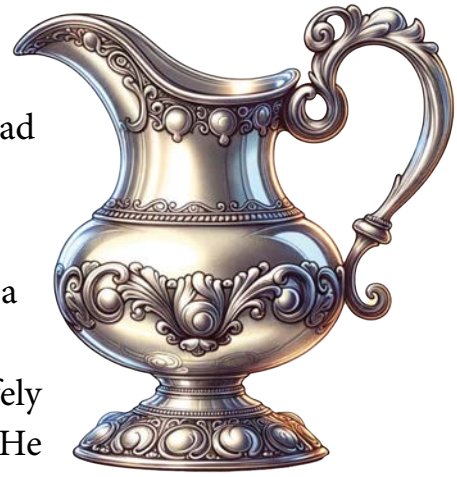
British General Braddock: Commander in chief for the 13 colonies

Back to Boston

Paul resumed working as a silversmith and expanded his skills. He learned to make false teeth, and he taught himself **engraving**. Soon after Paul came back to Boston, he married 21-year-old Sarah Orne, a girl he met at church. They would eventually have eight children. Paul was a good father. Once, when one of

engraving: Cutting designs in silver to print on paper

his children came down with the dreaded and often deadly disease of smallpox, he insisted on caring for the child at home instead of carrying him off to the **pest house**, as was commonly done.



The whole family had to be **quarantined** for a full month, but he stuck by his decision. The entire family came safely through the sickness. He had to work extra hard to make up for having his business shut down for a whole month. Fortunately, his business began to flourish, and Paul did well, making beautifully detailed creamers, bowls, cups, silverware, and whatever people needed. Today, some of the pieces Paul made are on display in some of America's finest museums.

pest house: House where sick people stayed until they got well or died

quarantined: Kept at home to prevent the spread of germs

Unrest Brewing

Great Britain began taxing the colonists. The British government had many debts, some of which had accumulated during the French and Indian War. **Parliament** decided the colonists must help pay the bills. The colonists didn't mind paying their share, but resented the government instituting and enforcing taxes without their **consent**. Besides, King George had really waged the war to acquire more land, not to benefit the colonists.

Parliament: British ruling body

consent: Permission

The only fair kind of government is based on law, not the whim of a king or his Parliament. The new taxes were just the beginning of a long list of **usurpations** by King George. Patriotic colonists started to meet in The Green Dragon in Boston's North End to decide how to handle the troubling situation. They called themselves the Sons of Liberty. Paul was one of the leaders of the group. The meetings were secret; the members started wearing a special medal around their neck to identify themselves to one another. Paul made the medals, which bore an image of the Liberty Tree. The Liberty Tree was a large elm tree that stood on the **Boston Common** and was then nearly 120 years old. The Sons of Liberty would meet there and sometimes have peaceful protests against British **tyranny**.

usurpations: Abuses of power to control others

Boston Common: Historic public park located in downtown Boston

tyranny: Cruel, Oppressive rule

implemented: Put in place

In March 1765, Parliament had **implemented** the Stamp Act, which placed a tax on documents, newspapers, marriage licenses, almanacs, and other papers. Unable to collect the taxes, Britain repealed the tax a year later. The colonists were elated and thought this meant they would be treated fairly. That night, they decorated the Liberty Tree and celebrated around it.

More Taxes

However, in 1767, Parliament passed the Townshend Acts, which **imposed** taxes on glass, lead, paint, paper, and tea. The colonists **appealed** many times to King George but to no avail. They wanted to elect colonists to go to England to represent them in Parliament, as is the right of British citizens. The Massachusetts legislature sent a letter to other state legislatures encouraging them to oppose the unfair taxes. King George was furious when he found out and sent an army to occupy the city of Boston. British soldiers stayed in the houses of Boston residents without permission and often demanded free food.

imposed: Forced

appealed: Made an earnest plea

Due to protests from the colonists, as well as from some of the members of Parliament, the Townshend Acts were removed in 1770, except for the tax on tea. Parliament thought the colonists wouldn't make a fuss over this tax on their favorite drink. They were wrong. The colonists agreed together to stop drinking tea. They would make do without it. About this time, according to the records of the Revere family, Paul acquired a horse. He built a stable to house the animal. His neighbors soon found out why he needed that horse: he became a crucial **courier** for the Sons of Liberty, delivering messages throughout the colonies, a responsibility which placed his life in constant danger.

courier: Messenger

The Boston Tea Party

The Sons of Liberty decided to show Parliament and King George that they would not submit to unlawful taxes. On the night of December 16, 1773, a group of Patriots dressed up as Native people, smeared their faces with soot and red paint, and rowed out to the three British cargo ships in the harbor. The ships had just arrived with a new shipment of tea. If no one bought the tea, then no taxes could be collected on it. They used axes to chop holes in 342 tea chests and dumped over 90,000 pounds of tea into Boston Harbor. Paul Revere was one of those Patriots and gave himself the name of "Mohawk." The Sons of Liberty did not hurt anyone or destroy any part of the ship, but they made it obvious they would not pay tax on that tea. The event became known as the Boston Tea Party.

King George was furious when he found out and demanded that the people of Boston pay for the tea they dumped in the water. He ordered Boston Harbor to be closed — no boats or ships could enter or leave. Many Bostonians relied on **commerce** to earn money for food, clothes, and necessities. Ships were an essential means of transporting those

commerce: Buying and selling goods

goods. What could be done? Paul saddled his horse and rode off to carry the message of Boston's **plight** to the other colonies. This journey became the first of many important rides for Paul Revere. As the news reached the other colonies, supplies began coming in. The rest of the Americans would stand with Boston and keep them supplied with food and necessary items while the harbor remained closed off.

During this time, Paul Revere began watching the British more closely. He had to be very cautious. He knew he could be arrested for spying, and spies were usually hung. He wrote, "In the winter, towards spring, we frequently took turns, two and two, to watch the soldiers, by patrolling the streets all night."[1] By mid-April the colonists were **stockpiling** ammunition to prepare for what they felt would be an unavoidable war. General Thomas Gage was leading the British army at the time. He decided to **confiscate** all of the colonists' guns in Charlestown, right across the river from Boston. Paul overheard that Gage also planned a march to Fort William and Mary in New Hampshire to confiscate colonists' guns. That's where Paul's newly acquired horse came in again! Paul rode all night to warn the colonists in New Hampshire to hide all their guns and ammunition.

plight: Difficult situation

stockpiling: Storing up

confiscate: Seize

Riding for Liberty

There was a large store of guns in the town of Concord, Massachusetts, which lay 12 miles from Boston. The Patriots found out that this was Gage's next target. He had placed **sentries** on all the roads between neighboring towns. Gage also had orders to arrest John Hancock and Samuel Adams, and send them to England for trial as **traitors**. Paul and the Sons of Liberty had devised a plan to warn colonists about the movement of British troops. What they needed to know was whether the **Redcoats** would move out "by water" across the Charles River to Cambridge or begin marching "by land" from Boston Neck.

sentries: Soldier guards

traitors: Betrayers of one's country

Redcoats: Nickname for British soldiers because of their red uniforms

sexton: Person who looks after a church

Robert Newman, the **sexton** of the Old North Church, had been chosen to give the signal from the church steeple tower. He was to hang two lanterns if the British were leaving by boat. If they started marching by land, he was to hang only one lantern. This signal would alert Patriots on the Charlestown shore which way the British were coming in case the messenger himself could not make it there from Boston to start his ride.

It was April 18, 1785, when Paul Revere heard from several reliable sources what was to happen. He hurried over to tell Robert Newman to hang two lanterns and then hurried home to gather his gear and bid his family goodbye. He charged his son to care for the family if anything should happen to him. They all knew his mission was **perilous**. He tried to encourage his son: "And as for being hanged, we all have to die, son,

perilous: Very dangerous

sometime. You can't dodge that. The important thing is to be ready to die bravely, whether you stop a bullet when you're young, or die in your bed of old age …"[2]

Paul swiftly headed to where he'd hidden his rowboat. He had to cross the Charles River, so was not able to take his own horse. His plan was to quietly row across the river, hopefully escaping notice of the British warship *Somerset*, anchored in the harbor. Arriving at his boat, he realized he'd forgotten his spurs, which he needed to be able to get a horse to move fast. His dog had followed him to the river. Writing a note to his wife, he attached it to his dog's collar. "Home boy, home as fast as you can," he said. The dog was off like a shot and back in a few minutes with his spurs tied to his neck.

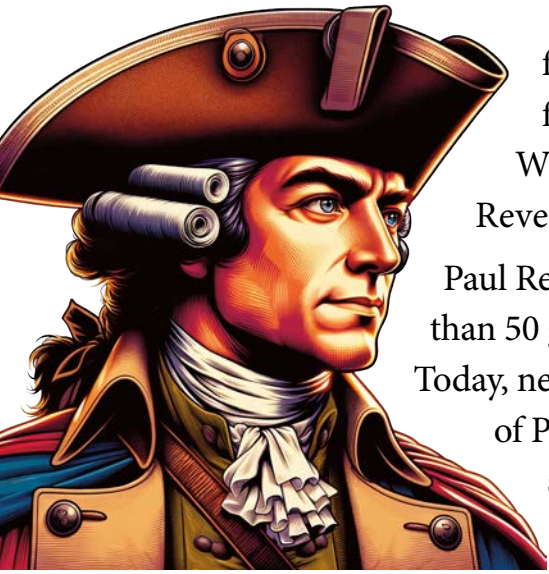
Paul did manage to sneak past the British and cross the river. On the other side, he met some men who led him to Deacon Larkin's house. The deacon loaned Paul a swift horse named Brown Beauty. He mounted and headed swiftly toward Lexington, waking the sleeping villagers as he cried out, "Up and arm, the regulars are coming!"[3] These regulars were the British army.

Minutemen soon heard the alarm — the sounds of guns and the excited ringing of church bells. The countrymen were rising and preparing to defend their homes. At Lexington, Minutemen guarding the house where Sam Adams and John Hancock were sleeping ordered Revere not to make so much noise. "You will soon have noise enough. The regulars are coming!" he shouted.[4] Revere was captured by British sentries on his way to Concord. Amazingly, the soldiers let him go, but kept Brown Beauty. Thankfully, at least two other riders that night didn't get caught: William Dawes and Wentworth Cheswell. The word was spreading far and wide, and when the British arrived at Lexington, John Hancock and Sam Adams had made their escape, and the Minutemen were armed and waiting for the British. It was the beginning of the American War of Independence.

Minutemen: Colonists ready to fight at a minute's notice

Revere continued to risk his life for the rest of the war. He learned to make gunpowder and kept American forces supplied with ammunition. He also made the engravings for **Continental money**. He made many rides to warn and inform others of what was happening. He is, though, most famous

Continental money: Paper money issued by the Continental Congress during the war



for that brave ride on April 18, 1775, forever remembered in a poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow entitled "Paul Revere's Ride."

Paul Revere died when he was 83. He had more than 50 grandchildren, whom he dearly loved. Today, near the Old North Church in Boston, a statue of Paul Revere, on his horse in mid-gallop, stands to commemorate his ride at the start of the war that birthed America.