

“One if by Land, Two if by Sea”

Paul Revere served as a messenger,

“In the year 1773 I was employed by the Select men of the Town of Boston to carry the Account of the Destruction of the Tea to New-York; and afterwards, 1774, to Carry their dispatches to New-York and Philadelphia for Calling a Congress; and afterwards to Congress, several times.” (Revere to Belknap, 1798, Massachusetts Historical Society)

In 1774 and 1775, the Boston Committee of Correspondence and the Massachusetts Committee of Safety employed Paul Revere as an express rider to carry news, messages, and copies of important documents as far away as New York and Philadelphia.

“In the Fall of 1774 & Winter of 1775 I was one of upwards of thirty, chiefly mechanics, who formed our selves in to a Committee for the purpose of watching the Movements of the British Soldiers, and gaining every intelegence of the movements of the Tories. We held our meetings at the Green-Dragon Tavern.”

“We were so carefull that our meetings should be kept Secret; that every time we met, every person swore upon the Bible, that they would not discover any of our transactions, But to Messrs. Hancock, Adams, Doctors Warren, Church, & one or two more.” (Revere to Belknap, 1798, Massachusetts Historical Society)

On the evening of April 18, 1775, Dr. Joseph Warren summoned Paul Revere and gave him the task of riding to Lexington, Massachusetts, with the news that British soldiers stationed in Boston were about to march into the countryside northwest of the town.

“In the Winter, towards the Spring, we frequently took Turns, two and two, to Watch the Soldiers, By patrolling the Streets all night. The Saturday Night preceding the 19th of April, about 12 oClock at Night, the Boats belonging to the Transports were all launched, & carried under the Sterns of the Men of War. (They had been previously hauld up & repaired).”

“We likewise found that the Grenadiers and light Infantry were all taken off duty. From these movements, we expected something serious was [to] be transacted. On Tuesday evening, the 18th, it was observed, that a number of Soldiers were marching towards the bottom of the Common.” (Revere to Belknap, 1798, Massachusetts Historical Society)

According to Warren, these troops planned to arrest Samuel Adams and John Hancock, two leaders of the Sons of Liberty, who were staying at a house in Lexington. It was thought they would then continue on to the town of Concord, to capture or destroy military stores - gunpowder, ammunition, and several cannon - that had been stockpiled there.

In fact, the British troops had no orders to arrest anyone - Dr. Warren’s intelligence on this point was faulty - but they were very much on a major mission out of Boston. (Paul Revere House)

"I was sent for by Doctr. Joseph Warren, of said Boston, on the evening of the 18th of April, about to oClock;

"When he desired me, 'to go to Lexington, and inform Mr. Samuel Adams, and the Honl. John Hancock Esqr. that there was a number of Soldiers, composed of Light troops, & Grenadiers, marching to the bottom of the Common, where was a number of Boats to receive them; it was supposed, that they were going to Lexington, by the way of Cambridge River, to take them, or go to Concord, to destroy the Colony Stores.'" (Revere Deposition, 1775, Massachusetts Historical Society)

Warren had also asked another rider, William Dawes to go to Lexington.

"When I got to Dr. Warren's house, I found he had sent an express by land to Lexington - a Mr. Wm. Daws." (Revere to Belknap, 1798, Massachusetts Historical Society)

Revere contacted an unidentified friend (probably Robert Newman, the sexton of Christ Church in Boston's North End) and instructed him to hold two lit lanterns in the tower of Christ Church (now called the Old North Church) as a signal to fellow Sons of Liberty across the Charles River in case Revere was unable to leave town.

"The Sunday before, by desire of Dr. Warren, I had been to Lexington, to Mess. Hancock and Adams, who were at the Rev. Mr. Clark's. I returned at Night thro Charlestown; there I agreed with a Col. Conant, & some other Gentle men, in Charleston ...

... that if the British went out by Water, we would shew two Lanthorns in the North Church Steeple; & if by Land, one, as a Signal; for we were apprehensive it would be dificult to Cross the Charles River, or git over Boston neck. I left Dr. Warrens, called upon a friend, and desired him to make the Signals." (Revere to Belknap, 1798, Massachusetts Historical Society)



The two lanterns were a predetermined signal stating that the British troops planned to row "by sea" across the Charles River to Cambridge, rather than march "by land" out Boston Neck.

Revere proceeded the short distance to Boston's North End waterfront. There two friends rowed him across the river to Charlestown. Slipping past the British warship HMS Somerset in the darkness, Revere landed safely.

After informing Colonel Conant and other local Sons of Liberty about recent events in Boston and verifying that they had seen his signals in the North Church tower, Revere borrowed a horse from John Larkin, a Charlestown merchant and a patriot sympathizer. While there, a member of the Committee of Safety named Richard Devens warned Revere that there were a number of British officers in the area who might try to intercept him.

At about eleven o'clock Revere set off on horseback. After narrowly avoiding capture just outside of Charlestown, Revere changed his planned route and rode through Medford, where he alarmed Isaac Hall, the captain of the local militia, of the British movements.

He then alarmed almost all the houses from Medford, through Menotomy (today's Arlington) - carefully avoiding the Royall Mansion whose property he rode through (Isaac Royall was a well-known Loyalist) — and arrived in Lexington sometime after midnight.

“In Medford, I awaked the Captain of the Minute men; & after that, I alarmed almost every House, till I got to Lexington.”



In Lexington, as he approached the house where Adams and Hancock were staying, Sergeant Monroe, acting as a guard outside the house, requested that he not make so much noise.

“Noise!” cried Revere, “You’ll have noise enough before long. The regulars are coming out!” According to tradition, John Hancock, who was still awake, heard Revere’s voice and said “Come in, Revere! We’re not afraid of you”. (Paul Revere House)

“I found Mrs. Messrs. Hancock & Adams at the Rev. Mr. Clark’s; I told them my errand, and inquired for Mr. Daws; they said he had not been there; I related the story of the two officers, & supposed that He must have been stopped, as he ought to have been there before me.”

“After I had been there about half an Hour, Mr. Daws came; after we refreshid our selves, we and set off for Concord, to secure the Stores, &c. there.” (Revere to Belknap, 1798, Massachusetts Historical Society)

About half past twelve, William Dawes, who had traveled the longer land route out of Boston Neck, arrived in Lexington carrying the same message as Revere. After both men had something to eat and drink, they decided to continue on to Concord, Massachusetts to verify that the military stores were properly dispersed and hidden away.

A short distance outside of Lexington, they were overtaken by Dr. Samuel Prescott, who they determined was a fellow “high Son of Liberty.”

A short time later, a British patrol intercepted all three men. Prescott and Dawes escaped; Revere was held for some time, questioned, and let go. Before he was released, however, his horse was confiscated to replace the tired mount of a British sergeant. Left alone on the road, Revere returned to Lexington on foot in time to witness the latter part of the battle on Lexington Green. (Massachusetts Historical Society)

Five Riders

Because of the epic poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Paul Revere is often credited as the sole rider who alerted the colonies that the Regulars (British) were coming.

Yet, despite this tale, there were many riders who went out the night of April 18 and in the years following, warning the colonists of the approach and movement of the British forces.

Dozens of messengers raced on horseback to spread the word. (LA Times) Five have been named; four men and one woman made late night rides, alerting the early Americans of what dangers lay ahead. They were Paul Revere, Samuel Prescott, Israel Bissell, William Dawes and Sybil Ludington.

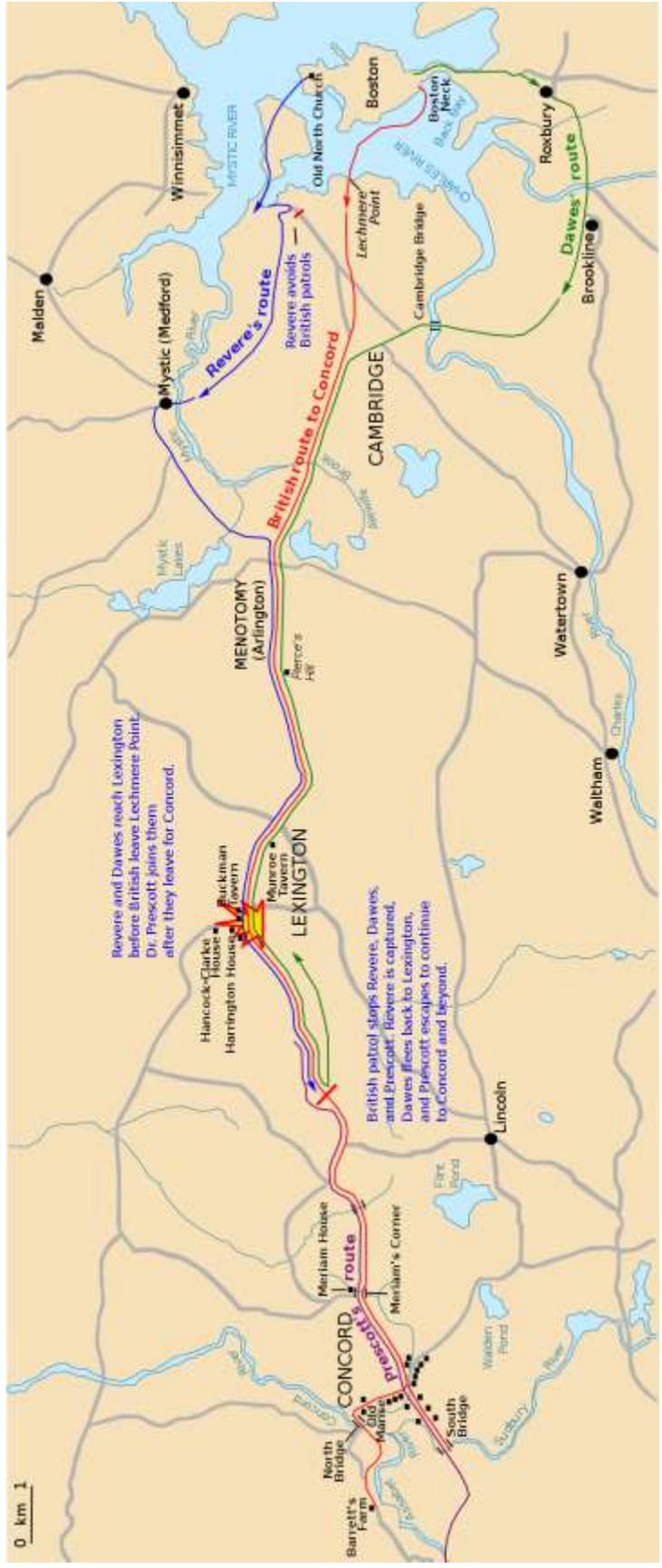
Paul Revere

Poets, historians, and schoolbooks have retold the story of the legendary ride of Paul Revere for more than two centuries. The most popular retelling is the poem entitled "Paul Revere's Ride" by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (written in 1860, nearly 100-years later). It begins:

Listen my children and you shall hear
Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere,
On the eighteenth of April, in Seventy-five;
Hardly a man is now alive
Who remembers that famous day and year.

Thanks to Longfellow, hardly a scholar or school child alive does not know the name of Paul Revere, and why he was important. Although his role has been embellished, it was still a significant one.

Contrary to popular belief, Paul Revere never shouted the phrase “the British are coming.”



William Dawes

Joseph Warren would not just send out Paul Revere that night, but would commission William Dawes to make the ride to warn the colonial minutemen as well.

In 1896, American poet Helen F. Moore would be among the first to correct this minor oversight of history when she composed a parody of Longfellow's poem with her own version:

Tis all very well for the children to hear
Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere;
But why should my name be quite forgot,
Who rode as boldly and well, God wot?
Why should I ask? The reason is clear-
My name was Dawes and his Revere.



Samuel Prescott

A native of Concord, Massachusetts, Prescott was familiar with the territory and was able to serve as a guide for Revere and Dawes on their nighttime journey.

When the three were met along the road to Concord by British officers and were forced to split up, Prescott would be the only one of the three to eventually reach Concord, carrying Warren's news.

Israel Bissell

Unlike the more famous names of Revere, Dawes, and Prescott, Israel Bissell (also known to history as both 'Isaac' or 'Trail' Bissell) was reportedly the man who made the longest ride in mid-April 1775.

He was one of a number of post riders charged with telling the patriots the British army had killed people at Lexington and calling them to muster against the British regulars. According to the story, he shouted along the way 'To arms! To arms! the first blood has been shed at Lexington!'

Immediately after the Battle of Lexington, and even as British reinforcements headed toward Concord, a militiaman, Joseph Palmer, scribbled a letter with the news. (Palmer later rose to brigadier general in the Continental Army.) He dispatched Bissell to take the letter to Connecticut. It read:

"To all the friends of American liberty be it known that this morning before break of day, a brigade, consisting of about 1,000 to 1,200 men landed at Phip's Farm at Cambridge and marched to Lexington, where they found a company of our colony militia in arms, upon whom they fired without any provocation and killed six men and wounded four others."

"By an express from Boston, we find another brigade are now upon their march from Boston supposed to be about 1,000."

“The Bearer, Israel Bissell, is charged to alarm the country quite to Connecticut and all persons are desired to furnish him with fresh horses as they may be needed.”

“I have spoken with several persons who have seen the dead and wounded. Pray let the delegates from this colony to Connecticut see this.” (New England Historical Society)

Some historians argue that he never existed, or that ‘Israel Bissell’ was the name given to a number of post riders who made the journey from Boston to Philadelphia.

Sybil Ludington

The last of the named night riders was a woman, actually, a 16-year old girl. Although she would not make her journey until April 26, 1777, she provided service to the American forces. The daughter of Colonel Henry Ludington, Sybil, would make a journey double to that of Revere (totaling 40 miles) to warn the colonists at Danbury, Connecticut of the approach of the British.

Commissioned by her father, who knew that Sybil was familiar with the terrain, the young girl set out at 9 pm the night of April 26 through Kent to Farmers Mills and then returned back home again just before dawn.

The men she recruited were too late to save the town of Danbury, which had been set aflame by the British, but they were able to drive the enemy troops from the area.



She was later commended by George Washington for her heroism. A statue of her was erected along her route in Carmel, New York, along with many other markers of her historic ride.

Information here is primarily from Massachusetts Historical Society; New England Historical Society; Paul Revere House

In an effort to provide a brief, informal background summary of various people, places and events related to the American Revolution, I made this informal compilation from a variety of sources. This is not intended to be a technical reference document, nor an exhaustive review of the subject. Rather, it is an assemblage of information and images from various sources on basic background information. For ease in informal reading, in many cases, specific quotations and citations and attributions are often not included – however, sources are noted in the summary. The images and text are from various sources and are presented for personal, noncommercial and/or educational purposes. Thanks, Peter T. Young