

History of The Midnight Ride

With the end of the French and Indian War, discontent grew both in the colonies and in the British Empire. War was expensive and England had incurred a large debt in fighting the French. The British subjects felt that the colonists should help pay for part of this war since it was fought partially on their behalf. To make matters worse, when the war was over the land west of the Appalachian Mountains had been given to the Native Americans in the Proclamation of 1763. Why pay for something that was given away?

The British crown had left the colonists alone for a long time. The early settlers learned to eke out a living on the frontier and survive with minimal assistance. As the colonies grew, the colonists continued to solve their own problems and begin making their own decisions for the well-being of the colony. By the time the British leaders began to pay attention, the colonists were independent.

Not realizing that the colonists were a different breed of British subjects, the British crown implemented a variety of taxes or duties. Britain needed to tighten their controls on taxes and regulating trades. They had been lax with the colonists too long. The British Empire had amassed a huge debt from the French and Indian War. Native Americans were a constant problem in the colonies, so the British leadership decided to keep an army in the colonies. This too would cost money. The colonies were an excellent source of income and resources. The British empire used their resources from all over the world for their benefit and felt they should be using the resources and taxes from the American colonies to help with the expenses.

Reflection Questions :

Why was there discontent in the colonies and in the British Empire?

Why was leaving colonies alone a problem?

Why did the British feel comfortable taxing colonists?



Proof sheet of one-penny stamps.

The first duty (tax) after the French and Indian War, that the British government imposed, was the Sugar Act in 1764. This taxed items such as foreign sugar, coffee, indigo and certain wines. This tax had actually been in effect since the 1730's, but the colonists had turned to smuggling and enjoyed the lack of enforcement of the tax. With this new tax, it actually lowered the earlier Molasses tax. Instead of being pleased because it lower part of an earlier tax, the colonists used protest measures, such as boycotting products, and were upset with the thought of being taxed without consent. From here, the British government implemented the Stamp Act. This act was to help pay for the cost of keeping troops in the colonies. With this tax, the colonists had to buy a stamp to place on printed materials such as legal documents, bills of sale, contracts, pamphlets, newspapers and playing cards. The colonists continued and intensified their protest measures. They boycotted British goods, rioted, held demonstrations and attacked the tax collectors. From this point, the British implemented a variety of taxes. As the colonists found ways around the taxes such as boycotting products or smuggling other products in, the British came up with new ways to tax the colonies. No matter the tax, the colonists were displeased. The British implemented the Townshend Acts and then, the Tea Act.

The British government did not understand what was occurring in the American colonies. They felt that these colonies should follow the same expectations as the rest of the British Empire. As different acts/taxes were implemented, the colonists began to flex their power by speaking out against British rule, protesting, boycotting and using mob violence. The British Crown was becoming less understanding and taking more drastic actions. When Parliament imposed the Tea Act, the purpose was to save the floundering British East India Company and provide tea to the colonists at a reduced rate. Instead of seeing this action as a positive by providing cheaper tea, the colonists saw it as another way to control them. The Boston Sons of Liberty members disguised themselves as Native Americans, boarded three British ships and dumped 342 chests of tea in Boston Harbor. The amount of tea destroyed was approximately 92,000 pounds in weight and close to a million dollars in today's currency.



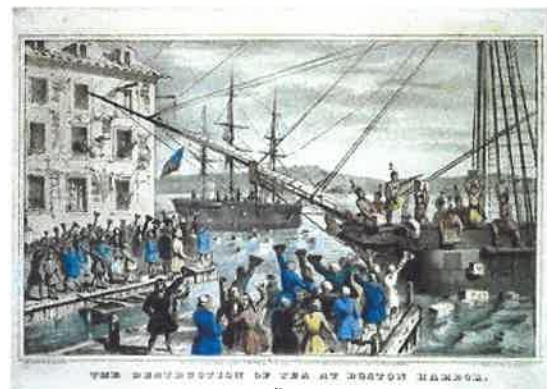
Paul Revere's engraving of British troops landing in Boston in 1768.

Parliament reacted by imposing the Coercive Acts (renamed Intolerable Acts by the colonists). The British closed Boston to any shipping, brought formal military rule to the colony of Massachusetts, denied Massachusetts the ability to gather in town meetings and required the colonists to house and quarter the British troops.

Reflection Questions 2:

- How did the colonists flex their power?
- What was the purpose of the Tea Act?
- How did the colonists respond to the Tea Act?
- What was the Coercive Acts?

Due to the restrictions put in place by the British after the Boston Tea Party, many of the Massachusetts Patriots were hiding in the countryside outside of Boston because they were fearful of being detained and arrested by the British. Several Patriots stayed within the boundaries of Boston—Dr. Benjamin Church, Dr. Joseph Warren and Paul Revere. Paul Revere worked for both the Boston Committee of Correspondence and the Massachusetts Committee of Safety to deliver messages and news. While Revere lived in Boston, he was to continue his work as an engraver and dentist but would take note of any movement of the soldiers in the area.



1846 lithograph by Nathaniel Currier was entitled "The Destruction of Tea at Boston Harbor."

During the watch of the British, Revere, Church and Warren noted movement by the British ships. Being suspicious of this movement Warren sent Revere to Concord on April 7, 1775. Concord was the temporary home of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress but also a storehouse of guns and ammunition for the militia. Thanks to Revere's warning of the British troops intentions to confiscate the weapons, the residents were able to relocate the munitions. They hid the weapons and ammunition in the swamps, barns and in wells.

On his way home, Revere stopped in Charlestown, to speak to the Patriots living there. Since Charlestown was located on a peninsula across from downtown Boston, they were in an ideal location to send messages to Concord to warn them of the movements of the British. The Patriots living in Boston such as Revere, Dr. Warren or Dr. Church might not be able to depart Boston when the troops were leaving. Revere and the Charlestown's Patriots agreed to use a signal to notify others. The Old North Church of Boston had a steeple that sat high above the buildings surrounding it and could be viewed across the Charles River. The custodian of the church was Robert John Newman who was a fellow Patriot and had access to the church at night. The signal agreed on was one lantern would be lit in the Old North Church if the British troops were to move by land crossing the Boston Neck (the original road leading into and out of Boston). Two lanterns would be lit if the troops were to depart by sea. Intelligence at the time believed that the British would probably NOT march out of Boston because they would lose the element of surprise.

Reflection Questions 3:

Why did certain Patriots leave Boston?

How was Revere working for the colonies?

What was the purpose of Revere's April 7th trip?

Besides talking to the people in Concord, who else did Revere visit? Why?

What was the signal?

Who was the signal for?



The British defenses in Boston, 1775.

One week later after Revere's visit to Concord, the British in Boston were ordered to take care of the rebellious colonists. They were to disarm the colonists, confiscate their weapons and imprison the colonial leadership. On the night of April 18th, Dr. Warren determined that John Hancock and Samuel Adams had to be warned of the movement of British troops and the possibility of their arrest and sentence of death at the gallows. Adams and Hancock, leaders of the Provincial Congress, had been organizing Congress' efforts from outside of Boston. In case one messenger was detained, Dr. Warren sent out two messengers from Boston, Paul Revere and William Dawes. Dawes left at 9:30 p.m. and was to attempt passage on the

Boston Neck (the main road that crossed over to the peninsula that made up Boston) and through Roxbury, Brookline and Cambridge. Paul Revere departed Boston at approximately 10 p.m. Revere was to travel by boat, across the Charles River and then travel by horseback through Charlestown and Medford. When Revere arrived at the Charles River, he realized he had forgotten one detail. He had forgotten to bring cloth to muffle the sounds of the oars in the water. Luckily, one of the boatmen helping Revere, borrowed a petticoat from his girlfriend to diminish the sounds of small boat crossing the river.

According to Revere, "they landed me on Charleston side . . . [and] I got into Town, I met Col. Conant, & several others; they said they had seen our signals." They had seen the two lanterns in the Old North Church. The Patriots of Charlestown were ready in case Paul had been unable to leave Boston. They obtained a horse for Revere. Before Revere left, a fellow Patriot told Revere that earlier that night as he had been coming back from Lexington that "he met ten British Officers, all well mounted, & armed, going up the Road." Thus warned of possible patrols, Revere left Charlestown at approximately 11 p.m. Just outside of the Charlestown Neck, Revere spotted several British soldiers and managed to elude them. "In Medford, I awaked the Captain of the Minute men; & after that, I alarmed almost every House, til I got to Lexington."

William Dawes, a shoemaker or tanner by trade, was the second messenger with the longer route to travel. Dawes plan was to attempt to leave by land. He had to slip past the British sentries guarding the passage into and out of Boston. In the past, Dawes had snuck into and out of Boston disguised as a peddler or drunk. He even smuggled gold in the city by forming the gold into buttons which were sewed on Dawes' clothing. Even more important was Dawes relationship with some of the British sentries. He had befriended those who were sociable. On the night of April 18th, one of Dawes' friendly sentries was on duty and Dawes slipped out of the city with other British soldiers when the gate was opened.

Reflection Questions 4:

- What orders did the British receive?
- Who sent out messengers?
- How many messengers were sent? Why?
- How did Revere get out?
- How did Dawes get out?



Old North Church of Boston

Paul Revere arrived in Lexington first. He discovered Samuel Adams and John Hancock at Hancock-Clark home. After being warned of the British troops' movements and their possible capture, Adams and Hancock slipped away. William Dawes arrived in Lexington thirty minutes after Revere and they make plans for the next step of their journey.

With Hancock and Adams warned, the messengers needed to warn the people of Concord of the British troops headed their way to confiscate the militia's weapons. At this point, Dawes and Revere are joined by a local Patriot, Dr. Samuel Prescott. The three must finish the task of warning the people of Concord. Departing Lexington, the men had not traveled far before they ran into a British roadblock. Not willing to surrender, the men broke through the roadblock. Prescott managed to evade capture. Using his knowledge of the landscape, he traveled off road and outdistanced the British.

Dawes attempted to outrun the British but realized that his horse was worn out from his journey from Boston. To throw off capturers, Dawes entered the yard of a home and caused a distraction. Making his horse rear, Dawes shouted that he had two of the men. The other British soldiers fell for the ruse and continued to search for the other missing man. Dawes, having been thrown from his horse, had to walk back to Lexington that night. He hid, until it was safe to return home.

Paul Revere was captured at the roadblock. He was interrogated with a pistol to his chest for several hours. When questioned about the colonial militia, the stockade of weapons and location of the Hancock and Adams, Revere told the truth but exaggerated the numbers. He informed them that Hancock and Adams were being protected by 500 militia men with another 500 soldiers on their way. As the British escorted Revere back to Lexington, they heard the sounds of shots being fired. Believing the information that Revere had told them was true and the colonists were well prepared and armed, they released Revere and fled.

Dr. Prescott, who had eluded capture, rode into Concord. Prescott reached Concord in time to warn the residents of the movement of the British troops. He continued out into the countryside warning other towns of the impending situation.

Paul Revere caught up with Hancock and Adams as they fled. Revere was sent back to Lexington to retrieve important Congressional papers that Hancock had left at Buckman's Tavern. On his return to Lexington, Revere heard shots being fired, not realizing that he was hearing the start of the Revolutionary War at Lexington Green.

Reflection Questions 5:

After warning Hancock and Adams, what was left to be accomplished?

Who was left for this final leg of the journey?

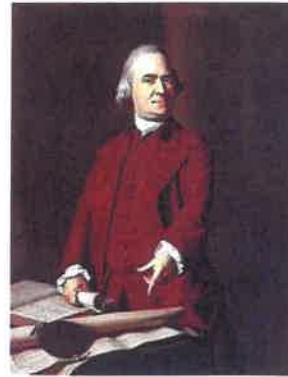
Who successfully reached Concord?

What happened to Revere? To Dawes?

How did Dawes and Revere help?



Hancock-Clark home



Samuel Adams



John Hancock



Buckman's Tavern

In the midst of the Patriots riding around the countryside, the British troops gathered to march out of Boston. Their orders were to gather any munitions and imprison any colonial leadership. At approximately 10 p.m., just as Revere was crossing the Charles River, the British were gathering to depart Boston. They crossed the river and began marching into the countryside at approximately 2:00 a.m. They marched past Cambridge, Menotomy (Arlington) and past Medford. They arrived in Lexington at 5 a.m. where 77 militiamen waited. As the 700 British troops lined up for battle, Captain Parker told the militiamen, "Stand your ground; don't fire unless fired upon, but if they mean to have a war, let it begin here." The British ordered the militiamen to put down their weapons. At the same time, the militiamen were told to retreat and disburse. In the midst of these orders, a shot was fired, though no one knows who fired first. The British opened fire. Eight militiamen were killed while nine others were wounded. Only one British soldier was injured.



Battle of Lexington.

Battle of Lexington



Reconstruction of the North Bridge as it looked in the late 1700s.

The British marched on to Concord. They were under orders to confiscate any weapons. When the British arrived at Concord, they could not find the large stockpile of weapons. Thanks to Revere's earlier warnings the week before, all weapons, ammunition, tools and supplies had been moved. What little supplies the British found, they began burning. In the confusion, the militia men thought they were burning all of Concord. The militia men hurried to the North Bridge. The British defending the bridge fired. The militiamen returned fire. At this time almost 2,000 militiamen had arrived. The British fired first, but the colonists returned fire and pushed back the British.

With so many militia men descending on the area, the British troops retreated following their path back to the Boston area. The militia men followed the British troops fired at them from behind fences, houses and trees. This sniping encouraged the British troops to abandon any unnecessary equipment, clothing or weapons, and retreat faster. The troops escaped to Charlestown Neck where they had naval support.

Though there was a long path ahead of them, the colonists stood up to the British. This exchange of gunfire would be recorded as the "shot heard 'round the world" by Ralph Waldo Emerson. These battles proved that the colonists could stand up to the British Empire.

Reflection Questions 6:

What happened at Lexington?

What happened at Concord?

What did the British troops do after Concord?

Who won?