

*Beyond Midnight: Paul Revere*

On view at New-York Historical Society until 12 January 2020



Fig. 1 Grant Wood (1892–1942), *Midnight Ride of Paul Revere*, 1931. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. © 2019 Figge Art Museum, successors to the Estate of Nan Wood Graham/ VAGA at ARS, NY

In *Beyond Midnight: Paul Revere*, on view through January 12, 2020, the New-York Historical Society explores the life and accomplishments of Paul Revere (1735–1818), the Revolutionary War patriot immortalized in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s 1861 poem “Paul Revere’s Ride”. As a group from the New York Silver Society, Inc., learned on October 21, 2019, when we toured with Dr. Debra Schmidt Bach, the N-YHS decorative arts curator who coordinated its New York City installation, the exhibition separates fact from fiction, revealing Revere as a complex, multifaceted figure at the intersection of America’s social, economic, artistic, and political life in Revolutionary War-era Boston as it re-examines his life as an artisan, activist, and entrepreneur. Featuring more than 140 objects, the exhibition highlights aspects of Revere’s versatile career as an artisan, including engravings, such as his well-known depiction of the Boston Massacre; glimmering silver tea services made for prominent clients; everyday objects such as thimbles, tankards, and teapots; and important public commissions, such as a bronze courthouse bell, and a cannon.

Organized by the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Massachusetts, and curated by Nan Wolverton and Lauren Hewes, *Beyond Midnight* will travel to the Worcester Art Museum and the Concord Museum in Massachusetts for a two-venue display (February 13 – June 7, 2020) and to Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville, Arkansas (July 4 – October 11, 2020).

On arrival, visitors are welcomed by a nine-foot-tall re-creation of the grand obelisk made for a 1766 Boston Common celebration of the repeal of the Stamp Act, the first tax levied on the American colonies by England. Originally made of wood and oiled paper, and decorated with painted scenes, portraits, and text praising King George while also mocking British legislators, the obelisk was illuminated from inside and eventually consumed by flames at the Boston event. The only remaining visual evidence is Revere's 1766 engraving of the design, also on view.

A Revolutionary activist, Paul Revere was a member of the Sons of Liberty, a secret group opposed to British colonial policy including taxation that kept track of British troop movements and war ships in the harbor. In the main gallery, a "ghost diorama" depicts Revere's shop when the well-known Liberty Bowl, now in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, was made. A replica of the bowl crafted by Stephen Smithers is on view, as are other "please touch" elements. The exhibition displays Revere's 1770 engraving of the landing of British forces at Boston's Long Wharf and four versions of Revere's provocative engraving of the 1770 Boston Massacre are reunited in the exhibition. Revere also helped plan and execute the Boston Tea Party in 1773, hurling tea into Boston Harbor. When war erupted in 1775, he acted as a post rider, delivering messages from the Continental Army to New York, Philadelphia, and Connecticut.

Paul Revere was a master craftsman specializing in metalwork, including copperplate engravings and fashionable and functional objects made from silver, gold, brass, bronze, and copper. An innovative businessman, Revere expanded his successful silver shop in the years after the war to produce goods that took advantage of new machinery. His fluted oval teapot, made from machine-rolled sheet silver, became an icon of American Federal silver design (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2 Paul Revere Jr. (1735-1818), **Tea service for John and Mehitable Templeman**, 1792–93. Silver, wood. Lent by the Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis, Minnesota; Gift of James F. and Louise H. Bell; Gift of Charlotte Y. Salisbury, wife of Harrison E. Salisbury and great niece of John Templeman Coolidge; and Gift of James Ford Bell and his family, by exchange, and Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Byron Wenger, 1960–2001, 60.22.1-9, 94.88.1-2, 2001.165.1-7.

Among the silver objects on view are two rare wine goblets possibly used as Kiddush cups made by Revere for his only known Jewish clients Moses Michael Hays (1739-1805) and his wife Rachel Myers, the sister of New York silversmith Myer Myers, shown exclusively in New York. Also featured is a 1796 cast-bronze courthouse bell made for the Norfolk County Courthouse in Dedham, Massachusetts. The exhibition also explores how Revere's trade networks reached well beyond Boston. He frequently bought and sold raw and finished copper from New Yorker Harmon Hendricks, a member of Congregation Shearith Israel, and supplied rolled sheet copper for Robert Fulton's famous steamship as well as for the rebottoming of the U. S. frigate *Constitution* in 1803.

The son of a French Huguenot immigrant artisan with whom he apprenticed, Revere belonged to an economic class called "mechanics," ranked below merchants, lawyers, and clergymen. However, Revere was a savvy networker, and what he lacked in social status, he made up for by cultivating influential connections, including with fellow Freemasons like Moses Michael Hays. Membership in the Sons of Liberty led to commissions from other Patriots, but he also welcomed Loyalist clients, setting aside politics for profit. On view are nine elements from a grand 45-piece service that Revere created in 1773 for prominent Loyalist Dr. William Paine and his wife Lois Orne—the largest commission of his career—just two months before the Boston Tea Party (Fig. 2).



Paul Revere Jr. (1735–1818), **Coffeepot, tankard, teapot, butter boat, tea tongs, and spoons made for Lois Orne and William Paine, 1773.** Silver, wood. Worcester Museum of Art, Worcester, Massachusetts; Gift of Frances Thomas and Eliza Sturgis Paine, in memory of Frederick William Paine; Gift of Dr. and Mrs. George C. Lincoln of Woodstock, CT in memory of Fanny Chandler Lincoln (1959); Gift of Paine Charitable Trust (1965), 1937.55-.59, 1965.336-.337

Paul Revere died in 1818, but his fame endured, initially for his metalwork and then for his patriotism. In the 1830s, Revere's engravings were rediscovered as Americans explored their Revolutionary past, and his view of the Boston Massacre appeared in children's history books. In 1860, poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was inspired to write "Paul Revere's Ride," romanticizing (and somewhat embellishing) the story of Revere's journey to Lexington. The poem first appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* in January 1861—an original copy of the magazine is on view in the exhibition. Artist Grant Wood's painting *Midnight Ride of Paul Revere* (1931), also on display (Fig. 1), depicts a dramatic scene of Revere riding past Boston's Old North Church. This is also an embellishment: in reality, Revere was on foot until he crossed the Charles River to Cambridge and then rode a borrowed horse to Lexington. He was also one of three riders and was stopped briefly by British officers and then released. A map of the actual ride is on display. These works and others enshrined Paul Revere at the heart of the nation's founding story. By the turn of the twentieth century, the tale of Paul Revere and his midnight ride was firmly established in the nation's psyche as truth, not fiction. Revere's contributions as a metalsmith and artisan were overshadowed, until silver scholars such as Kathryn C. Buhler began to explore the craftsman's *oeuvre* and exhibitions such as *Paul Revere's Boston: 1735-1818*, organized by Jonathan L. Fairbanks and Wendy A. Cooper of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, in 1975, again focused on his craftsmanship. Accompanying the exhibition is a 101-page soft-cover publication of the same title edited by Lauren B. Hewes and Nan Wolverton issued by the American Antiquarian Society (Worcester, 2019), ISBN978-0578-54457-1, available from the N-YHS shop.