



Paul Revere's Ride

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Paul Revere's midnight ride is a legendary event in American history - yet it has been largely ignored by scholars, and left to patriotic writers and debunkers. Now one of the foremost American historians offers the first serious study of this event - what led to it, what really happened, what followed - uncovering a truth more remarkable than the many myths it has inspired. In *Paul Revere's Ride*, David Hackett Fischer has created an exciting narrative that offers new insight into the coming of the American Revolution. From research in British and American archives, the author unravels a plot that no novelist would dare invent - a true story of high drama and deep suspense, of old-fashioned heroes and unvarnished villains, of a beautiful American spy who betrayed her aristocratic British husband, of violent mobs and marching armies, of brave men dying on their doorsteps, of high courage, desperate fear, and the destiny of nations. The narrative is constructed around two thematic lines. One story centers on the American patriot Paul Revere; the other, on British General Thomas Gage. Both were men of high principle who played larger roles than recent historiography has recognized. Thomas Gage was not the Tory tyrant of patriot legend, but an English Whig who believed in liberty and the rule of law. In 1774 and 1775, General Gage's advice shaped the fatal choices of British leaders, and his actions guided the course of American events. Paul Revere was more than a "simple artizan," as his most recent biographer described him fifty years ago. The author presents new evidence that revolutionary Boston was a world of many circles - more complex than we have known. Paul Revere and his friend Joseph Warren ranged more widely through those circles than any other leaders. They became the linchpins of the Whig movement. On April 18th, 1775, Paul Revere played that role in a manner that has never been told before. He and William Dawes were not the only midnight riders to ca

Paul Revere's Ride Details

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Conor says

A good, short overview of the lead up to the battles of Lexington and Concord, the battles themselves, and their significance in beginning the war of revolution against British rule. For a person like me whose knowledge of The Revolution is poor, this book serves as a decent primer.

As to Paul Revere's role in all of this: I had heard a lot of revisionist history lately about how Paul Revere never made his famous ride. But as this book makes clear, this bit of revisionism is only partially true, and he certainly deserves every bit of credit he gets! Not only was he instrumental in organizing the patriot movement in the lead up to the war, but he and several others did indeed make the midnight ride to inform the people outside of Boston that the British regulars were on their way to Lexington and Concord. Revere was briefly captured by a British patrol, but did eventually make it, and the efforts of he and his comrades allowed the militias to muster in time to oppose the regulars. Revere deserves his place among the pantheon of American founding fathers.

Mike says

I read this book in graduate school quite some time ago, but I still remember it as being one that I was fascinated with. It is amazing how little we actually know about Paul Revere. His importance to the Revolution goes far beyond the Midnight Ride. He was a major player in the Boston rebellion and one of the great organizers of the Committees of Correspondence. This book details Revere's life and also goes into the specifics of the Midnight Ride and the entire events around Lexington and Concord. While getting bogged down in the details at time, I thought this book was very well researched and I recommend to all.

Katie says

This is the kind of book that I would write, and that's both good and bad. The first third of the book was a biographical sketch of Paul Revere, which I really enjoyed (5 stars). The problem was that I was expecting the entire book to be about Revere, and I found myself bored by the rest of the book, which is essentially a blow-by-blow replay of the events of Lexington and Concord (2 stars).

Fischer isn't retelling the story of Lexington and Concord merely for the sake of doing so, though. He goes into such painful detail because he is using the events of story as evidence for the overarching argument of the book. As it happens, I'm completely sold on that argument - that the beginning of the American Revolution, as illustrated in miniature by the events at Lexington and Concord, was a highly organized and collaborative yet decentralized movement. I find Fischer's style of argumentation satisfying and comfortably familiar, progressing neatly from evidence (to more evidence, to even more evidence) to conclusion like a senior thesis. (Like my senior thesis. Note to self: make your writing less boring.) So Fischer's laborious argument was effective. I simply didn't find it particularly enjoyable.

Mark Singer says

From beginning to end, this is one of the better history books that I have ever read. Fischer explained in the introduction that most tales about Paul Revere and his famous ride tend to be either ones of idolatry or debunking. The truth is even stranger: Revere did make the ride, he was not alone, he was an important member of the colonial resistance, and he had made other important rides in the years leading up to the famous one of 1775. Fischer also gives a sympathetic portrait of the British commander of the Boston garrison, General Sir Thomas Gage, and the problems he faced against a hostile populace. The hour-by-hour breakdown of the ride, the British march, the battles of Lexington and Concord, and the aftermath are well detailed with good maps.

As a final note, one of the first things that I look at in any history are the bibliographies. This book has over 100 pages of appendices and bibliographies, and is worth reading.

Bliss Tew says

I read this book at a time that I had time to enjoy it as I was home on doctor's orders in 1999. This is a scholarly work that delves into the opinions, thinking, historical documents, actions, etc. of the American people and leaders during the build up towards war with Great Britain, what became a war for independence. The book isn't just a stirring account of Paul Revere's ride, but so much more. I highly recommend this book to anyone seeking better understanding of the forces and heroic people that shaped the birth of our nation. Ever since I read this book, a print of the painting of Paul Revere that is seen on its cover has hung in my office to remind me to emulate this heroic, patriotic, Christian man. Paul Revere was a real man. I hope I get to meet him in the great beyond.

Max says

Fischer describes how ordinary citizens rose up against the British army to begin the American Revolution. Paul Revere, a Boston silversmith, was one of many who served as messengers to warn the people of the royal army's movement enabling the colonists to secure their weapons and organize resistance. General Thomas Gage, the British forces Commander in Chief and Royal Governor of Massachusetts, wanted to avoid conflict, but could not tolerate the defiance of his authority. He recognized many of the strengths of the local militias but like other British officers underestimated their discipline and the ability of their leaders.

Gage was given instructions from London to bring the "peasants" to heel. Their obstruction to British laws and policies had crossed the line in the eyes of King George. The King looked upon their disobedience as one of many rebellions that his troops regularly put down, be it in Ireland, Scotland or East Anglia where the Massachusetts colonist's ancestors had originally come from. He was confident this situation would be handled as easily by his troops. Gage ordered his soldiers to confiscate the weapons and ammunition that the "provincials" had been accumulating. One of these missions targeted Concord and precipitated the first battle of the War. This was the occasion for Paul Revere's famous ride, largely forgotten until immortalized by Longfellow's famous poem over 85 years later. Other men also carried the message of the British army's departure from their base, but their names didn't rhyme with "hear".

The speed and thoroughness with which the warning was spread to all the surrounding towns allowed the

colonists to collect and organize their forces. These people readily answered the call of their own free will. They believed in their cause. The sons and daughters of Puritans who had left England because of oppression, they were not going to submit in their new home. They had been through one war after another, only twelve years earlier, The French and Indian War. But this war was different. These Puritans had a sense of history. They looked on their lives as an extension of their forefathers and as a foundation for future generations. They were close to their own mortality and the meaning of their lives in history. They were ready to risk it all.

The battles of Lexington and Concord ensued. The British should have taken the “peasants” more seriously. Many had military experience and they knew the terrain and how to use it to their advantage. Town militias had been a mainstay of New England life for over 100 years. Every able bodied man was expected to participate in the common defense, be it against the Indians, the French or now the King’s army. While the British Regulars were well trained, many had never seen combat. Fischer gives us the blow by blow of the battles. We see the how skillful tactics and steadfastness of the rebels enabled them to defeat the Regulars.

Fischer portrays the lives of many of the combatants to make the story human. He cites numerous individual acts of heroism and foolishness, of patriotism and treason, of kindness and brutality. His book is meticulously documented and as he did in *Washington’s Crossing* he follows with a wonderful historiography. One gets a feel for the times, the uncertainty, the danger, the anger, the fervor. Fischer delivers an engaging narrative and a valuable one for understanding the people who started the American Revolution.

Lora Innes says

I wish that David Hackett Fisher wrote a book about every subject I was interested in. He writes the way my mind works--following every rabbit down its hole and yet finds a way of not loosing track of what he's talking about in the midst of all that exploration. He flushes out his subjects and events so completely that you can see them from angles you've never looked at them before, which makes his approach holistic in a way very few history books are.

Paul Revere's Ride is no exception to this assessment. When I was at Bunker Hill this summer, I noticed one of the Rangers reading this book at the information counter. So I asked her how it was because it had been on my 'To Read' list a long time. She looked up at me, and, a bit exasperated, said, "Paul Revere was really only in the first chapter. Now he keeps talking about all these other guys." I said, "Does he tell you about all the different militias, and who was fighting where and when?!" She said, "Yeah. You'll love it if you're into that stuff..."

Well, love it I did.

I've read a lot on the Revolution, I've visited Lexington and Concord, I've toured the historic sites in the area, and still this book was full of fresh information that made me appreciate the events of April 19 in a new way that was, admittedly, a bit horrifying. The battles that day were an organized bloodbath against the British Army. This book shocked me, and I loved it for it.

If you want to revisit an old subject in a new way, take this book off your "To Read" list and start it today.

Damon says

I am a huge fan of American Revolutionary War history and particularly Boston's role. Maybe I am a little biased living in Lexington and having lived in Boston and all. :) This book does a good job of setting the record straight about a lot of the events that led up to the revolution. I had no idea that Lexington and Concord almost happened a few months early in Marblehead and Salem. I never truly understood why Paul Revere was so celebrated even though he never alerted Concord of the Regulars. Fischer's book has so much detail about these events that I constantly refer to it as a field guide to the historical places and events from the Revolutionary War period.

Jim says

David Hackett Fischer is one of my favorite authors, and he does not disappoint here.

Most people know about Paul Revere and the events surrounding the British attack on Lexington and Concord through the famous Longfellow poem. Fischer takes you into those events with Revere as the central figure.

With a riveting writing style Fischer does what very few can do...make a book on American history a real page turner...

An excellent look at a Revolutionary more famous later than at the time, but who nevertheless provides a good representation of the sort of "yeoman revolutionaries" that victory would ultimately depend on.

Elizabeth K. says

I love it when a book is well-organized. This one started with some brief background on Paul Revere and General Gage, and then went through an extremely detailed (yet not at all tiresome) play-by-play of the ride of April 18, 1775. Then, an interlude for some information about the state of the militias at that time, followed by another extensive outline, this time of the Lexington and Concord battles, and retreat to Boston on April 19. You get a great sense of Paul Revere's personality: the man who never met a club he didn't join. He's a patriot after my own heart, his reputation for leadership seems to have sprung from his willingness to take on club committee assignments, and actually do them. If you have ever been involved with club management of any sort, this might bring tears to your eyes.

Best bonus part: A brief yet brilliant appearance by John Hancock, the Michael Scott of the American Revolution -- the guy who fancies himself a step ahead, but is in reality two steps behind.

Grade: A+

Recommended: To anyone who likes American history, and if you live in the Greater Boston area, you should consider yourself obligated to read this.

Joshua says

David Hackett Fischer has sometimes been described as the "smart man's David McCullough", a term that I don't particularly care for. While Fischer writes in a more traditional academic style than McCullough, both are fantastic story tellers. Fischer tells the story of Paul Revere and the events of April 18-19, 1775 as part of larger chain of events that was unfolding across both North America and Europe. He paints men and women who have choice and who are acting as reasonable people, who are living in uncertain times and who have a complicated, and sometimes very personal, reasons. He also goes in knowing that he is battling against almost two hundred and fifty years worth of popular myths and memories, as well as various interpretations.

Fischer is able to balance the grievances and of the American colonists as authentic and rooted in popular ideas of liberty due to legal understanding and custom. At the same he also presents the background and feelings of the British officers and Loyalists as understandable to the point where I wondered which side I would support if I was in New England in 1775. Fischer also presents the eruption of hostilities at Lexington and Concord as part of a series of events that had been building to the point where many on both sides chose to believe that armed conflict was inevitable. The appendices are also amazing, especially one historiographical essay where Fischer tracks how the narrative of the ride of Paul Revere has changed during different periods of American history.

David says

This is fine history, detailed and scholarly but lively and exciting. I know the Boston area a bit and the places are familiar even as the culture of those days is very different from our own. These folks are not like us; they are better.

Nicely illustrated and printed, this book is a worthy piece of Americana. Try a little patriotism, why doncha?

David Nichols says

A thoughtful, lavishly detailed, and very deeply researched book that performs several functions. It's a halfway-decent biography of Revere himself, and of his principal adversary, Thomas Gage. More importantly, the author maps out the network of Revolutionary societies to which Revere belonged, and which helped sustain the imperial resistance movement in Boston. Fischer also describes the system of communications and alarms which connected the rebels in occupied Boston to the rebel-controlled towns in the countryside, and which allowed the Patriots to muster several thousand militia - the future nucleus of the Continental Army within hours of the indecisive battles of Lexington and Concord. His description of those battles, and of the ensuing slaughter of British soldiers on "Battle Road" as they returned to Boston, is, finally, masterfully done.

Fischer is supposed to have sold the film rights to this book for \$500,000. Asked by a colleague whether he worried if the future movie would take too many liberties with history, Fischer said, "I put my kids through college with that money; they can make him Pauline, for all I care!"

Eric_W says

David Hackett Fischer strips myth from history in Paul Revere's Ride. All sorts of fables, poems, and stories have been written about the event, which has become embedded in American culture. Any school child can tell at least something of the midnight ride and the lanterns. Fischer's book is the first scholarly treatment in two hundred years. He has discovered all sorts of information that make Revere a much more seminal participant in the Revolution than had previously been suspected.

One reason for historians' neglect of Paul Revere may be that the only creature less fashionable in academe than "a dead white male is a dead white male on a horse." Less jocularly, Fischer suspects it has to do with historians' emphasis on monographic treatises and reluctance to study any event that can't be graphed or put in a table. Fortunately for us, Fischer has eschewed this tradition and returned to the narrative form of historical reporting that was in vogue during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when history was alive and well and enjoyed. His book covers the eight-month period from September 1774 through April 1 1775, beginning with the powder alarms through the first battles at Lexington and Concord up to the bloody events of 1775.

Paul Revere was the son of a French immigrant silversmith. He grew up in Boston, at that time a town of 15,000 that more resembled a medieval village. Virtually an island at high tide, Boston greeted strangers crossing the "neck" of land to enter town with the unsettling vision of a gallows. Strangers were not generally welcome; certainly they were regarded with great suspicion. It was also a major seaport, and sailors reported that "no town of its size could turn out more whores than this town could."

Revere had lots of children (16) his first was born shortly after his first marriage, a common event in the eighteenth century, when perhaps 35% of couples were expecting at the time of their formal marriage. His first wife died shortly after their eighth child was born, and he married his second wife shortly thereafter. The principles of working together were pounded into the children from a young age. Cotton Mather, a famous preacher of the day, used the metaphor of rowing a boat with two oars. Pull on one oar only and the boat will simply go around in circles. Both oars together make great progress.

Revere was a genius at collective action. It turns out there were more than sixty riders out that night. He was a major organizer and instigator. He helped organize the Sons of Liberty, a terrorist group that included many Freemasons and used numerous secret signs and cryptic codes to communicate. They were organized into "cells" where the members only knew the leader, not each other, a structure copied by many underground and terrorist organizations later on. Their violence was tempered and organized, however. During the famous Tea Party, the locks on the tea chests were carefully replaced after the tea was dumped into the harbor, and one of the participants was severely chastised for stealing some of the tea rather than dumping it. Their careful symbolism was lost to the British, however.

It's important to remember that the Americans considered themselves British. This was really a civil war at the beginning. The riders did not cry out "the British are coming," which would have been like saying, "We are coming" but rather, "the Regulars are coming," meaning the regular British troops.

Revere became the "messenger" for the rebels. He made numerous rides of several hundred miles each to carry messages between the Bostonians and the Continental Congress meeting in New York. These were difficult rides at a time when roads were rough, if they existed at all, yet he made them with extraordinary

speed.

He was not the leader of the revolutionary movement, rather a doer and actor. He was able to get things done, partly because he knew so many people and his trustworthiness crossed many class boundaries.

General Gage was not a simpleton - unlucky perhaps as had been most of his ancestors - but he was handicapped in his plans for the attack on Concord by having his most intimate plans ferreted out by the Whigs almost as soon as he made them. Only Dr. Joseph Warren, who was respected by both sides, knew this secret spy and ally to the Americans. He never revealed who the spy was, but Fischer suspects it was Gage's wife, an American very sympathetic to the American cause. Gage himself had cause to suspect her, and after the Concord fiasco, sent her to England.

The army's march on Concord is told in fascinating detail. The regulars wore the most impractical clothes: snow white breeches that had to be kept immaculate upon pain of flogging; tall firr hats that were intended to make the men seem taller, but required additional caps to protect them from the weather; coats worn very tight, that were supposed to be preshrunk, but which continued to get smaller in the rain and often became so tight men could barely move their arms; and shoes not made for right or left, but square toed so they could be worn on either foot and were switched from right to left every day so as not to get overworn on one side. Officers' coats were scarlet, (unlike the red of the men) dyed from the dried bodies of female cochineal insects. That meant they did not fade (unlike the uniforms of the soldiers) and they made outstanding targets. They also wore a highly polished gorget just below the neck that provided an excellent bullseye.

Fischer has appended a most interesting historiographical section at the end of the book that discusses how the various Revere myths became cemented into American folklore. Much of it stems from the Whigs themselves, who wished to reveal as little as possible of their complicity in antagonizing the British to act. It was very important that the British fire the first shot and that the Americans be seen as innocent victims in order to garner as much support as possible. In fact, Revere's first written account was suppressed by the Whigs as he refused to acknowledge it was the British who fired first, and his report of all their activities prior to the event made it obvious how the conspirators had orchestrated many of the events. His deposition was not found until 1891 among his private papers. But it was Longfellow's poem that solidified Revere's ride as a solitary event. Great poem but short on historical verity Fischer notes in several short essays how the crosscurrents of American political thought have tempered the Revere legend and myth and used it to reflect their own perspective of American history. Fascinating.

Mark Mortensen says

This book provides a rock solid biography of Paul Revere focused around his famous "Midnight Ride" that set the stage for America's Revolutionary War. Author David Hackett Fischer provides a vivid historical account that deviates from simplistic popular myth and his story grasps ones attention just as much. Revere did not possess the power of Santa Claus to touch every home and community northwest of Boston in areas such as Carlisle, Acton and Wayland. Rather the heroic messenger for freedom had valuable assistance from loyal comrades. Fischer paints a very clear picture of the culture and terrain in Massachusetts back in 1775. I enjoyed drifting back to a time when low tides in Boston harbor were as noticeable as any other eastern shore location and the Charles River was surrounded by muddy marsh banks.

Having spent many years in and around Boston, Lexington and Concord I have always had an appreciation for this piece of history. In middle school our class toured Revere's home and I still have the souvenirs that I purchased. I had not considered that the Old North Church had Tory allegiance. In 1976 I was at the church to hear Queen Elizabeth II speak. I will place this book in my library beside my treasured 1865 three volume set of "The Life and Public Service of Samuel Adams".
