

# Primary Sources: The Ride of Paul Revere

By Paul Revere, adapted by Newsela staff on 03.13.17

Word Count **1,499**



Paul Revere's ride, courtesy of the National Archives.

*Editor's Note: Paul Revere is famous for his midnight ride on April 18, 1775. He rode to warn the American revolutionaries that British troops were approaching Lexington and Concord, Massachusetts as the Revolutionary War was about to start. Revere gave accounts of his ride to the Massachusetts Provisional Congress. The Congress wrote down accounts from all eyewitnesses to the battle in Lexington, Massachusetts. The Congress was gathering eyewitness accounts in the hopes of getting proof that the British had fired the first shot. But the most complete account of the ride is Paul Revere's letter to Jeremy Belknap. Belknap was a historian with the Massachusetts Historical Society. Revere's letter to Belknap was written in 1798, about 23 years after the event. Revere explained some things about the event that he had not mentioned in his original account to the Congress. Below is part of that letter.*

Dear Sir,

I wish to fulfill my promise of giving you some facts that led up to the Battle of Lexington. This is information which I have not seen reported in any history of the American Revolution.

## **"Something Serious Was Beginning"**

In the fall of 1774 and winter of 1775, I was one of more than 30 men who formed ourselves into a group watching the movements of the English soldiers. We were gaining information on the movements of the Tories, who were loyal to the king. We held our meetings at the Green-Dragon Tavern. We were very careful that our meetings should be kept secret. Every time we met, every person swore upon the Bible that they would not discover any of our plans to protect Misters Hancock, Adams, Doctors Warren, Church and one or two more.

Around November 1774, things began to grow serious. A gentleman who had connections with the Tory party, but was a patriot at heart, told me that our meetings were discovered. He mentioned the same words that were spoken among us the night before. We did not then distrust Dr. Benjamin Church, but supposed it must be someone among us. We moved our meetings to another place, which we thought was more secure. But here we found that all our actions were communicated to the English general, Thomas Gage. It was then a common opinion that there was a traitor in Massachusetts Provisional Congress, and that Gen. Gage knew all their secrets. (Church was a member of that Congress and was arrested in June of 1775. He was later convicted of spying.) In the winter, towards the spring, we frequently took turns watching the soldiers by patrolling the streets all night. On Saturday night, the 15th of April, around midnight, small boats were being moved toward the backs of the English Men of Warships. We also found that the English soldiers were all taken off duty. From these movements we expected something serious was beginning.

## **"I Woke Everyone In Every House"**

On Sunday, Dr. Warren sent me to Lexington, to inform Misters Hancock and Adams. They were staying at the Rev. Clark's. I returned at night through Charlestown. There I agreed with Colonel Conant and some other gentlemen, that if the English went out by water, we would show two lanterns in the North Church Steeple, and if by land, one, as a signal. On Tuesday evening, the 18th, it was observed that a number of soldiers were marching towards the bottom of Boston Common. About 10 o'clock, Dr. Warren sent for me. When I arrived I found he had already sent Mr. William Dawes off to Lexington by land to warn Misters Hancock and Adams. I was also being sent to warn them. But I was to ride to the north part of town where I would cross the Charles River in order to get to Lexington.

I left Dr. Warren and had my friend set the two lanterns in the North Church. I then went home, took my boots and coat and met my two friends, who rowed me across the Charles River to Charlestown. It was low tide and the Somerset Man of War was unable to move as the moon was rising. I met Col. Conant, and several others, who said they had seen our two lanterns. I told them what was happening and went to get me a horse. I rode off. It was then about 11 o'clock, when I saw two men on horseback, under a tree. But when I got near them, I discovered they were English officers who started after me. I turned my horse

quickly towards Charlestown Neck, and then pushed for the Medford Road. One got close and tried to cut me off, but got into a clay pond, near where the new tavern is now built, so I got clear of him, went through Medford, over the bridge and up to Menotomy. In Medford, I awakened the captain of the Minutemen and after that, I woke everyone in every house, until I got to Lexington. I found Misters Hancock and Adams at the Rev. Clark's home. I told them why I had come. I asked about Mr. Dawes, but they said he had not been there. He arrived about a half hour later and we set off for Concord, where the guns and ammunition were stored. We were overtaken by a young Dr. Prescott, who was also a brave Son of Liberty.

### **"The One In Command Questioned Me"**

We decided we needed to warn all those on the way to Concord. We had got nearly halfway when I saw two men, in nearly the same situation as those officers were, near Charlestown. I called for the doctor and Dawes to come up, but in an instant I was surrounded by four. The doctor rode toward me and we tried to get past them, but they, having pistols and swords, forced us into the pasture. The doctor and Dawes jumped their horses over a low stone wall and got to Concord. I saw some woods nearby and rode toward it, but out came six officers on horseback, and ordered me to dismount. The one in command questioned me and asked where I came from, and what my name was. I told him it was Revere. He asked if it was Paul and I told him yes. He asked me if I was a mail express rider. I said yes. He demanded what time I left Boston. I told him and said that the English troops on the ship were stuck in the river at low tide as I was passing. I added that there would be 500 Americans there in a short time. Then he aimed his pistol at my head and told me he was going to ask me some more questions and if I did not give him true answers, he would blow my brains out. He then asked me similar questions to those above and ordered me to mount my horse. When we got to the road, they turned down towards Lexington.

### **"A Continuing Roar Of Muskets"**

We rode until we got near Lexington Meeting House, when our fighters fired their guns, which seemed to worry them. The major asked me how far it was to Cambridge, and if there was another road. After we talked, the major rode up to the sergeant and asked if his horse was tired. He told him, it was. He made me get off my horse and gave it to the sergeant. When they all rode towards Lexington Meeting House, I went across the burying-ground and some pastures. I got to the Rev. Clark's House, where I found Misters Hancock and Adams. I told them what had happened and they decided to go from that house towards Woburn. I went with them along with Mr. Lowell, who worked for Mr. Hancock. When we got to the house near Woburn, Mr. Lowell and myself returned to the Clark home to find what was going on. When we got there, an elderly man came in who said he had just come from the tavern where a man from Boston said there were no English troops coming. Mr. Lowell and myself went towards the tavern, when we met a man on a full

gallop, who told us the troops were coming. Mr. Lowell asked me to go to the tavern with him to get a trunk of papers belonging to Mr. Hancock. We went up to the room and were getting the trunk, when we saw the English very near and coming fast. We hurried towards the Clark house. On our way, we passed through a group of 50 of our fighters. When we had got about 100 yards from the Meeting House, the English troops, led by an officer on horseback, appeared on both sides of the Meeting House. I saw, and heard, a gun fired, which appeared to be a pistol. Then I heard two guns and a continuing roar of muskets. We ran off with the trunk.