

# Trestleboard

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Greenleaf Gardens Lodge  
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*"The Unknown Soldier"*

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## The Midnight Ride of Brother Paul Revere

History Uncovered

**Paul Revere is most remembered** today as a nighttime messenger before the battles of Lexington and Concord. His famous "Midnight Ride" occurred on the night of April 18/April 19, 1775, when he and William Dawes were instructed by Dr. Joseph Warren to ride from Boston to Lexington to warn John Hancock and Samuel Adams of the movements of the British Army, which was beginning a march from Boston to Lexington, ostensibly to arrest Hancock and Adams and seize the weapons stores in Concord.

The British army (the King's "regulars"), which had been stationed in Boston since the ports were closed in the wake of the Boston tea party, was under constant surveillance by Revere and other patriots as word began to spread that they were planning a move. On the night of April 18, 1775, the army began its move across the Charles River toward Lexington, and the Sons of Liberty immediately went into action. At about 11 pm, Revere was sent by Dr. Warren across the Charles River to Charlestown, on the opposite shore, where he could begin a ride to Lexington, while Dawes was sent the long way around, via the Boston Neck and the land route to Lexington. In the days before April 18, Revere had instructed Robert Newman, the sexton of the Old North Church, to send a signal by lantern to colonists in Charlestown as to the movements of the troops when the information became known; one lantern in the steeple would signal the army's choice of the land route, while two lanterns would signal the route "by sea" across the Charles River. This was done to get the message through to Charlestown in the event that both Revere and Dawes were captured. Newman and Captain John Pulling momentarily held two lanterns in the Old North Church as Revere himself set out on his ride, to indicate that the British soldiers were in fact crossing the Charles River that night.

Riding through present-day Somerville, Arlington, and Medford, Revere warned patriots along his route. Revere certainly did not shout the famous phrase later attributed to him, "The British are coming!", largely

because the mission depended on secrecy and the countryside was filled with British army patrols; also, most colonial residents at the time still considered themselves "British." His warning, according to Revere's own accounts of the ride, was "the regulars are coming out." Revere arrived in Lexington around midnight, with Dawes arriving about a half hour later. Samuel Adams and John Hancock were spending the night at the Hancock-Clarke House in Lexington, and upon receiving the news spent a great deal of time discussing plans of action. Revere and Dawes, meanwhile, decided to ride on toward Concord, where the militia's arsenal was hidden. They were joined by Samuel Prescott, a doctor who happened to be visiting Lexington.

Revere, Dawes, and Prescott were detained by British troops in Lincoln at a roadblock on the way to nearby Concord. Prescott jumped his horse over a wall and escaped into the woods; Dawes also escaped, though soon after he fell off his horse and did not complete the ride. Revere was detained longer and had his horse confiscated, leaving Prescott the only rider to make it all the way to Concord. Revere was escorted at gunpoint back toward Lexington. As morning broke and shots began to be heard, his British army guards became concerned and left Revere in the countryside, horseless. He walked back to Lexington and arrived in time to see the beginning of the battle on Lexington Green.

The warning delivered by the three riders successfully allowed the militia to repel the British troops in Concord, who were harried by guerrilla fire along the road back to Boston. Revere's role was not particularly noted during his life. In 1861, over forty years after his death, the ride became the subject of "Paul Revere's Ride", a poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. The poem has become one of the best known in American history and was memorized by generations of schoolchildren. Its famous opening lines are:

**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  
On the midnight ride of Paul Revere**

Longfellow took many liberties with the events of the evening, most

especially giving credit to Revere for the collective achievements of the three riders, as well as claiming that the lanterns in the Old North Church were a signal for Revere and not from him, as was actually the case. As a result, historians in the 21st century sometimes considered Revere's role in American history to have been exaggerated, becoming a national myth. Other historians have since stressed his importance, however, including David Hackett Fischer in his book *Paul Revere's Ride* (1995), an important scholarly study of Revere's role in the opening of the Revolution.