

Road to Revolution: The Occupation of Boston



The copperplate used by Paul Revere to create this image is in the collection of the Massachusetts Archives. An effective piece of propaganda, it emphasizes the church steeples in peaceful Boston as British soldiers march in "insolent parade." MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES

Landing of the British Troops

On September 28, 1768 eight British warships sailed into Boston Harbor, joining six that were already anchored. The following evening the ships launched skyrockets, illuminating the fleet as crew members sang "Yankee Doodle," intended as a taunt to provincial Bostonians.

Around noon the next day several units debarked at Long Wharf including the 14th and 29th Regiments. In addition to the line of redcoats, each company of the 29th had an "Afro-Caribbean" drummer dressed in a yellow coat with red lapels and trim. Parading past the Town House, the 29th Regiment set up camp on Boston Common.

Prologue: The French and Indian War (1754-1763)

After decades of conflict, British forces captured the citadel of Quebec defeating France in the struggle for control of North America.



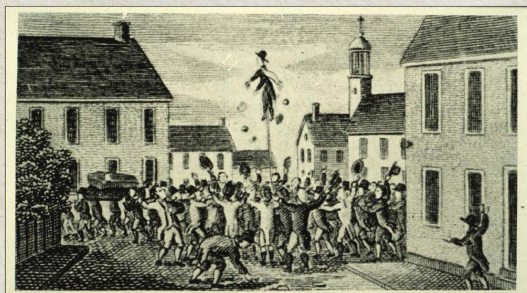
Britain and France fought several North American wars. This image presents a 1745 incident.
ARCHIVES ANGLAISE

Boston in Decline

The timing of the Stamp Act was disastrous for Boston. After a devastating fire in 1760, and a small pox epidemic, many were already fleeing the town. Wartime spending had enriched some merchants (and provided some jobs). That economic stimulus came to an abrupt end. In economically depressed Boston, opposition to the Stamp Act was especially loud.



Merchant John Rowe's bucket was used in fighting the 1760 Boston fire.
BOSTON FIRE HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Stamp Act protests. MARCHAND ARCHIVE

Taking the Stage

Because they lacked seats in parliament, many in the colonies famously protested “taxation without representation.” Samuel Adams, James Otis, and John Hancock emerged as leaders.

The Stamp Act

The “French and Indian War” had been costly. Deeply in debt, Parliament imposed new revenue measures on the colonies. In 1765, the Stamp Act was passed requiring a revenue stamp on newspapers, wills, deeds, and other public documents.



King George III was twenty-six years old at the time of the Stamp Act. Although not an absolute monarch, the inexperienced king wielded considerable power. NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY LONDON



This image, in the window of a lower Washington Street building, marks the site of the Liberty Tree.

Under the Liberty Tree

The “Sons of Liberty” organized theatrical, and sometimes violent, protests. There was widespread rejoicing in 1766 when repeal of the Stamp Tax was announced. However it was soon followed by the “Declaratory Act,” in which parliament claimed the right to pass legislation for the colonies “on any matter whatsoever.”

The Townshend Acts

In 1767 British Chancellor of the Exchequer Charles Townshend proposed new taxes on the colonies on glass, lead, paint, paper and tea.

British Chancellor of the Exchequer Charles Townshend.
SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS



Champagne Charlie

We imagine historical figures in a setting of dignified formality. British Chancellor of the Exchequer Charles Townshend (the equivalent of Treasury Secretary) did not always fit the mold. He earned the nickname “Champagne Charlie” after delivering a speech in Parliament while drunk. In addition to taxes on glass, lead, paint, paper, and tea, he also established an American Board of Customs Commissioners to crack down on smuggling. Boston would be its North American headquarters.

For Richer For Poorer

Although apprehensive about the loss of revenue, and looming deficits, Charles Townshend accepted Parliament’s vote to reduce taxes on the landed aristocracy. He would recoup some money by taxing the colonists to fund colonial administration and defense. The reaction in Boston was intense. Perhaps anticipating problems Lt. Governor Thomas Hutchinson wrote, “It has been a hard winter and many poor creatures suffered for want of work.”



Raynham Hall was the birthplace of Charles Townshend. His father held the title “Viscount” with a hereditary seat in the House of Lords. Destined for a life of privilege, Townshend made decisions that strained modest colonial finances.

“It is impressed in the minds of the people that these Duties are a prelude to many more much heavier and that a Standing Army is to enforce Obedience and the Legislative power of the colonies to be taken away.”

THOMAS HUTCHINSON,
OCTOBER, 1767



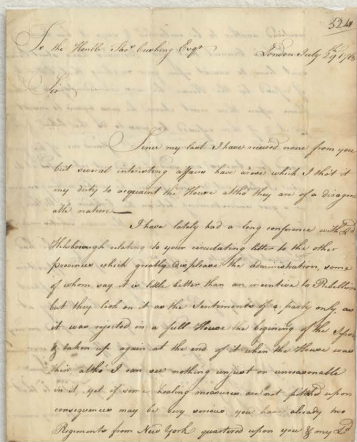
Lt. Governor Thomas Hutchinson became the most unpopular figure in Britain’s colonial government. Although supporting British policy, his reports could have accurate information about events and the colonial mood.
MASSACHUSETTS STATE HOUSE ARTS COLLECTION



TONY BUCKINGHAM PHOTOGRAPHER

The Circular Letter and the “Glorious 92”

On February 11, 1768 the Massachusetts House sent a “circular letter” to the other colonies urging united protest of the Townshend duties.



British reaction to the Circular Letter. Denys DeBerdt was hired to represent Massachusetts interests in London. He warns that actions in circulating a letter to the other provinces “greatly displease the Administration some of whom say it is little better than an invitation to Rebellion.” MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES

“It seems to be necessary that all possible care should be taken that the representatives of the several assemblies, upon so delicate a point, should harmonize with each other.”

MASSACHUSETTS HOUSE LETTER TO COLONIAL LEGISLATURES

The Glorious 92

In London, the Earl of Hillsborough, colonial secretary, demanded that the circular letter be rescinded and implied a military response. “Proper Care will be taken for the Support of the Dignity of Government.” The Massachusetts House



rejected the demand by a vote of 92 to 17. Largely forgotten today, the “Glorious Ninety-Two” were celebrated. In response, Governor Bernard closed the legislative session.

William Hogarth created this sketch of British radical John Wilkes whose activities inspired American opponents of British policy. NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON, D.C.

Say it with Turtles

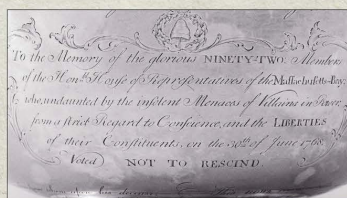
To commemorate the “Glorious 92,” the Sons of Liberty sent two turtles to John Wilkes, one weighed forty-five pounds the other forty-seven, for a total of ninety-two. In eighteenth century England, turtles were considered an epicurean delight and Wilkes was known to indulge.



The English Glutton by Mathew Darby. BRITISH MUSEUM



Paul Revere bowls. Paul Revere created a commemorative bowl to honor the 92 who refused to rescind the circular letter. The design has become classic. “Paul Revere bowls,” still widely reproduced, followed this basic design. The original is displayed at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. BOSTON HISTORY GUY



Inscription on the original Paul Revere bowl.

Wilkes and Liberty

The ninety-two who voted against rescinding the circular letter were toasted in Boston and other colonial cities. Their actions were linked to those of John Wilkes, a British radical who questioned the role of the King and Parliament and urged an extension of voting rights. His publication *North Briton* was read in America. The 45th edition, “*North Briton 45*,” led to his arrest. A gathering in South Carolina raised 92 toasts to the Massachusetts Assembly followed by 45 more for John Wilkes.

Arrival of the Customs Commissioners

Boston had been selected as the home base of British customs officials in North America. Five arrived on Pope's Day, in November, 1767.

A Much Too Warm Welcome

Pope's Day commemorated Guy Fawkes Day in England when a plot by Catholic dissidents to blow up Parliament was foiled. In Boston, street gangs fought for supremacy on that night. Although the event was toned down after the death of a child in 1764, it remained raucous enough. One commissioner observed "twenty Devils, Popes, and Pretenders," being carried through the streets. Ominously some participants held signs reading "Liberty & Property and No Commissioners."

"In the mean Time we must depend on the favor of the leaders of the Mob of our protection."

BRITISH CUSTOMS OFFICIALS CALLING FOR REPEAL OF THE TOWNSHEND ACTS OR SENDING TROOPS TO BOSTON



After many decades of service HMS Romney ran aground and broke up off the Dutch coast in 1804. NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM

HMS Romney

On May 17, 1768 the arrival of the 50 gun man-of-war Romney marked the beginning of British military involvement. Tasked with the suppression of smuggling, the Romney also impressed seamen from vessels entering the harbor for service in the British Navy. Some sea captains began to avoid Boston Harbor, further damaging the local economy. Protests against impressment heightened tensions.



Published in 1768, these verses celebrate Pope Night in Boston. The image depicts revelers in costume. Some participants would soon begin to harass British customs officials. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Seizure of the Liberty

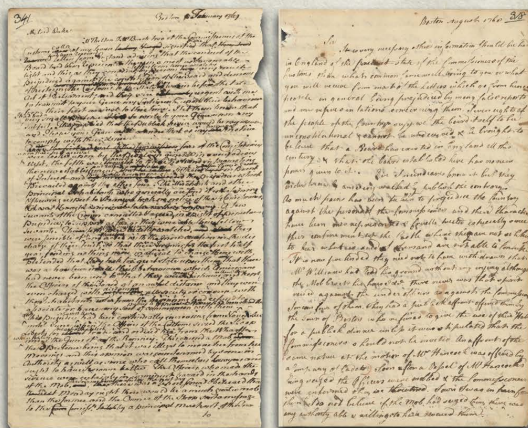
In June, 1768 John Hancock's ship *Liberty* was seized for customs violations and towed to a position next to the *Romney*. A crowd gathered and many attacked the collector of the port, Joseph Harrison, and his son. Proceeding to Harrison's home, they broke windows and



John Hancock. MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON

dragged Harrison's "fine sailing pleasure boat" through the streets of Boston before burning it at the Liberty Tree. Harrison took refuge on Castle Island. A few days later he sailed to England.

Seizure of John Hancock's Ship *Liberty*. Thomas Hutchinson reports: "Officers of the Customs seized the Sloop *Liberty*... and ordered her from the Warf where she lay [to the side] of the *Romney*." MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES



Snubbed: Lt. Governor Thomas Hutchinson reports, "The Town of Boston has refused to give the use of their Hall for a public dinner unless it was stipulated that the Commissioners have not been invited... An affront of the same nature at the motion of Mr. Hancock was offered by a company of Cadets." August, 1768 MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES

Calling for British Troops

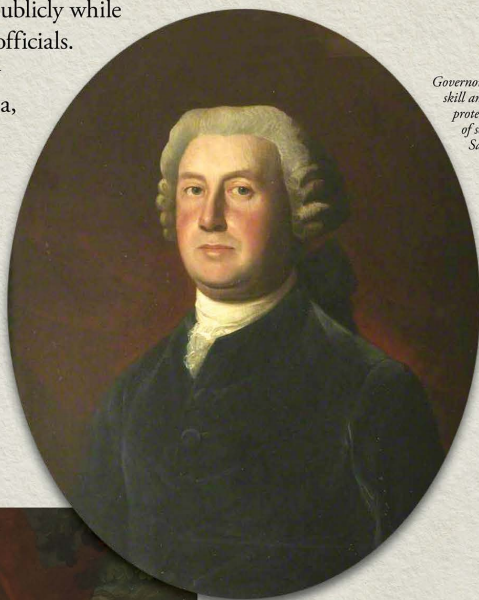
Governor Francis Bernard came to the conclusion that British troops were needed in Boston, but did not want to be responsible for inviting them.

Shadow Boxing

When the Council, the upper house of the colonial assembly, refused to join him in requesting troops Governor Bernard held back publicly while hinting at the need to British officials. General Gage, British military commander for North America, was frustrated with Bernard. “Quash this Spirit at a Blow, without too much regard to the Expence,” he wrote, “and it will prove economy in the End.” While Bernard hesitated and maneuvered, the government in London ordered troops to Boston.

“I was now at the end of my tether.”

GOVERNOR FRANCIS BERNARD AFTER REFUSAL OF THE MASSACHUSETTS COUNCIL TO REQUEST BRITISH TROOPS



Governor Francis Bernard lacked the political skill and temperament to deal with rising protests. Increasingly, he became a figure of scorn by radicals like James Otis and Samuel Adams. OXFORD UNIVERSITY



General Thomas Gage, British commander for North America, by John Singleton Copley. Gage judged that a move of decisive force would defuse the crisis. YALE CENTER FOR BRITISH ART

What's in a Name: Beacon Hill

In 1634, the Puritan government, fearing that the King might suppress the Massachusetts Bay Colony, had ordered that a beacon be placed on “sentry hill” to warn of possible invasion—the origin of the name “Beacon Hill.”



BANK OF AMERICA

of the dispatch of British troops arrived in 1768, a turpentine barrel was again placed on Beacon Hill, sixty-five feet above ground and visible far inland to warn of possible danger.

Restricting Self-Government

Taxes alone were not the issue.

Suppressing democratic participation in

Massachusetts' government fueled angry

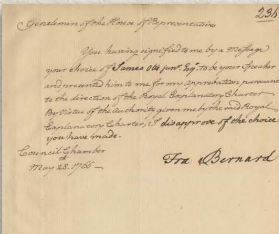
protests.



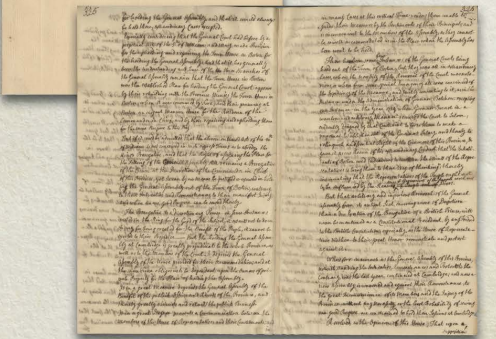
The original 1691 Province Charter is on display in the Commonwealth Museum's Treasures Gallery. MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES

Setting the Rules: The 1691 Province Charter

Issued by William and Mary, the charter granted a high level of self-government to Massachusetts. The Governor was appointed by the King. The Assembly consisted of a two house legislature. The House of Representatives was elected directly, while the members of the Council (or upper house) were nominated by the House and approved by the Governor. Importantly, tax and revenue measures were to originate in the House.



Veto of James Otis. Two years before the arrival of troops Governor Francis Bernard informs the House of Representatives that he is vetoing the choice of James Otis as Speaker. He notes in darker ink, "I disapprove of the choice you have made." May 28th, 1766 MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES



Move to Cambridge. House members protest the Governor's decision to convene the legislature in Cambridge. "It deprives the General Assembly of the house provided for their accommodation...obliges us to be Dependent upon the owners of private Property for the place of holding the Assembly...and deprives the General Assembly...of the...records of the Province...[it] thereby greatly obstructs and retards the public Business." MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES

"The Further from Boston the better..."

LT. GOVERNOR THOMAS HUTCHINSON ON CONVENING THE LEGISLATURE IN CAMBRIDGE

Losing Control

Colonists suspected that Governor Bernard had financial incentives to support customs seizures. (He received a commission on them.) As the crisis deepened he privately recommended restrictions on self-government for Massachusetts. He proposed direct appointment of the Council (the legislature's upper house) and removal of local judges who did not enforce the law. He also suspended the House of Representative several times and convened it in Cambridge to avoid the influence of Boston radicals.



The Town House (Old State House) was the seat of British government in Massachusetts.



The restored Council Chamber at the Old State House in Boston. Frustrated by the Council, Governor Bernard privately urged that members be appointed by the crown. BESTBUDBRIAN

James Otis emerged as a radical voice at the time of the Stamp Act crisis. He famously protested the "writs of assistance" broad search warrants issued to prevent smuggling. Brilliant but unstable, he withdrew from public life and died in dramatic fashion when struck by lightning. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



Massachusetts Hall, Harvard College. DADEROT

No Respect

Governor Bernard's portrait hung in Massachusetts Hall at Harvard College. Vandals broke in and symbolically cut the heart out of the image to protest the "heartlessness" of British policy.

The Empire Strikes Back

British soldiers boarded ships in Halifax, Nova Scotia bound for Boston. Lord Hillsborough, the colonial secretary, also ordered that two regiments be brought across the Atlantic from Ireland.



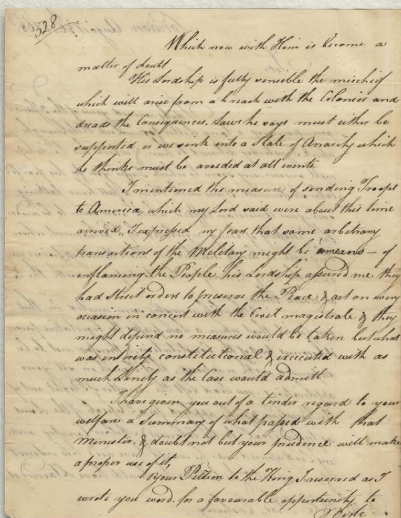
Reenactment of the arrival of British troops, 2018. PHOTO BY GERI PALLADINO, COURTESY OF NORTH END WATERFRONT.COM

Some soldiers occupied the Town House (the Old State House) for a time and positioned twin cannons aimed at the front door. PHOTO BY GERI PALLADINO, COURTESY OF NORTH END WATERFRONT.COM



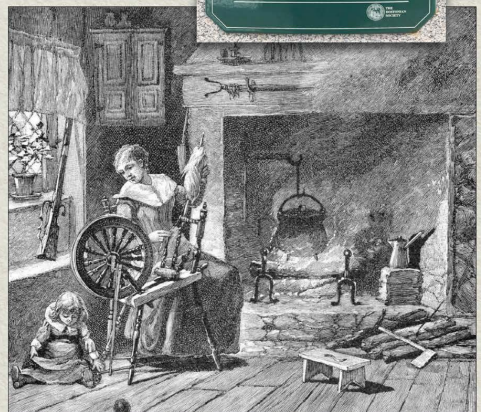
No Vacancy

In a town as small as colonial Boston, quartering troops was a major problem. The Quartering Act required the town to “billet and quarter the officers and soldiers... in the barracks provided by the colonies.” If barracks were inadequate the soldiers should be housed in inns and taverns or, if necessary, barns and deserted houses. Quartering became an immediate controversy. Some troops took temporary shelter at Faneuil Hall and the Town House. Others camped on Boston Common.



*“To have a standing army!
Good God! What can be
worse to a people who have
tasted the sweets of liberty!”*

ANDREW ELIOT, MINISTER OF
THE NEW NORTH CHURCH,
SEPTEMBER 27, 1768



The Manufactory House was located on today's Tremont Street. It once provided work for the poor in weaving textiles.

The Siege of the Manufactory House

Located on today's Tremont Street, the Manufactory House was formerly used in the production of textiles. By 1768 it became a shelter for poor and homeless Bostonians. When ordered to vacate the building to allow the quartering of British troops, the residents resisted with broomsticks and tools that had been left behind. Over a two week siege townspeople threw bread and other provisions to second story windows. Armed redcoats were forced to retreat. Some were housed in converted warehouses and commercial buildings.

Famous last words, "I mentioned the measure of sending Troops to America which my Lord said were about this time arrived... I expressed my fear that some arbitrary transaction of the military might be a means of inflaming the people, his lordship assured me they had strict orders to preserve the Peace." Denys DeBert to the Massachusetts House, on his conversations in London. MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES

The Weight of Occupation

“As if in an Enemy’s country...”

MASSACHUSETTS COUNCIL TO THE EARL OF HILLSBOROUGH
(COLONIAL SECRETARY) PROTESTING THE DEPLOYMENT
OF TROOPS. APRIL 15, 1769



British soldiers portrayed on Boston Common. In 1768 an execution for desertion shocked Bostonians. PHOTO BY GERRI PALLADINO, COURTESY OF NORTH END WATERFRONT.COM



PHOTOS BY GERRI PALLADINO, COURTESY OF NORTH END WATERFRONT.COM

Desertion

British soldiers were often very poor and some saw opportunities in the Massachusetts countryside. During the first two weeks more than forty deserted, encouraged by townspeople. The response was shocking. On October 31 regiments were gathered on the Common to witness the execution by firing squad of Private Richard Ames for desertion. A guard post appeared at Boston Neck (then the only way in and out of town) to check on all entering or leaving.

Close Quarters

Eighteenth Century Boston was really a small town with a population near 15,000. During the occupation it is estimated that one in three adult males was a British soldier. The fact of occupation was obvious with redcoats on the streets, at check points, in shops and taverns. Some fought with townspeople and increased tension by competing with locals for scarce part time jobs to supplement their modest incomes.



Selected in part for their height, British grenadiers wore tall helmets to enhance the effect and intimidate opponents. PHOTO BY GERRI PALLADINO, COURTESY OF NORTH END WATERFRONT.COM



John Hancock's home is no longer standing. Its location was to the left of the present Massachusetts State House on today's Beacon Street. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

The View from John Hancock's Window

John Hancock's Beacon Hill home overlooked Boston Common. He witnessed floggings and possibly an execution. Displays of harsh army discipline conveyed a sense of potential danger to civilians.



Death of Christopher Seider

Amid growing tension, the shooting death of a child, Christopher Seider, brought the crisis to a new level.

"Innocence itself is not safe..."

TRANSLATION OF LATIN INSCRIPTION ON THE COFFIN OF CHRISTOPHER SEIDER

Ebenezer Richardson

Ebenezer Richardson was a loyalist who sometimes informed the government about smuggling. One day he removed signs that identified and threatened merchants who were importing British goods. An angry mob followed him home and began pelting the house with eggs and other debris. The confrontation escalated when a brick was thrown through a window. From within the house, bird shot was fired into the crowd, killing Christopher Seider, not yet eleven years old.



This marker, at the Old Granary Burial Ground, lists "Christopher Seider" along with the victims of the later Boston Massacre. SWAMPVANK

Christopher Seider

Christopher Seider was a child of German immigrants. He was baptized in Braintree in 1759 and the family later moved to Boston. His exact name is not certain. It may have been Snyder among other possibilities. Names were not always spelled carefully, especially true in the case of immigrants who were not from the British Isles.

Poetic Justice

Phillis Wheatley was a slave who became well known as a poet. She had been brought to Massachusetts from Africa at a young age. Although holding her in slavery, the Wheatley family saw her potential and encouraged her to write. Among her works is this poem, lamenting the death of Christopher Seider.

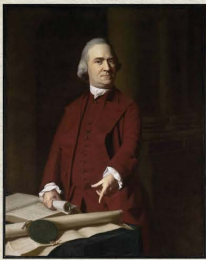
*Snider behold with what Majestic Love
The Illustrious retinue begins to move
With secret rage fair freedom's foes beneath
See in thy corse ev'n Majesty in Death*

Frontispiece from Phillis Wheatley's book of poetry, 1773.
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



A Town in Mourning

Samuel Adams and other Sons of Liberty organized the largest funeral ever seen in Massachusetts. Mourners followed Seider's casket through the town to the Liberty Tree before burial. In part because of his age, Seider's death came to symbolize British oppression. The incident might be better known today, if not overshadowed by an event that occurred eleven days later... the Boston Massacre.



Samuel Adams, MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON



Aftermath

On March 3, 1770 a confrontation between colonists and British soldiers led to the death of five civilians. The “Boston Massacre” became the next milestone on the Road to Revolution...



MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES

Beyond the Midnight Ride: Paul Revere's Engravings

Paul Revere's engravings provided extremely effective propaganda. Why are his original copper engraving plates held at the Massachusetts Archives?



Cyrus Edwin Dallin's stately vision of Paul Revere on horseback, against the backdrop of the Old North Church.



The Paul Revere house. BU/EDU

The Need for Speed

At times Revere was forced to hurry. He was directed "to attend the business of stamping the notes... all the ensuing night... and to finish them with the greatest dispatch possible." Concerned for security, a committee was sent to remind him "to take care, that he does not leave his engraving press exposed, when he is absent from it" and to take the plates into custody when printing was completed. The plates have remained in the possession of the various Massachusetts governments ever since.



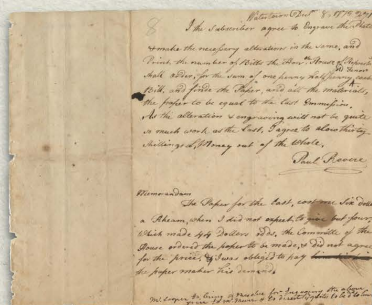
Grant Wood's cinematic rendering of Paul Revere's ride presents a fantasy landscape of colonial Massachusetts.

"Said committee are directed to take the plates into their hands, and deliver them...when the notes are all struck off."

INSTRUCTIONS TO COMMITTEE OVERSEEING THE PRINTING OF CURRENCY

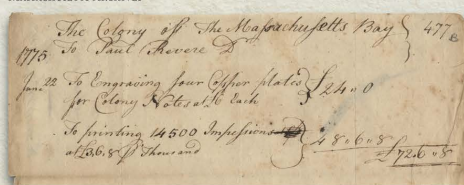
Revolutionary Era Currency

As an engraver, Paul Revere was commissioned to create paper currency for the Provincial Congress in 1775 and the "state" of Massachusetts in 1776. The frugal Revere used the reverse side of the "Boston Massacre" and "Landing of the Troops" plates (along with other copperplates) to engrave the materials. Revere created large size notes for loans, smaller for currency.



Paul Revere's signature appears on this bill for engraving currency on December 8, 1775. MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES

The Colony of the Massachusetts Bay agrees to pay Paul Revere for "Engraving four Copper plates for Colony Notes" and "printing 14,500 Impressions."



Paul Revere's workshop.

Cast for a Revolution: the Copley Portraits



John Singleton Copley

Copley's portraits of Boston's revolutionary leaders secure his place in American history. He preferred art to politics and took commissions for portraits of British officers and "Sons of Liberty." For many years he dreamed of traveling to Europe to complete his education as an artist. He fled after the Boston Tea Party. His father-in-law Richard Clarke was a tea merchant and Copley himself became a target of protesters.

Self-portrait of John Singleton Copley, NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY



John Hancock

Often described as Boston's wealthiest merchant, John Hancock grew up in modest circumstances in present day Quincy, then part of Braintree. His merchant uncle Thomas, lacking an heir, brought him into his business. This portrait was done after his uncle's death when John inherited enormous wealth. The pen may seem symbolic, but the portrait was done in 1765, long before Hancock's fame as the boldest signer of the Declaration of Independence.

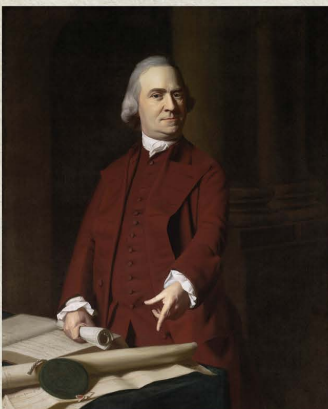
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



Paul Revere

This is an iconic portrait of colonial America as well as the portrayal of an individual — Paul Revere. Historian Jane Kamensky noted that Revere appears "at once maker and thinker." Revere "sat to" Copley in 1768 before he might be seen as a historical figure. How was the painting financed? A Copley portrait cost twice as much as a Revere teapot and Revere sold only one in 1768. Perhaps friends helped, or possibly Revere and Copley — fellow artists — bartered for the portrait.

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



Samuel Adams

This portrait once hung in the home of John Hancock, who probably financed it to display his own political sympathies. It shows a defiant Samuel Adams. He points to the Provincial Charter, currently on display in the Commonwealth Museum's Treasures Gallery. Calling it "Our Magna Carta" Adams alleged British violations of charter rights. Later, a disillusioned Copley reportedly said that Adams would be his choice if he needed to model a portrait of the devil.

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston