

# A Review of Fischer's Paul Revere's Ride

Sarah Bischoff

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/the\\_histories](https://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/the_histories)



Part of the [History Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

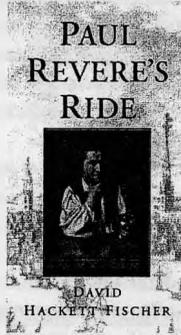
Bischoff, Sarah () "A Review of Fischer's Paul Revere's Ride," *The Histories*: Vol. 6 : Iss. 1 , Article 7.

Available at: [https://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/the\\_histories/vol6/iss1/7](https://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/the_histories/vol6/iss1/7)

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Scholarship at La Salle University Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Histories by an authorized editor of La Salle University Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [careyc@lasalle.edu](mailto:careyc@lasalle.edu).

## Book Review I

**Paul Revere's Ride**  
By David Hackett Fischer



**Reviewed by Sarah Bischoff '08**

Few college students have made it through their elementary and secondary education without encountering the poem "Paul Revere's Ride" by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. It is filled with imagery that sheds light on the heroism of one man who dares to defy the British army. Riding alone in the moonlit night, Paul Revere single handedly warns the citizens of towns surrounding Boston of the impending invasion. Thus, the Americans are able to unite against the British redcoats to begin a war that will eventually win them independence. While Longfellow's poem makes for a very good story, it is nevertheless very misleading. In *Paul Revere's Ride*, Professor of History David Hackett Fischer of Brandeis University uses a wealth of primary sources to construct an accurate portrayal of an event that is often known to Americans simply as Paul Revere's Ride.

The book focuses specifically on the events of two days—the night the British troops began their march to Lexington, and the following day when they were met by organized groups of American militia. However, Fischer also provides a good background to the events through his discussion of major characters and occurrences that preceded the night of April 18, 1775. One unique aspect of this historical account is the nearly indiscriminate descriptions of characters on both sides of the conflict. Fischer uses an adequate degree of fairness in describing British figures such as Thomas Gage and Lord Hugh Percy and does not cast a negative light on them merely because of their efforts against American independence.

In his book Fischer explains the buildup of tension between the colonists and the British government, one that occurred over the course of several years, and how that tension culminated into the events that were made famous by Longfellow's poem. Instead

of the lone rider, Fischer promotes the idea of a collective group of colonists that all played a part in forming an opposition to the redcoats. This collective group had steadily gained strength, most significantly after the Boston Massacre of March 5, 1770, and had become a widespread network of colonists that were prepared to fight against the British government.

Paul Revere's role in this collective effort was not that of a solitary leader who convinced Americans to rally behind him. His significance instead lies in the many and various connections he held in different communities throughout the colonies. His work as an artisan, his involvement in a variety of different organizations, and his concept of a gentleman as one whose status "could be attained by self-respecting men in any occupation" all contributed to the array of friends and acquaintances he acquired. Ultimately, Fischer argues that Revere's unique character and personality allowed him to associate with a variety of colonists in all professions and trades and thus brought together many Revolutionary factions into one, united group.

Throughout *Paul Revere's Ride* Fischer analyzes other significant figures of the Revolution, including Samuel Adams, Thomas Gage, William Dawes, John Adams, Dr. Joseph Warren, and Margaret Gage. His physical and character descriptions are colorful portrayals and draw the reader into the events of the book. They also convey one clear message: the stories of heroes—whom we admire for their ability to single handedly change history through their own will—are often misleading interpretations of events.

In *Paul Revere's Ride* we discover that one man was not alone responsible for touching off the American Revolution, as the poem would have you believe. Instead, an integrated network of various individuals came together to fight for one common goal. We find that Longfellow's captivating, enthralling poem is not exactly the depiction of reality we had once thought it was. Perhaps we even feel a nostalgia for that old version of the same story. But then we realize that Fischer's version creates its own heroic story. Not that of one man, but that of a multitude of Americans who put aside their differences, in occupation and social status, to fight together against oppression. We may even begin to like Fischer's version better.

New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Pp. 445. \$19.95

Genre: American History