

Ring Out in Honor of Brave Paul Revere

Karen Allen

Two hundred twenty-one years ago this past April Paul Revere rode into American history. Two hundred years ago this November, 1996 he became part of Falmouth's history when one of his bells was cast to be hung in the tower of the new 1796 Congregational meetinghouse on the Green.

In the spring of 1775, British Major General Thomas Gage, under orders to be more assertive in his prosecution of the rebellious colonials, dispatched soldiers into the countryside to seize the militia's stores of powder and armament.



The First Congregational Church beside the Falmouth Village Green, originally sited on the Green.
Photo by Rachel P. Snow, ca. 1890. Courtesy Falmouth Historical Society.

When a secret plan for a British expedition to Concord was uncovered on April 16, Paul Revere was dispatched from Boston to Lexington to warn John Hancock and Samuel Adams that a British sortie was imminent. He returned to Boston the same night, only to ride again two days later. Revere warned the citizens that the British were coming by sea—having been rowed across Back Bay to Lechmere Point.

Though Paul Revere is most famous for his midnight ride and patriotism, he was also a silver, pewter and copper smith and an engraver. He engraved and printed a hymn book, political illustrations and, more importantly, banknotes. He has been proclaimed the Father of the American engraving industry. Enlisted in 1775 to engrave the first banknote to be issued in independent America, Revere cut the images on sheets of copper and printed them on a press of his own making. The making of his own press was necessitated by the British blockade which precluded access to equipment in Boston.

The notes were known as "Sword in Hand" because they bore the likeness of a minute man with a sword in his right hand. Dated December 7, 1775, they were "Issued in defense of American Liberty." Unlike other notes issued by the Continental Congress which were easy to copy, Revere's notes seem to have been secure.

Paul Revere, at age 57, took on a new challenge when the bell in the Second Church of Boston cracked in 1792. Church members including Revere, decided to have it recast. Since very few bells were produced in America, it seemed best to send it to England.

Though bell-casting is a much larger scale of metal work than the smithing Revere was accustomed to, he offered to cast the church's bell. He needed and found an expert bell-maker to teach him the art of bell casting. Aaron Hobart taught Revere how to mold and cast his first bell. This first mold was probably made much the same as in his formula written in 1798: "The mud for the thickness of Bell, one part horse

dung, one sand, and one part clay. For nowel and cope, 6 parts horse dung, 4 sand, 4 clay and some cow horn."

Though he has never been called the Father of American bells, his was America's first large scale bell foundry. This foundry in North Boston also produced brass cannon, howitzers, bolts, spikes, nails, and copper sheathing. The foundry was moved to Canton in 1801 and Revere set up the first American copper rolling mill. It was here that the sheathing for the USS *Constitution* was produced.

Revere's first bell was inscribed, "THE FIRST CHURCH BELL CAST IN BOSTON 1792 BY P. REVERE." When rung the bell produced a harsh tone but Bostonians were proud to have a bell locally produced. The less than pure tone did not prevent the 912 pound bell from calling parishioners to service. This first Revere bell is presently on display in the auditorium of St. James Episcopal Church in North Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Revere's inexperience at bell casting is apparent in the imperfections of the bell's surface. But with study and practice the Revere foundry was soon producing well cast bells having excellent tonal quality. Revere once wrote, "We know we can cast as good bells as can be cast in the world, both for goodness and for sound."

One of the largest and finest Revere bells is the one cast for King's Chapel, Boston, in 1816 weighing 2,437 pounds. The 1792-1828 Revere foundry stockbook lists 959 bells cast. The weight of the bells ranged from a few pounds to 2,943. Soon his bells became sought after for their simple elegant design and distinctive tone. No meetinghouse or public hall was complete without a Revere bell hanging in the belfry.

A church bell held great importance in colonial communities where there were few clocks. Citizens awoke to the Gabriel bell, the Sermon bell called them to services, and the Pudding bell told the cook to ready dinner. The Passing bell tolled three times, then a ring for each year of life at a person's passing.

The Falmouth Congregational Church bell, like many, was used as a fire alarm. Ruth Washburn Sterling in her childhood memories recalled a small red box on the front of the church. In the event of a fire the glass front of the box was broken allowing access to a key to the belfry where the Paul Revere bell could be rung to sound the alarm.

It is hard to imagine something so large and heavy being delicate, but if rung improperly bells can be easily broken. Each Revere bell carried this cautionary guarantee:

This bell is warranted for twelve months accidents & improper usage excepted; and unless it shall be rung or struck before it is placed in the belfry, or tolled by pulling or forcing the tongue against the bell, by a string or otherwise.

Another devastating fate for bells is fire. Many bells have been cracked when the cold water from a fire hose hit a hot bell in a burning steeple.

In 1811, at age 76, Paul Revere ended his active partnership in the bell foundry. Although his sons continued the business of making Revere bells, only those made between 1792 to 1811 are authentic Paul Revere bells. Early bells were marked REVERE or REVERE BOSTON, with successive bells REVERE & SONS BOSTON and after 1801, REVERE & SON BOSTON. The last bell listed in the stockbooks was sold in 1828, the year the firm in Canton, having moved from Boston in 1801, was incorporated as the Revere Copper Company.

On Paul Revere's death in 1818, it was the King's Chapel bell that served as the Passing bell. Since his death was on a Sunday, Revere bells all over New England in ringing to call parishioners to service were also ringing out a praise to their maker.

The bell in the steeple of the First Congregational Church beside the Falmouth Village Green was originally cast for the 1796 meeting house which was actu-

ally sited on the Green with its entrance just opposite the Benjamin Stanford house, presently known as Swan Point Inn.

The Church Society met on October 10, 1796, to choose the best of three floor plans presented by the building committee and they set aside October 20 for the pew sale. Early American congregations, short on funds, sold pew spots or pews to provide monies for building and repairing their meeting houses. The buyer was given a deed which could be sold or willed to another parishioner. For unknown reasons, the sale was postponed until November 14, when Joseph Dimmick began auctioning off the pews. The Falmouth Historical Society has pew deed 32 which was purchased that day by Francis Davis for \$78.00. The money from the sale was to be used to cover the



The Revere bell, showing its frame and yoke, in the bell tower of the First Congregational Church, 1887.
Photo by Jack Allen.

building costs and any extra would go toward the purchase of a bell. However, Timothy Crocker, who lived across the street from the meeting house (on the present site of St Barnabas), paid for the cost of the bell. Crocker was the father-in-law of the Church's minister, the Reverend Henry Lincoln. The receipt for the bell signed by Paul Revere states:

Boston, November 30, 1796

W.H.F. Lincoln

Bo't of Paul Revere

One Church Bell

Weight 807 lbs @ 42cts. = \$338.94

Received payment by a note

Paul Revere

This receipt was given to the Falmouth Historical Society in 1901 by Miss Martha Butler, a Sunday School teacher at the First Congregational Church.

This bell was, according to Edward Stickney, the fifteenth cast by Revere in his Boston foundry and is inscribed with the traditional raised letters: THE LIVING TO THE CHURCH I CALL AND TO THE GRAVE I SUMMON ALL REVERE BOSTON. 1796.

Though there seem to be no photographs of the Congregational Society's 1796 meetinghouse, there are a couple of drawings. The most accurate according to written descriptions is an engraving by J. W. Barber drawn around 1838. The church had a gabled roof and a low square tower topped with corner posts and picket railing; above this rose a square open belfry through which could be viewed the Paul Revere bell. Topping the open belfry was a tall slim steeple adorned with a finial.

In 1857 the post and beam frame of the 1796 meeting house was moved to the present site of the First Congregational Church. The new church was built in the latest Italianate style of the time upon these timbers. A new larger bell tower was built to house the Revere bell which was taken down from the old church and

*W.H.F. Lincoln } Boston Nov 30 1796
Bo't of Paul Revere }

One Church Bell } Date 8
Weight 807 lbs } Cost, 338.94
Received by a Note Paul Revere*

The receipt for the Falmouth Paul Revere bell, originally cast for the 1796 meetinghouse. The church bell weighed 807 lbs, cost \$338.94, and the receipt was signed by Paul Revere. Courtesy Falmouth Historical Society.

placed in the new with the building committee furnishing a new frame and yoke.

Now Falmouth citizens were called to service, aroused to danger, and alerted when war was declared, and likewise when peace followed, by the melodious tones of the church's Revere bell. The Passing bell tolled all too soon after the joyous ringing for the Civil War's end, when President Lincoln died of his wounds. Only a few years earlier, in 1859, it had been rung for the Reverend William Bates, father of poet Katharine Lee Bates. Mr. Bates had been installed as pastor of the First Congregational Church on June 16, 1858, but spent most of his pastorate in great pain due to spinal cancer. Among his last words was a reference to the Paul Revere bell as it was being rung for Sunday morning worship: "How good that bell sounds! How often have I joyfully obeyed its call!"

According to R. C. Bodfish writing in 1900, Mr. Edward Landers, who lead the singing during Congregational service, tuned his violin cello to the Revere bell, which was said to be in the pitch of C-sharp.

At a meeting on February 8, 1896, a committee of five was chosen to arrange a centennial anniversary cele-

bration of the Paul Revere bell being hung in the belfry of "Old First Church," as they fondly called the First Congregational Church of Falmouth. The celebration, held April 20-21, 1896, was covered by the *Falmouth Enterprise*. It stated that flags were displayed from the belfry and in front of the church.

The Sunday morning and evening services emphasized the anniversary of the bell but the main celebration on Monday evening began with an "inspiring selection" played on the organ. The congregation and townsfolk filling the sanctuary listened to the Reverend C. N. Hinckley of the Methodist Church give the invocation. Other town ministers also took part, followed by Deacon Obed F. Hitch, who read the original bell receipt. Two Lawrence high school girls read poems: Frances G. Swift read Longfellow's Paul Revere's Ride, and Edith A. Holton read, The Falmouth Bell, written expressly for the occasion by Katharine Lee Bates. Both Ms. Swift and Ms. Holton would later write poems of their own praising the Falmouth Congregation's Revere bell.

The Reverend Charles H. Washburn, minister of the First Congregational extended the welcome with the Reverend William E. Barton, D.D. of Shawmut Church in Boston giving the main address. Barton called the bell,

the town's old friend who dwelled alone in the steeple for a hundred years calling the congregation to the house of God, tolling the passing of men's souls and the joy of peace.

During the last part of Dr. Barton's stirring oratory the bell rang in response:

Ring out tonight in honor of brave Paul Revere . . .

Ring in honor of those who founded this good old town . . .

Ring in the union of the people of God . . .

Ring for another hundred years . . .

Karen Allen, a Falmouth Historical Commission member, started delving into Falmouth's history after moving here in the 1970s. Research began in earnest after she and her husband, Jack, accepted the duties of co-chairmen of the Falmouth First Congregational Church's Tricentennial celebration in 1987. Karen was appointed as the church's archivist and began writing a history of the Falmouth Congregational Church on the Green.

This project was interrupted by an incursion into the printing business. As the Village Printer, the Allens designed newsletters and brochures for several organizations including the Falmouth Historical Society, Katharine Lee Bates Centennial Celebration, and Historical Highfield. Karen especially enjoyed working with Arnold Dyer on *Hotels and Inns of Falmouth* and *Residential Falmouth*. Though no longer in the printing business, she is presently working with the Dennis Historical Society on a history of Dennis. Starting next year, ten years after beginning, Karen hopes to finish her history on the Congregational Church.

The Church celebrated the Bicentennial of the bell on November 3, 1996, by including parts of the Centennial celebration along with a special sermon and songs and skits by the Sunday School children. Although the bell can be heard every day when it is struck on the hour and half hour, on November 3 it rang out its own celebration. May it ring for another hundred years!