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Theme: Play; Paul Revere Poem

## The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere Revisited

By Eileen Nagle

## THE MIDNIGHT RIDE OF PAUL REVERE REVISITED

### List of Characters

**ANNOUNCER:** Introduces the contest

**ORATOR:** Recites poem

**WILLIAM DAWES:** Revolutionary War Patriot

**PAUL REVERE:** Revolutionary War Patriot

**DR. SAMUEL PRESCOTT:** Revolutionary War Patriot

**SETTING:** Bare hardwood floored stage with a Patriot American Revolutionary War flag displayed

### ANNOUNCER

Ladies and Gentlemen, the 3<sup>rd</sup> finalist in the Longfellow Oration Contest, we are again watching for expressive and word perfect execution.

### ORATOR

(Strides on, clears his throat, dramatically recites)

THE MIDNIGHT RIDE OF PAUL REVERE BY Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 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.

### DAWES

(rushing in and cutting ORATOR off)

Wait, wait wait one minute! I remember I was there and it was Paul Revere AND William DAWES who made that ride.

### ORATOR

I beg your pardon sir, who are you?

### DAWES

I am William Dawes and it didn't begin at midnight either.

### ORATOR

I didn't know that.

**DAWES**

Neither did Mr. Longfellow, or at least he chose to ignore it. I'll tell you how it really happened. Now Paul was there all right, he and a group of Patriots had been watching those Redcoats for quite a few days, then in the evening on April 18<sup>th</sup> at about 10:00 word arrived that the Redcoats were preparing boats for crossing the Charles River.

**ORATOR**

I thought he didn't know if they were coming by land or by sea, and you say they came by the river?

**DAWES**

(animatedly) Indeed, and when they saw the Regulars repairing their landing crafts they figured something was afoot. Being suspicious 2 days earlier Paul had made a trip to Concord, and warned the residents there that Redcoats were likely to be dispatched in the near future to seize the town's arms supply. The townspeople began to hide arms and valuables in barns, wells, and the neighboring swamps. That's when he called me to come in. I was just a lad at the time.

**PAUL REVERE**

(Gallop ing in) The Regulars are coming out! The Regulars are coming out!

**ORATOR**

(Jumps) Who in the world are you?

**DAWES**

(unimpressed) He's Paul Revere

**ORATOR**

(Very impressed) Wonderful! I'd like to shake your hand, sir!

(To DAWES) It's the famous Paul Revere, like in the poem!

(Heartily shakes PAUL's hand)

Wait, didn't you actually call "The British are coming! The British are coming!"

**PAUL**

NO, we called "The Regulars are coming out."

**ORATOR**

Why do you call them the Regulars? Aren't they the British?

**PAUL**

We were all British subjects. It would seem funny to call them the British when we were also the British. We called them Regulars, Redcoats or Lobsterbacks, they sure hated that name!

**ORATOR**

Lobsterbacks?

**DAWES**

Because of their redcoats, they looked like lobsters!

**ORATOR**

(chuckling) Oh, to be sure. I hadn't thought about that. Tell me, what really happened next?

**PAUL**

I needed to go to Lexington, and warn Mr. Samuel Adams, and the Honorable John Hancock that there was a number of soldiers, marching.

**DAWES**

WE... (correcting) WE needed to warn them.

**PAUL**

WE (beat) couldn't be sure but it was supposed that they were going to Lexington, by the way of Cambridge River, to take them, but maybe they would go to Concord, to destroy the colony ammunition stores.

**DAWES**

It was scary not knowing which way they would go. How were we going to warn people? Paul couldn't ride both roads at once.

**ORATOR**

You're right, It could get a bit tricky going two ways at once.

**PAUL**

I returned at night from Concord through Charlestown; there I met with some Gentlemen, and we agreed on a plan that if the British went out by water, we would show two lanterns in the North Church Steeple; and if by land, one, as a signal; we were apprehensive as either way would be difficult to travel.

**ORATOR**

So you were only guessing which way they would go?

**PAUL**

The probability of crossing the Charles River was the most likely so if that was the signal I would ride and warn the residents along that route. We still weren't absolutely sure.

**DAWES**

I HAD to go the longer, darker, and less known about route.

**PAUL**

Hey, we just couldn't rule it out. So I asked young Dawes if he would like to ride along that route and warn the residents that the Redcoats were coming. As I recall he eagerly accepted.

**DAWES**

If I had known it would erase me forever from history I wouldn't have, (To the ORATOR) but I did want to protect Misters Adam and Hancock and all of my neighbors. So I left Boston earlier in the evening than Paul Revere, taking the longer, darker, harder land route to Lexington where we agreed to meet up.

**ORATOR**

It's only right, you couldn't have done anything else, and not a word of it in Mr. Longfellow's poem?

**DAWES**

Not a word.

**ORATOR**

He got the rest of it right, though;

(Continuing on with the poem) He said to his friend, "If the British march By land or sea from the town to-night, Hang a lantern aloft in the belfry arch Of the North Church tower as a signal light,— One if by land, and two if by sea; And I on the opposite shore will be, Ready to ride and spread the alarm Through every Middlesex village and farm, For the country folk to be up and to arm."

Then he said "Good-night!" and with muffled oar

**PAUL**

(Interrupting; chuckling) That 'muffled oar' was a lady's petticoat wrapped around the oar

**ORATOR**

Fancy that, I won't be asking how you got the petticoat.

(Continuing) Then he said "Good-night!" and with muffled oar

(nods to PAUL) Silently rowed to the Charlestown shore, Just as the moon rose over the bay, Where swinging wide at her moorings lay The Somerset, British man-of-war; A phantom ship, with each mast and spar Across the moon like a prison bar, And a huge black hulk, that was magnified By its own reflection in the tide.

**DAWES**

Even the guy who hung the lanterns gets more publicity than I do.

**ORATOR**

Meanwhile, his friend through alley and street Wanders and watches, with eager ears, Till in the silence around him he hears The muster of men at the barrack door, The sound of arms, and the tramp of feet, And the measured tread of the grenadiers, Marching down to their boats on the shore.

**DAWES**

See what I mean? Nothing about my trials try this new verse;

Meanwhile his friend who was just a lad; rode miles along roads silent and dark; where every shadow appeared a stark Redcoat waiting to do something bad.

**ORATOR**

It just doesn't sound quite right, sir.

**DAWES**

What was Paul Revere doing when I was riding with shadows chasing me? Sitting around waiting for a lantern!

**ORATOR**

Two lanterns actually. I know that part.

But mostly he watched with eager search The belfry tower of the Old North Church, As it rose above the graves on the hill, Lonely and spectral and sombre and still. And lo! as he looks, on the belfry's height A glimmer, and then a gleam of light! He springs to the saddle, the bridle he turns, But lingers and gazes, till full on his sight A second lamp in the belfry burns.

Now that's poetry...

**PAUL**

I have to admit Dawes is right, Mr. Longfellow stretched it a bit. I was off by 11 o'clock, and it wasn't dark, the moon shone bright that night.

(To DAWES) There were shadows chasing me too, and mine were real! I saw two officers on horseback, standing under a tree in a narrow part of the road. I was near enough to see their holsters. One of them started his horse. He came towards me, the other up the road, as I supposed, to head me, should I escape the first. I turned my horse short about, and rode upon a full gallop for Mistick Road. He followed me, and finding he could not catch me, returned. I proceeded to Lexington, through Mistick, and alarmed Mr. Adams and Col. Hancock.

**ORATOR**

Ah, I know that part!

A hurry of hoofs in a village street, A shape in the moonlight, a bulk in the dark, And beneath, from the pebbles, in passing, a spark Struck out by a steed flying fearless and fleet; That was all! And yet, through the gloom and the light, The fate of a nation was riding that night; And the spark struck out by that steed, in his flight, Kindled the land into flame with its heat. He has left the village and mounted the steep, And beneath him, tranquil and broad and deep, Is the Mystic, meeting the ocean tides; And under the alders that skirt its edge, Now

soft on the sand, now loud on the ledge, Is heard the tramp of his steed as he rides.

**DAWES**

HAH! We were supposed to meet in Lexington and go together to warn Mr. Adams and Col. Hancock together!

**PAUL**

You got in a half an hour later! Lives were at stake, we were in a hurry!

**DAWES**

I had 5 more miles to ride than you did!

**PAUL**

It didn't do any good, they wouldn't budge anyway, they just didn't understand how close the danger was. At least we started on to Concord together!

**DAWE**

S It was midnight by then.

**ORATOR**

It was twelve by the village clock When he crossed the bridge into Medford town. He heard the crowing of the cock, And the barking of the farmer's dog, And felt the damp of the river fog, That rises after the sun goes down. It was one by the village clock, When he galloped into Lexington.

(beat) Wait a minute you said it was midnight when you left Lexington. What time did you get into Concord?

**PRESCOTT**

(striding firmly on and getting in the ORATOR'S face) Wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong! What does Longfellow say about Concord?

**ORATOR**

(confused then timidly) Well... It was two by the village clock, When he came to the bridge in Concord town. (Looks at



PRESCOTT) No?

PRESCOTT

No.

ORATOR

How do you know? And who are you exactly? (Turning to the other two who look sheepish) Who is he?

**PAUL**

(reluctantly) He's Sam

**PRESCOTT**

(Corrects him) Dr. Samuel Prescott

**ORATOR**

(Impressed) Doctor?!

**DAWE**

S He joined us in Lexington.

**PRESCOTT**

At midnight.

**ORATOR**

Oh, you rode, too did you? So the three of you were the heroes who warned Concord?

**PRESCOTT**

Not quite

**ORATOR**

So you didn't make it all the way to Concord with these two gentlemen?

(DAWES AND PAUL looking uncomfortable)

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**PRESCOTT**

Oh, I made it all right; I'm the ONLY one who made it. These two didn't.

**ORATOR**

(amazed) Amazing, I didn't know that.

(Turning to the others) What happened to you two?

**DAWES**

Well, as I said there were Redcoats all over the place.

**PAUL**

It's a miracle we weren't all hung as traitors after we were captured.

**ORATOR**

You were all captured!!

**PRESCOTT**

Momentarily, some of us got away.

**PAUL**

Well, they were pretty convincing putting their pistols in my face and saying "Stop. If you go an inch further, you are a dead man." I stopped.

**DAWES**

Then they threatened to blow our brains out, but I got away!

**ORATOR**

(to Paul) And you sir?

**PAUL**

I was captured, but I used it to our advantage! They said they were just waiting for some deserters. I told him I knew better, I knew what they were after; and that I had alarmed the country and I should have 500 men there soon.

**ORATOR**

Well, I am amazed. I didn't ...

DAWES and PAUL

We know, you didn't know that

ORATOR

Well, I didn't.

PAUL

Finally after a long time and abuse they stole my horse and let me go with a tired one. As quick as I could I went to the house where I left Misters Adams and Hancock, and told them what had happened; this finally convinced them that they had to leave for a safer location and I went with them. (turns to PRESCOTT) It's a good thing too.

PRESCOTT

Why is that?

PAUL

Not long after at 5:00 in the morning the Redcoats marched into Lexington, I found some important papers of Mr. Hancock's and got them out just before the Redcoats would have found them.

ORATOR

May I continue, sir?

PRESCOTT

(nods)

ORATOR

You know the rest. In the books you have read How the British Regulars fired and fled,— How the farmers gave them ball for ball, From behind each fence and farmyard wall, Chasing the redcoats down the lane, Then crossing the fields to emerge again Under the trees at the turn of the road, And only pausing to fire and load. (pause) Is that part true?

DAWES, PAUL AND PRESCOTT

Oh, yes!

ORATOR

Mr. Revere warned the Misters Adam and Hancock and saved the papers. The good doctor fortunately was out riding and (beat) by the way Doctor, what were you doing out at midnight

PRESCOTT

(deep breath)I was returning home from courting a young lady in Lexington.

ORATOR

Nothing to be ashamed of. He rode on to Concord and warned the people. This is better than the poem. Mr. Dawes, sir, after you escaped from the Regulars, what did you do?

DAWES

My horse bucked me off and I had to walk back to Lexington.

ORATOR

I am so impressed and Mr. Longfellow would have served you better if he had included all of you in his poem.

(to the audience as if to the judges)

This will be better than word perfect execution!

So through the night rode (beat) Samuel Prescott, William Dawes, and Paul Revere, And so through the night went their cry of alarm To every Middlesex village and farm,—

A cry of defiance, and not of fear, A voice in the darkness, a knock at the door, And a word that shall echo for evermore! For, borne on the night-wind of the Past, Through all our history, to the last, In the hour of darkness and peril and need, The people will waken and listen to hear The hurrying hoof-beats of their steeds, And the midnight message of Prescott, Dawes and Paul Revere. (bows)

The End