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**Myths and Facts of Revere’s Midnight Ride**

*From the Paul Revere Heritage Project*

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was one of the most popular poets in American history. He wrote Paul Revere’s Ride in 1860, 95 years after the actual ride. Current events at the time influenced Longfellow’s approach to his famous poem. During that time the Independence war was receding from memory and the civil unrest which lead to the American Civil War was beginning. A critical time in American history had started, a time in need of patriotism, when a unifying cause was needed to avoid the break up of the Union. The author's intentions were political, he wanted to remind his readers of the sacrifices their parents went through and to build awareness to fight slavery and protect the Union. To appeal his audience he combined narrative fiction with the music of verse. Longfellow romanticized his character to inspire and lift spirits.

At the opening of the poem the author addresses children though that was not his intended audience. Paul Revere’s Ride was first published in The Atlantic Monthly, a literacy and cultural commentary magazine and not a children’s magazine. By invoking children he tried to address the urgency and importance of passing on the legacy to the new generation since “hardly a man is now alive who remembers that day and year”. He felt the need to preserve the memory of this patriotic act.

From the beginning he meant to write a poem and not a historical account. He meant to retell the story taking the liberty to dramatize Revere’s individuality, patriotism and the fight for independence. Longfellow created a national icon from a local folk hero hardly known outside Massachusetts. He also dramatized Revere’s ride creating a national myth.

During most of the nineteenth century Longfellow’s poem was considered a historical account and evidence of what happened the night of April 18, 1775 and many textbooks were written based on Longfellow’s poem. During the 20th century textbook writers and historians tried to portray a more objective account of the facts. They argued about the inaccuracies of the poet’s account and what were the real events, they tried to demythologize the poem. Nevertheless, Longfellow's poem has become so successful and ingrained in every American mind that readers no longer remember it as a poem but as a national legend. It is a reminder of the patriotism that led to independence and a part of the American culture.

1. Why did Longfellow write about Paul Revere so long after the events of the Revolutionary War?

2. What were the author’s political goals through writing the poem?

3. Why did Longfellow address his poem to children?

4. How did Longfellow’s work become more than just a poem?

5. After reading both the poem itself and this article, how would you describe the importance of verifying the authenticity of sources to study history?