

*The Old North Church*  
& HISTORIC SITE

Why is Old North famous? It all comes down to the steeple. In the 1700s, Old North's steeple was the tallest point in Boston and could be seen from quite a distance--and that turned out to be very important.

If we could go back in time to April 1775, we would be in a very divided city. There was a huge military presence--British troops were everywhere. There was tension building. Some residents were Loyalists, some were neutral, and some were resisting British laws and policies until they had representation. That last group, whom we call 'Patriots' included a group known as the Sons of Liberty whose members were men like Samuel Adams, John Hancock, and Paul Revere. Back in April of 1775, the Sons of Liberty were very concerned about reports that British General Thomas Gage was planning to send troops to seize munitions stockpiled in the town of Concord. The Sons of Liberty needed a plan for how to spread the word quickly and widely as soon as the troops went on the move. Equally importantly--the message needed to include whether the troops were taking the land route or the shorter, but more complicated, water route. Paul Revere's ability to problem solve came to the rescue. He suggested that they use Old North's steeple--specifically, use a lantern signal shining from the steeple, to alert a network of riders waiting across the river. A simple signal: "one if by land and two if by sea".

And that's what happened on April 18, 1775. Spies learned that the British were taking the water route. Revere passed the word on to activate the plan - with his own ride to do, and so many towns and villages to alert, Revere could not do it all on his own; it would require a lot of teamwork for the plan to be successful. So, Old North's sexton, Robert Newman and vestryman John Pulling, Jr. broke curfew and entered the church late in the evening. They climbed up the tower to the top of the steeple where they held two lanterns for about one minute. Those two signal lanterns set a complex alarm system into motion, a system that included many people fanning out across Massachusetts that night. Once Revere got across the river, he began his own famous ride as part of this system.

Ultimately, when the British arrived in Lexington the next morning they were met by local militia members and the shots fired that morning ignited the American Revolutionary War.