Americanism
January 2, 2026
Washington at the Delaware

We have all seen the famous painting of a bold and confident George Washington standing bravely in a small boat, crossing the Delaware River with his Continental Army. It has stirred patriotic emotions in us for years, but how exactly did this crossing take place successfully?

At the time of the crossing, Washington's army had experienced a series of military defeats, and troop morale was at an all-time low. As the harsh Pennsylvania winter ensued, the soldiers lacked both food and warm clothing, and the army was shrinking due to expiring enlistments and desertions. Washington desperately needed a victory.

Washington organized a surprise attack on a well- trained garrison of about 1,400 Hessians, or German mercenary soldiers, who were situated around Trenton, New Jersey. After several councils of war, he set the date for the crossing of the Delaware River with about 2,400 Continental soldiers for Christmas night, 1776.

The plan was to cross three separate groups over the river, but two groups were unable to cross successfully. Only Washington's main group made it across, but it was more than three hours delayed.

None of the Continental soldiers knew anything about their upcoming mission; Washington kept all details of the crossing secret. On Christmas morning 1776, the soldiers awoke to frozen, snow-covered ground. In late afternoon, they gathered along the river, following Washington's orders. The plan was to begin crossing immediately after nightfall, complete the crossing by midnight, reassemble, and march ten miles to Trenton, arriving there no later than 5 am, to surprise the Hessians in battle.

However, things did not go as planned. Many of the regiments did not arrive at the river until well after dark, and a severe winter storm of wind, rain, snow, hail, and sleet ensued at the riverbank, slowing the crossing. The boats had to maneuver through ice jams and river currents, and the extreme night darkness made it hard for the boatmen to see the opposite shore.

So, how did Washington secure the boats necessary for the Delaware River crossing? And who were these skilled boatmen who led the army across?

In preparation for the crossing, the New Jersey Continental militia had gathered all available watercraft to the banks of the river and secured them. Thus, the British would not be able to access them, and they would be used by the American soldiers when they completed the mission and re-crossed the river to safety.

About 20 strongly built cargo vessels, called Durham boats, transported the soldiers across the river. Each Durham boat was 60 feet long, 6 feet wide, and 3 feet deep, with a flat bottom and high sides. With both the front and stern pointed at the ends, they were propelled along the shoreline by maneuvering steel tipped poles into the riverbed. Oars were used in the deeper water in the middle of the river.

An oarsman would go across the river, simply turn around in the boat, and run it back across the river with ease. There were numerous Durham boats around the Trenton landings, used daily for transporting heavy iron ore and bulk goods downriver to markets in and around Philadelphia. The patriot soldiers simply commandeered them for the mission, and hid them along the river until the night they were needed.

Oh, but wait. Unbelievably, the soldiers also transported heavy artillery and 50 horses across the river that night. Washington and his army needed the extra firepower so, over the river at a ferry location, came 18 cannons, some weighing as much as 1,750 pounds. They also moved enough ammunition for the coming battle, as well as the horses needed to pull the artillery carriages. For this endeavor, simple flat- bottomed ferries were used, probably fixed to a wire stretched across the river.

Fortunately, the area where General Washington and his army crossed was rather narrow, only about 300 yards wide. No one died during the crossing, not even one of the skittish and terrified horses.

And who were the skilled boatmen who transported the soldiers and equipment safely across? Washington relied on nearly 500 men in the Marblehead Regiment from Massachusetts, under the command of Colonel John Glover. Most of Glover's men were seamen, mariners, and fishermen from the New England maritime shores. Glover himself was a successful seaman and international merchant who owned his own ship.

When Washington asked Glover whether his daring plan to cross the Delaware at night was even imaginable, much less doable, Glover confidently replied, "You need not be troubled about that, General; my boys can handle that." And they did. The indispensable so-called "Marbleheaders" are the unsung heroes of the crossing.

General Washington updated John Hancock and the Continental Congress in a letter dated December 27, 1776. In it, he wrote, "Sir: I have the pleasure of congratulating you upon the success of an enterprise … against a detachment of the enemy lying in Trenton … which was executed [or in modern language "completed"] yesterday morning."

Humbly describing his military achievement in the letter, Washington wrote, "As I was certain there was no making a retreat without being discovered… I determined to push on at all [costs]."

What an inspiring feat Washington and his Continental Army accomplished!
We are indeed blessed to live in this country. Thank you for listening, and God bless America.

--Karen Blanco

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Americanism
February 6, 2026
John Hancock

John Hancock, serving as President of the Second Continental Congress, was the first person to sign the newly created Declaration of Independence. Legend has it that, after signing his name in a large flourish, Hancock exclaimed, “There! Now, King George can read my name without spectacles, and may now double his reward of 500 pounds for my head. That is my defiance.”

Historians cannot verify that Hancock actually made that statement, but he was at that time well known for his energetic personality, and great patriotism for the American fight for independence. It is a comment that would fit his personality well.

Hancock was born in Braintree, Massachusetts in 1737, the son and grandson of ministers. As a young boy, Hancock played with his future compatriot John Adams and other children in Braintree, exploring the woods, swimming in streams, and hiding out in an old fort in the area.

Tragically, when John was just seven, his father died, leaving his widow and three young children to live with John’s grandfather. Thomas Hancock, John’s wealthy uncle, whose marriage had produced no children, adopted John as the heir to his fortune.

Off John went to Boston, where his uncle hired tutors to change him from a country bumpkin to a country squire, teaching him how to dress opulently, to use manners, and to interact well with others.

Hancock entered Harvard College at age 13 and graduated at the age of 17, whereupon Uncle Thomas trained John for eventual ownership of the House of Hancock. This was the large and successful business, built and maintained by the uncle, which engaged in mercantilism and shipping, as well as investment banking.

In 1764, Uncle Thomas died, leaving the entire business to John, making him quite possibly the wealthiest man in Massachusetts.

Hancock married his wife Dorothy in 1775, and they had two children. Their daughter Lydia did not survive infancy and, since John was away at the time in Philadelphia, with great sorrow he learned of her death by letter.

Their son, born in 1778, was named John George Washington Hancock, in tribute to America's future first president. Hancock was training his son to take an eventual active role in our young nation, but the boy tragically died at age 9, when he fell and hit his head while ice skating.

At first, Hancock was a loyal subject of the British Empire since, as a merchant, he did quite a lot of business with England. He hesitated to take sides in the fight for independence for fear of losing his business empire.

However, his mind changed with the Stamp Act in 1765, for now there was talk of "no taxation without representation." In one incident, British customs officials seized one of Hancock's ships, accusing him of smuggling wine. Continual British aggression fueled Hancock's growing patriotism.

He gave fiery speeches against the British, encouraging colonists to "fight for your houses, your lands, wives, and children, so that those noxious vermin will be swept forever from the streets of Boston."

And another Hancock quote: "Some boast of being friends to government. I am a friend to <u>righteous</u> government…but I glory in publicly avowing my eternal enmity to tyranny."

No wonder the British tried endlessly to capture Hancock and silence him.

As President of the Second Continental Congress, Hancock oversaw the distribution of the Declaration of Independence to the 13 colonies. Printed broadsheets of the document were sent to each colony's governor, who was expected to find a way for the citizens to hear the Declaration read aloud as a public proclamation.

These original printed broadsheets of the Declaration, including the one sent to King George, contained only one name, that of John Hancock. The other delegates did not sign their names until August 2, 1776.

As one source explains beautifully, “In other words, in the earliest and riskiest stages of the war, it was Hancock’s name and his alone that was printed on the Declaration of Independence, a document that the British viewed as highly treasonous.” John Hancock was a brave man, indeed.

There are many more wonderful stories about John Hancock, so I encourage you to consult the sources I have included at the end of this piece. Hancock died in 1793 at the age of 56. Thousands of people came to pay their respects to the American hero.

John Adams later said of his childhood playmate, college friend, and Congressional colleague: “I could melt into tears when I hear his name. [He was a man of] benevolence, charity, and generosity. I can say with truth that I profoundly admired him and more profoundly loved him.”

Thank you for listening, and God bless America.

--Karen Blanco

Sources:
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Americanism
March 6, 2026
Paul Revere

I am pretty sure that most of us have heard Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's 1860 poem about Paul Revere's ride, which begins: "Listen, my children, and you shall hear/Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere." This poem honors one of the most iconic and important heroes of the American Revolution.

Revere was born in Boston on New Year's Day in 1735, the son of a French silversmith named Apollos Rivoire, who was born in France and changed his name to Paul Revere shortly after immigrating to the colonies. The young Revere was educated in the local school, and later learned the art of gold and silversmithing in his father's shop. When Paul was nineteen, his father died, leaving him as the family's main source of income. He retained and grew his father's smithing shop, eventually employing numerous apprentices and journeymen.

Revere married Sarah Orne and together they had eight children. After Sarah unfortunately died in childbirth, Revere married Rachel Walker, with whom he had eight more children. Revere was well equipped to feed all those hungry young mouths since, alongside his life as a well -regarded silversmith for forty years, he supplemented his income with other business ventures.

He worked as a copperplate engraver, producing illustrations for books and magazines. He practiced as a dentist for seven years, cleaning people's teeth, providing false teeth for patients, and selling toothpaste.

Revere operated a hardware store in downtown Boston where he sold items like hammers, chisels, ink stands, and wallpaper. He opened a foundry which supplied bolts, spikes, and nails for Boston shipyards, and which produced cannons of various sizes and, also, church bells. He opened the first successful copper rolling mill in North America, providing copper sheeting for the hull of the ship USS Constitution. He seems to have been an enormously hard -working man.

As the Revolutionary War drew near, Revere became politically involved through his business patrons and community connections. He gathered intelligence on the movements of British soldiers, and served as a courier for various patriot groups.

On horseback, he rode express to the Continental Congress in Philadelphia, distributing messages and plans among the Revolutionary patriots who were challenging the British.

On April 18, 1775, the night of Revere's famous ride, the British planned to remove arms and military supplies from a major collection held by the colonists in Concord, Massachusetts. At about 10 pm, patriot leader Dr. Joseph Warren dispatched Revere and William Dawes to warn patriots Samuel Adams and John Hancock, who were staying in Lexington, that the British were heading their way.

The two famous lanterns in the Old North Church steeple were lit -- "one if by land, two if by sea"-- and the alarm began spreading across the countryside. Passing through various towns on horseback, Revere actually did not yell, "The British are coming, the British are coming!" That phrase would have confused the locals, who still considered themselves to be British subjects.

Instead, eyewitness accounts reveal that he yelled, "The Regulars are coming out!" Everyone knew that "the Regulars" meant the British soldiers, and soon the patriot Minutemen grabbed their weapons and headed to the town green, followed by the rest of the Militia. Revere's alarm network succeeded marvelously – as the British soldiers began their march, they could hear the signals echoing in the dark night across the countryside, a sound reminding them of their vulnerable position among hostile colonists. Revere's mission was ultimately a success.

However, his famous ride nearly failed when a British patrol intercepted him, Dawes, and another patriot rider named Dr. Samuel Prescott. Dawes and Prescott escaped, but not Revere. In a letter Revere wrote later, he describes the scene: "I saw two men on horseback, under a tree. When I got near them, I discovered they were British officers… I turned my horse very quickly and galloped away… The one who chased me, endeavoring to cut me off, [fell into] a pond…and I got clear of him."

Later, however, Revere was captured by British soldiers: "In an instant, I was surrounded by six officers on horseback, [who] ordered me to dismount." The commanding officer questioned Revere, who openly and courageously admitted

that he rode to warn the colonists of the British activities: “[I] told him that there would be five hundred Americans [in Boston] in a short time, for I had alarmed the countryside all the way up.”

Revere continues his account: “[An officer] clapped his pistol to my head, called me by name, and told me he was going to ask me some questions and, if I did not give him true answers, he would blow my brains out.”

The officers searched Revere for weapons, and ordered him back on his horse. After traveling for a bit, they then ordered him to dismount, and confiscated his horse for one of the soldiers to use. At approximately 2:30 am, his mission complete, Paul Revere walked back alone in the dark and cold night, a true American hero.

Fortunately, on that legendary night, the important patriot leaders Samuel Adams and John Hancock were safely spirited out of Lexington away from the British. In 1811, at the age of 76, Paul Revere retired, leaving his business in the hands of his son and grandsons. He died in 1818 at the age of 83, and his obituary read, “Seldom has the tomb closed upon a life so honorable and useful.”

Thank you for listening, and God bless America.
--Karen Blanco

Sources:
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