

A NOTE ON THE ORIGIN
OF THE

Paul Revere
Liberty Bowl

1768

*on the occasion
of its first exhibition
as a possession of the*

MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

February 16, 1949

A Symbol of Our Freedom

"To the Memory of the glorious NINETY-TWO" are the first words of the engraved inscription on the silver punch bowl which ranks as the most important piece of early American silver in existence. Its historical significance is unquestioned and it also has its quality as a work of art. Its simple, classic form is perfectly suited to its purpose, its fine engraving is expressive of the courageous spirit of its commemorative message and it is an excellent example of the craftsmanship of the famous patriot and silversmith, Paul Revere. The inscription in full reads:

*"To the Memory of
the glorious NINETY-TWO:
Members of the Hon'bl House
of Representatives
of the MASSACHUSETTS-BAY,
who, undaunted by the insolent Menaces
of Villains in Power, from a strict
Regard to Conscience, and
the LIBERTIES
of their Constituents,
on the 30th of June 1768,
voted
NOT TO RESCIND."*

In February of the year 1768 the House of Representatives of the Bay Colony sent out a circular letter to the assemblies of all the other colonies. It expressed their protest against the English Ministry and also suggested a united stand in opposition to the Townshend Acts — a part of the old grievance, taxation without representation. Upon learning of this action by the Assembly of Massachusetts the British Ministry was aroused, especially so since trouble at home was headed by one John Wilkes also pleading for reforms in government, and so under the august authority of George III Lord Hillsborough, in charge of American affairs, sent forth an edict demanding that the American circular letter be rescinded.

In Boston, on June 30th 1768, the imperious ruling by the Crown was read, considered and then put to a vote before one hundred and nine men of the Honorable House of Representatives. Seventeen men voted to submit and to rescind. Ninety-two voted not to rescind! Then fifteen men of spirit sought out their friend, Paul Revere, and engaged him to hammer up a bowl of silver and one suitably engraved.

On one side of the bowl is an engraved circular device enclosing a "No. 45" and the words "Wilkes & Liberty"; below them is shown a torn paper marked "General Warrants" for the questionable warrants under which Wilkes house was entered and searched. In the engraving there appears also a Liberty Cap flanked by banners marked "Magna Charta" and "Bill of Rights".

John Wilkes, 1727-1797, publisher and man of politics, established in 1762 his newspaper, the North Briton. He was a fearless writer, called "libelous" by his enemies, and one working for certain reforms in constitutional government. On April 23rd of the following year, Wilkes published a caustic criticism of the King's message to his parliament and this appeared in Issue No. 45 — a supplementary edition of the North Briton. Seven days later John Wilkes was arrested and thrown into prison but his friends and supporters rallied to him and his cause.

Gifts and commendatory letters poured in upon him — a jailed member of Parliament as a Representative from Middlesex — and among his American letters was one from The Sons of Liberty in Boston, Massachusetts. They wrote: "The friends of Liberty, Wilkes, Peace and Good Order assembled at the Whig Tavern to the number of Forty-five and upwards — took the first opportunity to congratulate their Country, the British Colonies and himself on his happy return to the land worthy of such an inhabitant." And so No. 45 had become a symbolic number as "Wilkes and Liberty" had become a party cry both in England and her American colonies.

*Excerpts from an article to appear in the
BULLETIN of the MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS,
written by EDWIN J. HIPKISS, Curator.*

This famous bowl, this Symbol of American Freedom, has been returned to the city of its origin through public subscription.

Friends of the Museum of Fine Arts, old friends and new, have given generously. It pleases us especially that thousands of school children have contributed and, too, it should be known that the museum has rightly been the largest single contributor.

The bowl belongs, nevertheless, to us all and it will be held in honor always and honorably exhibited.

G. H. EDGELL
Director

Dear Mr. Moore
I am getting a box
for you on the
Museum Bowl
Dessal Saem