

Voices of Warning: Ironies in the Life of Cyrus E. Dallin

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While standing in the narrow court of the mall adjacent to the Old North Church in Boston, Massachusetts, it is impossible to miss the imposing monument honoring Paul Revere. Admirers look skyward to take in the twenty-one-foot, heroic-sized monument. One can almost hear the voice of warning tumbling forth from the determined rider with a fixed stare, anxiously seated upon a mighty steed. It is entirely plausible that while most observers are gazing at the monument, they are reflecting upon the night ride of April 18, 1775, made by Paul Revere. It is equally conceivable that some may be recalling a line or two from Longfellow's immortal poem "Paul Revere's Ride." But to imagine that by viewing this statue one's thoughts would be directed to Temple Square in Salt Lake City is bordering on the absurd.

As surprising as it may seem, the connection between the monument honoring Paul Revere in Boston and the statue atop the Latter-day Saint temple in Salt Lake City is not as improbable as one might assume. Though most people would never consciously associate the two statues, both share more in common than merely being symbols of heritage. This paper considers two of Cyrus E. Dallin's most visible works: the Paul Revere monument in Boston, Massachusetts, and the angel Moroni statue atop the Latter-day Saint temple in Salt Lake City.

Voices of Warning

While visitors in Boston look up at Paul Revere and are reminded of a voice that warned patriots of the advancing enemy troops, visitors in Salt Lake City, Utah, strain their necks to take in another

monument 223 feet above the ground, and they too imagine hearing a voice of warning. There, perched on a granite spire in Salt Lake City is a golden angel with a slender trumpet poised on his lips. The angel Moroni stands erect and warns people to prepare for yet another coming. Unlike Revere, however, this messenger was warning not only of the coming of a temporal enemy but also of the coming of the gospel, the Judgment, and ultimately the Savior Himself (see Revelation 14:6–7).

While this theme between the monuments of Revere and Moroni is not exclusive—there are literally thousands of monuments that embody such a theme—it is an important starting place when considering the commonalities and ironies associated with these two statues.

The Unlikely Sculptor

Besides both statues sharing the designation of being messengers warning of impending events, the most definitive link between these two monuments is that both were created by Cyrus Edwin Dallin. Dallin was born November 22, 1861, in a log cabin in Springville, Utah. He was naturally drawn to sculpt and sketch at an early age, working with clay from creeks and ponds and molding nearly everything imaginable. His mother encouraged young Cyrus by baking his creations in her oven.¹ At the age of twelve, Cyrus modeled several busts, including representations of Joseph and Hyrum Smith.

One of nine children and raised in meager circumstances, young Dallin worked with his father in Silver City, Utah (Tintic Mining District), to provide for the family.² Although the work was strenuous, Dallin continued to model whenever clay was made available from within the mines. His creations soon attracted the attention of C. H. Blanchard of Silver City, who insisted that Cyrus receive worthy training. Blanchard, with the help of a wealthy mine official named Joab Lawrence, raised enough money to send Dallin to Boston in April 1880.³ There Cyrus trained under the direction of Truman H. Bartlett.

Although Dallin's situation with Bartlett was less than ideal, it gave Dallin's skills a chance to mature and increased his longing to work on his own and showcase his talent. In 1882 circulars were

issued inviting local artists to create an image of Paul Revere. The Massachusetts Charitable Mechanic Association, the Massachusetts Grand Lodge of Free Masons, and the Revere family were sponsoring the contest that would result in a forthcoming monument to honor the Bostonian patriot.⁴ The competition attracted several accomplished sculptors such as Daniel Chester French, who sculpted the statue of Abraham Lincoln in the Lincoln Memorial in Washington DC.⁵ Since the competition was an open invitation, close to a dozen artists entered—including the twenty-one-year-old Cyrus E. Dallin.

Dallin completed his model in six short weeks. In April 1883 he submitted an equestrian model titled “Waiting for the Lights,” which was displayed with the other entries at the Boston Art Club.⁶ Months later it was announced that Cyrus E. Dallin had won the competition. Of course Dallin was thrilled with the initial announcement, for it seemed that this was a golden opportunity in launching a glorious career. It was ironic that the event that gave Cyrus E. Dallin name recognition as a young artist initially announced his victory by giving the wrong name. According to Dallin, the newspapers reported that “Charles E. Dillon of Utah” won first place in the competition.⁷ Fortunately his excitement overshadowed the mistake, and Dallin was thrilled with the victory—at least for the moment.

Many Bostonians found it ironic that the sculptor of their local hero was actually a novice from the West. Dallin was called “Utah’s cowboy sculptor” by some, and others went as far as calling him the “youth from the godless Mormon city of Salt Lake.”⁸ With his youthful appearance and his unique heritage, Dallin was the focus of critical remarks that were actually fueled by the jealousies of some of the artists who had not won the competition.⁹ In a way, it was ironic that some of the public displeasure was connected with Dallin’s relationship with Mormonism, because Dallin was never a member of the Church. Although he denied that his mother and father were members of the Church, they were actually members in their earlier years. In fact, Dallin’s father and mother had first met as Mormon pioneers crossing the plains on their way to Utah in 1851. In fact, Cyrus Dallin was named after Cyrus Wheelock, a Mormon missionary who converted Dallin’s father, Thomas, to the

Church in 1849.¹⁰ After arriving in Utah and settling in Springville, the family decided that “they could not conform to the strict requirements of the Mormon faith,” and they became affiliated with the Presbyterian religion.¹¹ As a result, Cyrus Dallin was not a member of the Latter-day Saint Church.

The Second Revere Model

Although Dallin was recognized as the winner of the contest and received a three-hundred-dollar prize, the committee stalled in moving forward with the execution of the monument. Part of the concern was a growing debate concerning the accuracy of Longfellow’s depiction of Revere waiting for the signal lanterns in the church belfry.¹² This debate directly affected Dallin since his model was inspired by the poem and depicted Revere looking over his shoulder waiting for a glimpse of the belfry signals.

Dallin approached the committee and asked for permission to submit a second model that would be historically accurate. He was granted permission and completed his second version in only three weeks.¹³ The committee considered reentries from three artists (Dallin, French, and Kelly) but were in deliberations for over a year. The second version of Dallin’s Revere was displayed in various galleries in Boston and received positive public reviews.¹⁴ Even with the positive reviews, however, the committee was unwilling to make a decision and became bogged down in deliberations.

The Third Revere Model

This untimely process forced Dallin to look elsewhere for new commissions. On September 11, 1883, Dallin wrote to President John Taylor and proposed a commission for a memorial to Joseph Smith, even though Dallin reminded eastern critics that he was not affiliated with the Church.¹⁵ Perhaps Dallin’s solicitation was motivated by a prediction made by Philo Dibble when Cyrus Dallin was only twelve years old. Philo Dibble proclaimed that Dallin would one day become a great sculptor and that he would make figures or busts of Joseph and Hyrum for the Salt Lake Temple.¹⁶ Apparently Dallin never heard back from President Taylor and,

after waiting four more months, wrote to him again in January 1884.¹⁷ He stated that he was returning to Utah and offered his unspecified services to President Taylor. Within a month, Dallin had returned to Salt Lake City and set up a modest studio, hoping for new commissions to sustain himself.

Ironically, it was only after Dallin returned to Salt Lake City that the Revere committee decided to use his model—pending revisions—for the monument. In June Dallin returned to Boston, and in August finished his third Revere model. The committee was not pleased with this rendering, so Dallin altered the statue as requested in November 1884 and sent it to be displayed. On November 18, 1884, the committee “almost unanimously” awarded Dallin the contract for the pending monument.¹⁸ Although contracts were signed, the funding for the monument was to be accomplished by popular subscription. With public concerns, swirling accusations, and all the other quibbling over the monument, public financial support was slow in coming and hindered the progress of the project. Frustrated with the committee and the politics involved, Dallin traveled to Paris to study at the behest of a kind benefactor and friend.¹⁹ Before leaving, Dallin signed a contract that extended the completion date of the monument to September 1, 1891.²⁰

The Fourth Revere Model

After winning critical praise for his work in Paris, Dallin returned to America in 1890 only to find that his model of Revere had disappeared.²¹ He had left the model in a shop that had both closed for business and had its owner die while Dallin was in Paris. Tragically, the model was never recovered.²² Resolute to complete the project, Dallin began anew on the fourth model of Revere. The finished product, like its predecessors, sat dormant while the committee and politicians slowly considered their options. Dallin kept busy with other commissions and finally married his longtime sweetheart of nine years, Vittoria Colonna Murray, on June 16, 1891.²³ During this time, Dallin was promised commissions in Salt Lake City, so he and his new wife returned to Utah, only to find the commissions were ornamental and not substantial for an artist of his talent and acclaim.²⁴

The Angel Moroni

Apparently Dallin's contact with Church leaders resumed sometime in 1891 and proved to be more fruitful than his earlier attempts to secure work with President John Taylor in 1883. Upon his arrival in Salt Lake City, Dallin began working on three portrait busts of members of the First Presidency (Wilford Woodruff, George Q. Cannon, and Joseph F. Smith).²⁵ Pleased with Dallin's work, President Wilford Woodruff invited Dallin to model an angel for the east central spire on the Salt Lake Temple. Dallin politely declined President Woodruff's invitation, since he wasn't a member of the Church and "didn't believe in angels."²⁶ He felt strongly that the artist who sculpted the angel should be a person "of a spiritual nature."²⁷ Woodruff urged Dallin to reconsider and even suggested that he consult with his mother in Springville.

Dallin visited his mother, seeking advice on President Woodruff's offer. After listening to her son's concerns, Jane Hamer Dallin felt strongly that Cyrus should make the angel statue and recommended to her son to accept the commission.²⁸ Dallin argued that since he didn't believe in angels, he would not be able to depict the statue properly. His mother countered that "every time you return home and take me in your arms you call me your 'angel mother.'"²⁹ She then convinced Cyrus to study the scriptures as well as Mormon doctrine and theology to determine the true character of the angel Moroni.³⁰ Dallin reported that he found great inspiration from the book of Revelation, where an angel is depicted as warning people with a loud voice that "the hour of his judgment is come" (Revelation 14:7). In a way, irony's hand was again manifested, for it appeared that Dallin had been determined to distance himself from the Revere statue and its theme of a warning voice by going to Salt Lake City. Shortly after his arrival he was drawn into a commission dealing with a similar theme. It seemed that in one way or another, Dallin was destined to spend much of his life's work dealing with messengers that warn others. Another irony is that it was his mother, who had left the Church when Dallin was a boy, who not only persuaded him to study Mormonism but actually convinced Dallin to accept the commission. Finding the encouragement he

needed from his mother and the inspiration he sought from his study, Dallin accepted the commission.

On July 21, 1891, Dallin met with the First Presidency, members of the Presiding Bishopric (William B. Preston and John R. Winder), and the temple architect (Joseph Don Carlos Young) to view his drawings of the angel Moroni.³¹ The designs were accepted by the First Presidency on August 19, 1891, and President Woodruff commissioned Dallin to model the angel. Dallin's plaster model of the angel Moroni was ready for exhibition by October 4, 1891.³² It was exhibited at the Salt Lake Fair and received favorable reviews.³³ A full-size model was shipped to W. H. Mullins and Company in Salem, Ohio, where a twelve-and-one-half-foot copper statue was created.³⁴ It was covered with twenty-two-karat gold and polished to a high luster.

The angel Moroni was hoisted onto the center eastern spire with forty thousand onlookers on April 6, 1892.³⁵ Dallin completed several other statues for the Church, including the Brigham Young monument, and finally left Utah in 1893. Dallin once said that he was not a Latter-day Saint because the Church "has too many intermediaries between me and God."³⁶ Yet ironically enough, Dallin told Levi Edgar Young, a friend and a member of the First Council of the Seventy: "I consider that my 'Angel Moroni' brought me nearer to God than anything I ever did. It seemed to me that I came to know what it means to commune with angels from heaven."³⁷

The Fifth and Sixth Revere Models

Dallin traveled again to Paris in 1896 and returned three years later with hopes of finally completing the Revere monument. In an effort to rekindle interest in the project, Dallin created a fifth model of Revere. Upon its completion, Dallin petitioned Mayor Thomas N. Hart to renew the expired contract. After a new committee, the Boston Art Commission, was formed, Dallin's model was approved on December 4, 1899.³⁸ It was placed on public display and was warmly received, but the project lost momentum once again because of the lack of funding. It seemed that the project was destined to failure. Yet Dallin refused to give up.

Despite the frustration with Revere project, Dallin continued to sculpt. In fact, it was following this period that Dallin created *Appeal to the Great Spirit*, which some consider his most inspiring work.³⁹ Thirty years after Dallin's fifth Revere model, he completed the sixth version of Revere, which was similar to the original model from 1883.⁴⁰ The sixth model had slight modifications to the horse, and Revere was now wearing a cape. While the model appeared in newspapers around the country, no effort was made to erect a monument.

The Seventh Revere Model

Dallin's interest in the Revere project was rekindled when a friend, Frederick B. Hall, died, leaving behind a photograph of Dallin's lost model—the third version of the Revere statue.⁴¹ Dallin admitted that this version was his personal favorite of all the renditions, and upon seeing a photograph of the model, he decided to make a seventh version. Now in his seventies, Dallin attempted to duplicate the 1884 statuette. Around the same time, A. J. Philpott, dean of the Boston art critics, spearheaded a new campaign to resurrect the Paul Revere monument project.⁴² Unfortunately, political posturing and lack of funding thwarted the efforts to move forward with the monument. By 1935, Boston mayor Frederick Mansfield was convinced that the monument should be constructed in the newly created Paul Revere Mall adjacent to the Old North Church, but no action was officially taken.⁴³

Frustrated with the events over the past fifty years and with a growing sense of urgency, Dallin decided to enlarge the seventh statuette of Revere to heroic proportions (one and one-half lifesize) at his own expense. Dallin and his son, Lawrence, used three tons of modeling clay to sculpt a ten-and-one-half-foot statue of Revere in four months. Vittoria Dallin described her husband as a “mental and physical wreck” after the model was completed.⁴⁴ Fearing that he would never see this work finished, he was driven by the fact that he had “thought about it and dreamed about it so long that I decided to get it off my chest before I died.”⁴⁵ The heroic-sized model was displayed at the Boston Historical Society.

Dallin appeared before a legislative committee on March 6, 1936 in support of a bill that would place the Revere statue on the

capitol grounds. While most supported the idea, some, including Governor James Curley, felt that the statue belonged in the Paul Revere Mall and not on the capitol grounds.⁴⁶ Once again the effort to erect a monument stalled. As a result, Dallin decided to sell the Revere statue to Arlington, Massachusetts, for ten thousand dollars less than what Boston offered. It was proposed that the statue would be placed in front of a local high school.⁴⁷ With the threat of losing the statue altogether, Boston's officials took positive steps in acquiring Dallin's work.

Dallin approached despondency with the project and in a last ditch effort petitioned the White Fund for financial aid in 1939. The George Robert White Fund was a charitable trust fund established in 1922 to be used for creating public works of both utility and beauty in Boston.⁴⁸ Dallin's percolating disillusionment with events over the past fifty years was evident in his appeal to the White Fund which parodied Longfellow's poem "Paul Revere's Ride."

Listen, my children, and you shall hear
Of the ignoble failure of Boston to rear
The greatest creation of my long career,
The Equestrian Statue of Paul Revere.
A citizen's committee of well known men
Selected my model from a competition of ten.
On July the fourth, eighteen hundred and eighty-five,
The committee, of which not one now is alive
Made a contract with me all legally signed
To erect in Copley Square my statue designed
To honor the hero whose cry of alarm
Aroused every Middlesex village and farm
For the country folk to be up and to arm.
Alas! no statue now graces Copley Square.
'Tis enough to make even an angel swear
But being only human I refuse to despair.
And I hope that means will be found somewhere
So after the lapse of many a year
Due honor be paid to Paul Revere.⁴⁹

The White foundation agreed to fund the project and a contract was signed January 17, 1940 by Cyrus E. Dallin.⁵⁰ Finally, on Septem-

ber 22, 1940, the statue of Paul Revere sculpted by Cyrus E. Dallin was displayed in the court of the Paul Revere Mall.⁵¹

Conclusion

The ironies associated with Cyrus E. Dallin's life and especially with his statues of Paul Revere and the angel Moroni range from the peculiar to the tragic. Consider, for example, Philo Dibble's prediction that Dallin would one day become a great sculptor and that he would make figures or busts of Joseph and Hyrum for the Temple. Dibble's forecast seemed unlikely, especially when gazing upon the budding artist—a slender boy from Utah who loved nature and American Indians and answered to the nickname of "Birdie."⁵² But when viewing the works produced by young Cyrus Dallin, Dibble's prediction seemed perfectly plausible. While it is true that Dallin never sculpted Joseph or Hyrum for the temple, Dibble's prognostication regarding his skills and recognition was accurate. It wasn't, therefore, a surprise for many—at least, to those who knew young Dallin well—that his works would number in the hundreds, receive international acclaim, be viewed by the masses, and that Dallin himself would be affectionately known as "Cyrus the Great" by his students.⁵³ What was unexpected, however, was that while Dallin's work became increasingly well known with the public in general, the name of Cyrus E. Dallin was hardly known by the masses at all. Arguably Dallin's most visible, recognizable, and prolific works are his statues of Paul Revere and the angel Moroni. Yet for the thousands who view these works of art each year, or even for those who know the works well, there are few who can accurately name the artist.

Many find some of the ironies associated with Dallin's statues peculiar. Some think it is odd to discover that the angel Moroni, which is perhaps the most well-known statue associated with Mormonism, was sculpted by a non-Mormon from the East. By the same token, there were those who couldn't imagine that a novice from the West could be capable of creating the Bostonian hero Paul Revere. It almost seemed that Dallin would never be completely accepted because the easterners thought he was a religious westerner and the westerners thought he was a nonmember easterner!

Perhaps the most ironic and tragic aspect of it all was that the work Cyrus E. Dallin considered as his most influential, important, and prized was also the work that caused him such tremendous professional and personal pain. As he later reflected upon the Paul Revere saga, he said: "In spite of this early victory, my first success turned out to be the major disappointment and tragedy of my personal and artistic life. I have never had a greater defeat than that early victory turned out to be. It upset me terribly and utterly discouraged me for the time being. It was the one great artistic tragedy of my career."⁵⁴

It is difficult to discount the artistic genius of Cyrus E. Dallin. Although the events associated with creation of the Paul Revere statue were often filled with heartache, difficulty, and raw emotion, the Paul Revere statue is admired—along with the numerous other Dallin statues—just as Philo Dibble predicted. Cyrus E. Dallin's fortitude, courage, and perseverance are to be commended. In truth, Dallin's talent and perseverance illustrate an ironic truth captured in a quotable phrase by another famous artist. An elderly Auguste Renoir, the famous impressionistic painter, was once asked by a student why he continued to paint when his hands were tortured by the pain and crippling effects of arthritis. Renoir simply responded, "The pain passes, but the beauty remains."⁵⁵ So it was with Cyrus E. Dallin. His work remains beautiful still.

NOTES

¹See Harold H. Jenson, "True Pioneer Stories: Cyrus E. Dallin," *Deseret News*, June 7, 1934, 19; Rell G. Francis, "Cyrus E. Dallin and His Paul Revere Statue," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (winter 1976): 7.

²See Albert L. Zobell, "Cyrus Dallin and the Angel Moroni Statue," *Improvement Era*, April 1968, 5.

³See Zobell, "Angel Moroni's Statue," 5.

⁴See Francis, "Paul Revere Statue," 11–12.

⁵See Francis, "Paul Revere Statue," 12.

⁶See Francis, "Paul Revere Statue," 12.

⁷William L. Stidger, *The Human Side of Greatness* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1940), 91.

⁸Loring Holmes Dodd, *Golden Moments in American Sculpture* (Cambridge, MA: Dresser, Chapman & Grimes, 1967), 35.

⁹Rell G. Francis makes an excellent case that professional jealousies were not imagined by Dallin and were at the core of many of the problems concerning the Paul Revere contest. In fact, Francis exposes T. H. Bartlett as a conscientious saboteur of Dallin's career. This was ironic because it was Bartlett that initially took Dallin under his wing as student in 1880. See Francis, "Paul Revere Statue," 5–39; Dodd, *Golden Moments* 35; Stidger, *The Human Side*, 92.

¹⁰Rell G. Francis, *Cyrus E. Dallin: Let Justice Be Done* (Springville, UT: Francis, 1976), 3.

¹¹Francis, "Paul Revere Statue," 7.

¹²Francis, "Paul Revere Statue," 13.

¹³Francis, "Paul Revere Statue," 13.

¹⁴Francis, "Paul Revere Statue," 15.

¹⁵Francis, *Let Justice Be Done*, 15.

¹⁶Alice Merrill Horne, "Cyrus Edwin Dallin," *Young Woman's Journal* 21, no. 9 (1910), 491.

¹⁷Francis, *Let Justice Be Done*, 16.

¹⁸Francis, "Paul Revere Statue," 18.

¹⁹Stidger, *The Human Side*, 93–94.

²⁰Francis, *Let Justice Be Done*, 24.

²¹Dallin's *Signal of Peace* won an honorable mention at the Paris Salon of 1980. Francis, "Paul Revere Statue," 25.

²²Francis, "Paul Revere Statue," 25.

²³*Let Justice Be Done*, 28–29.

²⁴Horne, "Cyrus Edwin Dallin," 494.

²⁵Zobell, "Angel Moroni Statue," 5.

²⁶Francis, *Let Justice Be Done*, 66.

²⁷Florence S. Sears and Jack Sears, "How We Got the Angel Moroni Statue," *Instructor*, October 1953, 292.

²⁸Sears and Sears, "How We Got the Angel," 292.

²⁹Francis, *Let Justice Be Done*, 66.

³⁰Francis, *Let Justice Be Done*, 67.

³¹Zobell, "Angel Moroni Statue," 5.

³²"The Temple," *Salt Lake Herald*, October 4, 1891, 23.

³³Francis, *Let Justice Be Done*, 67.

³⁴Zobell, "Angel Moroni Statue," 6.

³⁵Zobell, "Angel Moroni Statue," 6; Sears and Sears, "How We Got the Angel," 292.

³⁶Brent F. Larsen, "An Interview with Cyrus E. Dallin," in Francis, *Let Justice Be Done*, 155.

³⁷Levi Edgar Young, "The Angel Moroni and Cyrus Dallin," *Improvement Era*, April 1953, 234.

³⁸Francis, *Let Justice Be Done*, 31.

³⁹In December 1912 *Appeal to the Great Spirit* was placed in front of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, Massachusetts.

⁴⁰Francis, "Paul Revere Statue," 29.

⁴¹Francis, "Paul Revere Statue," 30.

⁴²Francis, "Paul Revere Statue," 31.

⁴³Francis, "Paul Revere Statue," 31.

⁴⁴Vittoria C. Dallin, "The 'Great Spirit' and Cyrus Dallin," quoted in Francis, "Paul Revere Statue," 32.

⁴⁵Francis, "Paul Revere Statue," 32.

⁴⁶Francis, "Paul Revere Statue," 33.

⁴⁷Francis, *Let Justice Be Done*, 188.

⁴⁸Dodd, "Golden Moments," 35.

⁴⁹"Cyrus Dallin's Dream of 50 Years Realized," *Boston Globe*, January 6, 1940, in Francis, *Let Justice Be Done*, 189.

⁵⁰Dallin finally received \$27,500 for the statue from the White fund. This was a major reduction from the \$80,000 first submitted (see Dodd, "Golden Moments," 35).

⁵¹Francis, "Paul Revere Statue," 38.

⁵²Francis, *Let Justice Be Done*, 4.

⁵³Francis, *Let Justice Be Done*, 147.

⁵⁴Stidger, *The Human Side*, 92.

⁵⁵Arthur F. Lenehan, ed., *Best of Bits and Pieces* (New York: Economics, 1994).