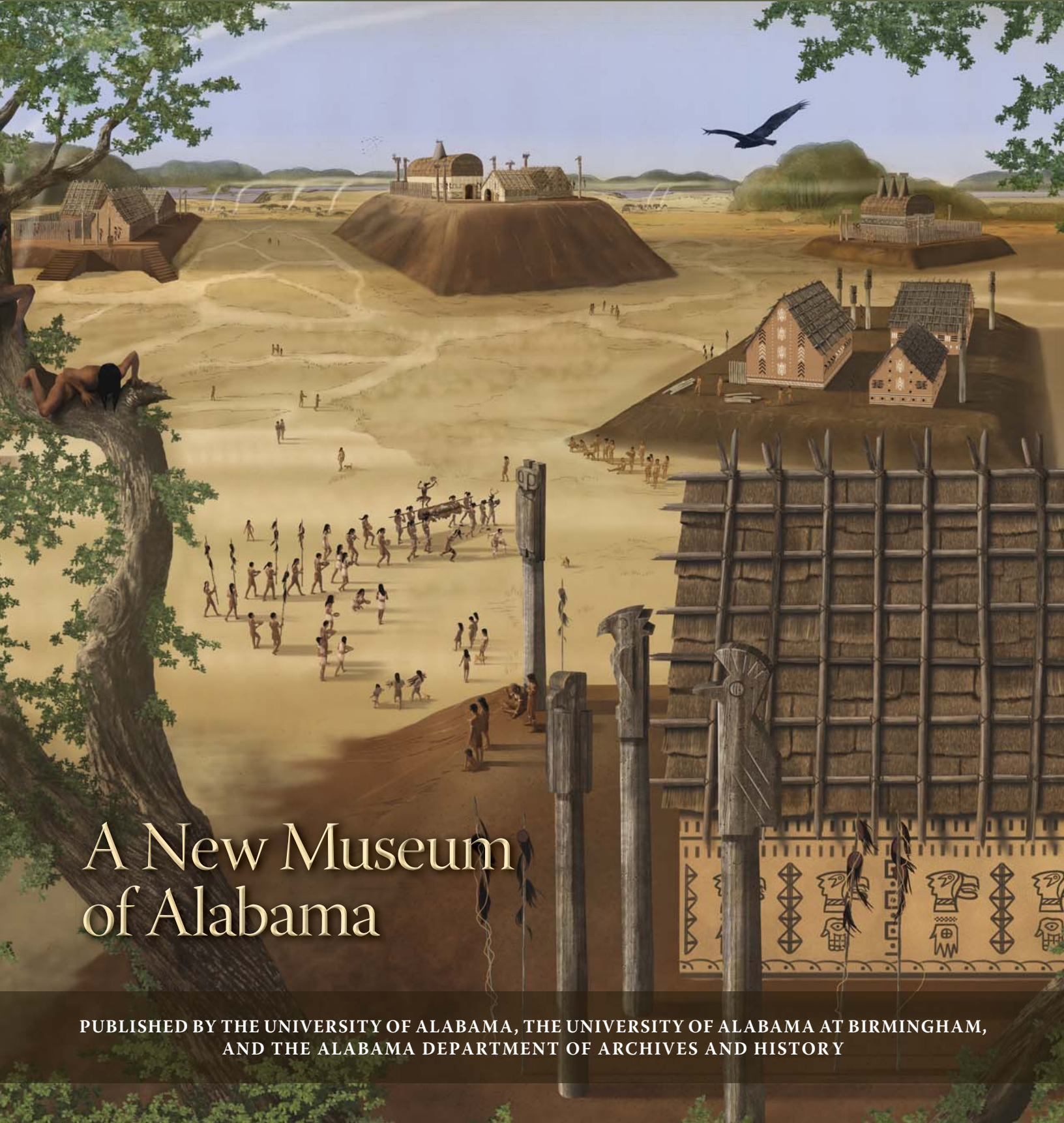


Alabama Heritage



A New Museum of Alabama

PUBLISHED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA, THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM,
AND THE ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF ARCHIVES AND HISTORY

PAUL REVERE AND THE ALABAMA CAPITOL'S STRIKING TOWER CLOCK

BY THOMAS KAUFMANN

Around 1851, after Alabama's present-day capitol building was rebuilt from the burned ruins of the 1847 Stephen Decatur Button–designed edifice, the citizens of Montgomery wanted to have a city clock that everyone could see, hear, and tell time by. Montgomerians eyed the top of the capitol portico pediment as the perfect place for a clock, and they petitioned the state government for their request. In a joint resolution on February 9, 1852, the legislature approved the placement of a town clock on top of the capitol building downtown. The city soon ordered a 'Striking Tower Clock' from Howard & Davis of Boston and installed it on top of the capitol's columned portico, building the beautiful New England version of a Greek Revival–styled clock house around it. The huge black clock dials and Roman numerals made it architecturally and categori-

A "Striking Tower Clock" was installed on the portico of the rebuilt Alabama State Capitol in response to a petition by the citizens of Montgomery. (Robin McDonald)

cally unique in comparison with other state capitols. For unexplained reasons, however, the astounding historical significance of the striking tower clock and bell has gone practically unnoticed in the archived annals of the capitol.

The clock originated in Boston and was crafted by renowned clockmakers Howard & Davis. Edward Howard and David P. Davis began a partnership in Boston around 1847,

making tower clocks under the name of Howard & Davis. Howard likely made the capitol's striking tower clock, either in part or in a supervisory capacity, and the Alabama capitol clock is considered to be a prized example of early tower clockmaking in America prior to 1875. After that date, practically all tower clocks were mass-produced in an industrial fashion.

The Howard & Davis capitol clock was electrified in the 1930s; it no longer has the original gears, or the winding and striking mechanisms, but the essential gear-box armature frame is still intact, and it is believed to be one of only twenty or so still in existence today. The time-piece's clock weights likely still hang in the walls of the capitol due to the tautness of the weight-chains in the



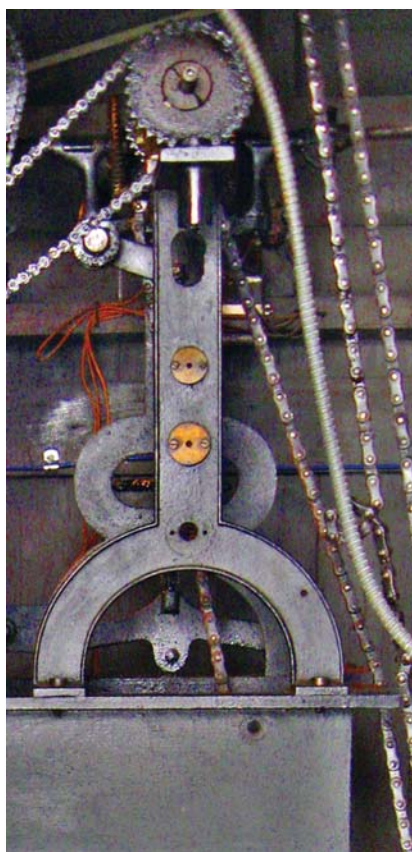
capitol attic. Also, the Howard & Davis striking tower clock was engineered to mechanically and perfunctorily strike the hour on a tower bell. Situated on the capitol's roof, between the clock and dome and under its own pavilion, the large 2,500-pound bronze clock bell glistens with chromatic colors visible through a cloudy patina developed over the course of practically 160 years. Though now silent, long ago the bell chimed the musical note 'E' in broad waves of sound heard up to two to three miles away.

But the capitol bell has its own fascinating history with an authentic connection to one of the most important and famous figures of the American Revolution—Paul Revere. A clue to this connection can be found around the bell crown, where the aged block letters reveal the inscription:

CAST BY HENRY N.
HOOPER & COMPANY
BOSTON 1850.

Interestingly, Henry N. Hooper & Company formerly was known as Revere & Sons Boston. Coppersmith Paul Revere began casting bells in his Boston foundry in 1792 and was eventually succeeded by his sons and grandsons in carrying on the family copperworks and bellcasting business. Revere cast his last bell in 1811, around the time that his son Paul Revere Jr. took over the foundry operations. Tragically, Revere's son died shortly

Top right: The bell is situated in a pavilion behind the clock tower. Center right: Made of bronze, the bell weighs an impressive 2,500 pounds. Bottom right: The clock's gear-box armature frame is one of the few still surviving today. (All Thomas Kaufmann)



thereafter in 1813, with Revere following him in death in 1818.

In 1821 grandson Paul Revere III partnered with master mechanic and bellfoundryman William Blake to form "Revere and Blake," being joined shortly thereafter by John W. Sullivan and Henry N. Hooper in 1823 to become "Paul Revere and Company," with Hooper as the company agent. In 1825 the business name changed to "Boston & Braintree," and yet again to "Boston Copper Company" until 1830, when Henry N. Hooper partnered with William Blake and Thomas Richardson to form Henry N. Hooper & Company (1830–1868), the very maker of the Alabama capitol bell.

Although the capitol bell is not technically one of the *Revere* bells, which were only cast between 1792 and 1830 and bear the inscription of the Revere name upon them, it was cast in the Revere foundry legacy and tradition by individuals who quite possibly apprenticed under Paul Revere himself or most definitely learned the craft under his sons and his grandsons. Even today, the foundry is still referred to as the Revere-Hooper-Blake Foundry by bell historians and the Guild of Carillonners in North America.

Preservation of the bell and the clock would no doubt reveal a layer of history that has never been widely known or presented before and would add a new dimension to experiencing our state capitol and its historical narrative. And certainly our children and theirs will appreciate the chance to see a bell forged in Revere's foundry.

Thomas Kaufmann is a Montgomery artist and preservationist. For more information, please visit www.thomas-kaufmannart.com.