

Dr. Joseph Warren (June 11, 1741 – June 17, 1775)

Joseph Warren was an American physician who played a leading role in Patriot organizations in Boston during the early days of the American Revolution, eventually serving as President of the revolutionary Massachusetts Provincial Congress.

Joseph Warren was born in Roxbury, MA on June 11, 1741. His father was a respected farmer who died when Joseph was only 14. After attending the Roxbury Latin School, Warren enrolled in Harvard College, graduating in 1759, and then taught for about a year at Roxbury Latin. He studied medicine and in 1764 married an 18-year-old heiress, Elizabeth Hooten. She died in 1773, leaving him with four children.

While practicing medicine and surgery in Boston, Warren became involved in politics, associating with John Hancock, Samuel Adams, and other leaders of the Sons of Liberty. He spoke publically and wrote many articles that were published in the colonial newspapers.

Warren was a Scottish Freemason. He was a member of Lodge St Andrews, No.81. (This Lodge met on the night of the Boston Tea party and there are reports that the men of this Lodge were either the instigators or otherwise intimately involved with that event.) Andrews Lodge continues to meet in Boston under the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts. Along with Warren, Patriots Paul Revere and William Palfrey were also members of that Lodge. Warren was appointed Grand Master of all Scottish Freemasonry in the 13 colonies by the Grand Lodge of Scotland. He was appointed Grand Master of the newly established Provincial Grand Lodge of Massachusetts in that same year.

The passage of the stamp-act led Dr. Warren to publish several articles in the Boston "Gazette." About this time began his friendship with Samuel Adams, who soon came to regard him as a staunch and clear-headed ally, who could be depended upon under all circumstances.

In June 1768, Dr. Warren was one of the committee appointed to wait upon the governor and protest against the enforcement of the revenue laws. He was present at every town-meeting held in Boston, from the arrival of the British troops in October of 1768, to their removal in March, 1770, and he was one of the committee of safety appointed after the Boston massacre. Warren conducted an autopsy on the body of young Christopher Seider in February 1770, and was an author of the assembled report on the Massacre.

In March, 1772, he delivered the anniversary oration upon the "massacre". During the next two years he was in active co-operation with Samuel Adams, and when, in August, 1774, that leader went to attend the meeting of the Continental congress at Philadelphia, the leadership of the party in Boston fully engaged Dr. Warren.

On Sep 9, 1774, Dr. Warren read a paper drawn up by himself, since known as the "Suffolk resolves." The resolutions, which were adopted unanimously, declared, among other things, that a king who violates the chartered rights of his people forfeits their allegiance; they declared the regulating acts of the crown as null and void and refused to pay taxes, they advised the towns to choose their own militia officers; and they threatened that if anybody was arrested for political reasons, they would retaliate by seizing upon the crown officers as hostages. A copy of these resolutions, which virtually placed Massachusetts in an attitude of open rebellion, was forwarded to the Continental congress, which forthwith approved them and pledged the faith of all the other colonies that they would aid Massachusetts in case armed resistance should become inevitable.

As the 5th of March, 1775, drew near, several British officers were heard to declare that anyone who should dare to address the people in the Old South church on this occasion would surely lose his life. As soon as Dr. Warren heard of these threats, he solicited for himself the dangerous honor, and at the usual hour delivered a stirring oration.

On the evening of April 18, observing the movements of the British troops, Dr. Warren dispatched William Dawes and Paul Revere, to give the alarm to the people dwelling on the roads toward Concord. The next morning, on hearing the news of the firing at Lexington, Warren left his patients in the charge of his assistants, and rode off to the scene of action. There, General Heath had assumed command of the militia. During that day's Battle of Lexington and Concord, Warren coordinated and led militia into the fight alongside General Heath as the British Army returned to Boston. When the enemy were returning from Concord, he was among the foremost in hanging upon their rear and assailing their flanks. During this fighting Warren was nearly killed as a pin was struck from his head by a musket-ball.

When his mother saw him after the battle and heard of his escape, she begged him to not risk his life further, to which he answered "Wherever danger is, dear mother, there will your son be. Now is no time for one of America's children to shrink from the most hazardous duty; I will either set my country free, or shed my last drop of blood to make her so."

During the next six weeks he unceasingly urged on military preparations of the New England colonies. At the meeting of the Provincial congress at Watertown, on May 31st, he was unanimously chosen its president, and thus became chief executive officer of Massachusetts under this provisional government. He continued to recruit and organize soldiers for the Siege of Boston, and also negotiating with Gen. Gage of the British Army in his role as head of the Provincial Congress.

On June 14, 1775 Warren was commissioned as a major general by the Provincial Congress. Several days later, in the moments before the Battle of Bunker Hill, Warren arrived where the militia was forming and asked where the heaviest fighting would be; General Israel Putnam pointed to Breed's Hill. Warren volunteered to join the fighting as a private against the wishes of General Putnam and Colonel William Prescott, both of whom requested that he serve as their commander. Warren declined the command in the belief that Putnam and Prescott were more experienced with war. He was among those inspiring the men to hold rank against superior numbers. Warren was known to have repeatedly declared of the British: "These fellows say we won't fight! By Heaven, I hope I shall die up to my knees in blood!"

He fought in the battle until out of ammunition and remained until the British made their third and final assault on the hill to give time for the militia to escape. At the final struggle, he was endeavoring to rally the militia, Gen. Warren was struck in the head by a musket-ball and instantly killed.

His Legacy

General Gage reportedly said Warren's death was equal to the death of 500 men. His death encouraged the revolutionary cause because it was viewed by many Americans as an act of martyrdom.

At the time of Warren's death, his children were staying with his fiancée, in Wooster as refugees from the Siege of Boston. She continued to look after them, receiving support for their care and education from John Hancock, Samuel Adams, Benedict Arnold, and even the Continental Congress.

Joseph's youngest brother and apprentice in medicine, John Warren, served as a surgeon during the Battle of Bunker Hill and the rest of the war, and afterwards founded Harvard Medical School and co-founded the Massachusetts Medical Society.

Fourteen states have a Warren County named after him. The New York county and 30 Warren Townships are also named in his honor. Warren Avenue in Detroit and Warren Square in Savannah, Georgia are named after him. Five ships in the Continental Navy and United States Navy were named *Warren* in his honor.

He has many statues and his death is immortalized in John Trumbull's painting, *The Death of General Warren at the Battle of Bunker's Hill, June 17, 1775*

Of Joseph Warren, military historian **Ethan Rafuse** wrote, "No man, with the possible exception of Samuel Adams, did so much to bring about the rise of a movement powerful enough to lead the people of Massachusetts to revolution."