

How Warren County Got Its Name

By Webb Garrison

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"Your life is too valuable to risk," insisted patriot leader Elbridge Gerry. "When the action starts, I beg you not to expose your person."

Bunker Hill, on the outskirts of Boston, had already been fortified against the opposition of Joseph Warren, M.D. Powder was in extremely short supply; as a result, the physician argued that troops who tried to defend Bunker Hill would find themselves vulnerable. Arrival of a few barrels from Savannah helped, but did not give Americans fire power equal to that of British who were sure to attack any fortified position.

Earlier, friends had urged Dr. Warren, a Harvard College graduate, to serve as physician-general to the Massachusetts militia. He refused the post, saying he wanted more hazardous service. That led to his appointment as a major general of the colony's fighting force.

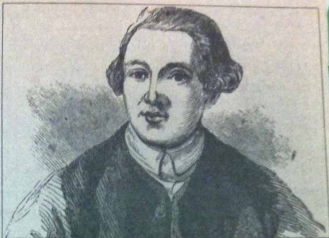
By the middle of June 1775, it was certain that battle-hardened British regulars would attack the poorly equipped defenders of Bunker Hill. Insisting he simply had to be there for the battle, Dr. Warren told Mr. Gerry: "I know that I may fall, but where is the man who does not think it glorious and delightful to die for his country?"

On the morning of June 17, Dr. Warren, who also served as president of the Council of Safety, met with its members at Cambridge. That afternoon, he went to Bunker Hill.

Brig. Gen. Israel Putnam of Connecticut, who was in charge of patriot forces, offered to take orders from the new arrival who outranked him. Dr. Warren said he'd rather forget rank and serve as an ordinary volunteer. Assigned to a redoubt and offered command of the post, he again refused.

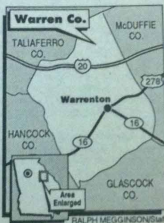
Soon after he entered the ranks of ordinary fighting men, Dr. Warren's worst fears were confirmed. An overwhelmingly large British force, with vastly superior fire power, moved slowly toward the patriots. Very early in the assault, it was clear that the Continentals could not hold Bunker Hill.

Joseph Warren, sole major-general among defending forces, took a direct hit that penetrated his brain. Next morning, a longtime medical friend, a Dr. Jeffries, identified the body. A hasty consultation led to a decision that the first high-ranking officer to fall in the American Revolution should be buried at the spot where he died.



Joseph Warren, M.D., fought in the Revolution as a volunteer.

SCRAPBOOK



Evacuation of Boston by the British nearly a year later triggered a wild celebration. During the course of the festivities, someone suggested that an isolated grave marked by a simple stone was no place for the remains of the physician-hero. As a result, Revolutionary leaders made a decision, and on April 8, 1776, one of the most elaborate ceremonies of the period was held.

At the time he fell in battle, Joseph Warren was Grand Master of Freemasons for North America. His pioneer studies of smallpox had brought him fame among medical colleagues and the general public. He could have had a safe spot in a protected command center, but died

Small wonder that the streets of Boston were crowded with Continental soldiers, Freemasons and physicians when the city turned out to honor his memory. His body was reinterred in King's chapel, with military and Masonic rites.

Masons of Charlestown, Mass., later erected a 35-foot monument at the spot where he fell. Replaced after 40 years by the Bunker Hill monument, a scale model of the Warren marker was placed inside the tall granite obelisk.

Many people outside his native state quickly forgot the gallant physician who died at age 35 in the first major battle of the Revolution. Not so one-time Scottish merchant Edward Telfair, first man to serve as governor of Georgia under the Constitution of 1789.

Gov. Telfair was never able to forget that although powder had gone from the southeastern frontier of Colonial America to Boston, the supply was woefully small. "Had Georgia been more generous," he said many times, "the outcome at Bunker Hill might have been different."

It was too late to rectify the error in sending only a little gunpowder, so Gov. Telfair waged a campaign to commemorate the major-general who knowingly went into battle with powder scarce.

That is how a 284-square-mile tract of Georgia land came to be designated as Warren County on Dec. 19, 1793. Warrenton, incorporated 35 years after the death of a man no Georgia leader ever saw, also perpetuates the name of Maj. Joseph Warren, M.D.