

# JOSEPH WARREN

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*This STB on Joseph Warren was written by Robert W. Williams III, A Massachusetts freemason who served as Editor of the "Trowel" (publication of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts) for many years. This article was also reprinted by the Southern California Research Lodge.*

## JOSEPH WARREN Martyr of Bunker Hill

On a quiet summer afternoon about 230 years ago, some Harvard College students shut themselves in an upper dormitory room to arrange some affairs pertaining to their class. Another class member desired to be with them--knowing they intended to thwart some fondly cherished purpose of his own. They refused to admit him; the door was closed, and he could not gain admittance without violence, which he chose to avoid.

Reconnoitering the premises he discovered that one of the windows in the room was open and he noticed a nearby waterspout that extended from the roof to the ground. He climbed to the top of the house and slid down the eaves, then laid hold of the spout and descended until he was opposite the open window. With a prodigious physical effort he thrust himself through the window and landed in the room! Simultaneously, the waterspout crashed to the ground; had it fallen a moment sooner he would have been thrown to the pavement below and, undoubtedly seriously injured. He coolly remarked to himself, "It served its purpose!"

That Harvard boy was Joseph Warren, later known as Doctor Warren and General Warren, the martyr of Bunker Hill and the Grand Master of Masons (Massachusetts Provincial Grand Lodge) in North America. The boy had already given promise of the man in whatever he undertook. The fearless act of getting to that room was the swelling bud which opened and blossomed and bore fruit in his adult life.

In December 1769 Warren received a commission from the Earl of Dalhousie, Grand Master of Masons in Scotland, appointing him Provincial Grand Master of Masons in Boston and within 100 miles of the same. The commission was dated May 30, 1769. When the Earl of Dumfries succeeded Dalhousie as Grand Master he issued another appointment to Warren, dated March 7, 1772, constituting him "Grand Master of Masons for the Continent of America," extending his original limits. He was indefatigable in the discharge of his Masonic duties and, coupled with his extensive medical practice, the care of his motherless children, together with his patriotic devotion to his country, won for him the highest regard of the public and the Craft. His name is indelibly engraved on the mystic temple of Freemasonry, just as it is on the pages of American History.

Somewhat impetuous in nature, but brave to a fault, Bro. Warren craved the task of doing what others dared not do--the same courage imbued in Paul Revere and other patriots. On the anniversary of the Boston Massacre (March 3, 1770) Warren was the orator. While it was a duty which won him distinction, it was also one of peril. English military officers attended in order to

heckle Warren and it required a brave man to stand up in Old South Church, in the face of those officers, to boldly proclaim their bloody deeds. It required a cool head and steady nerves, and Grand Master Warren had both.

The crowd at the church was immense; the aisles, the pulpit stairs, and the pulpit itself were filled with officers and soldiers of the garrison, gathered there to intimidate the speaker. Warren was equal to the task but entered the church through a pulpit window in the rear, knowing he might have been barred from entering through the front door. In the midst of his most impassioned speech, an English officer seated on the pulpit stairs and in full view of Warren, held several pistol bullets in his open hand. The act was significant; while the moment was one of peril and required the exercise of both courage and prudence, to falter and allow a single nerve or muscle to tremble would have meant failure--even ruin to Warren and others.

Everybody knew the intent of the officer and a man of less courage than Warren might have flinched, but the future hero, his eyes having caught the act of the officer and without the least discomposure or pause in his discourse, simply approached the officer and dropped a white handkerchief into the officer's hand! The act was so adroitly and courteously performed that the Breton was compelled to acknowledge it by permitting the orator to continue in peace.

On June 14, 1775, three days before the Battle of Bunker Hill (actually Breed's Hill), Dr. Warren was elected Major General by the Provincial Congress of Massachusetts. Without military education or experience, he was placed in the presence of the whole British army. Against the protests of Gen. Artemus Ward, Gen. Israel Putnam and others, Warren chose to shoulder a musket and join the fighting men behind the barricades on the hill. He felt a premonition of his death and declared to Betsey Palmer (whose husband joined the Tea Party and the Battle of Lexington), "Come, my little girl, drink a glass of wine with me for the last time, for I shall go to the hill tomorrow and I shall never come off."

The shooting lasted less than one hour but only because the Patriots ran out of ammunition. Warren had been shot in the back of the head and thrown to the ground. His body was thrown in a ditch by a British officer and buried with the others. It was discovered months later and identified by Paul Revere who recognized a false tooth he had made for Warren. He was next buried in the Granary burial ground (Tremont St., Boston) where he was laid after Masonic ceremonies in King's Chapel and, thirdly, in the Warren Tomb in St. Paul's Cathedral, Boston. Finally, on August 3, 1855, "The precious ashes were carefully deposited in an imperishable urn and placed in the family vault at Forest Hill Cemetery where they now repose." (G.L. Proc. 1855-69 p. 511.) On April 8, 1777 Congress ordered a monument to be erected over the grave of Gen. Warren in the Town of Boston, but like many other things Congress resolves, it was never accomplished. In 1794 King Solomon's Lodge of Charlestown (now meeting in Somerville) erected a monument on Bunker Hill on land donated by Bro. Benjamin Russell for that purpose. It was "A Tuscan pillar, 18 feet in height placed on a platform 8 feet high, 8 feet square, and fences around."

The Bunker Hill Monument Association was formed in 1823 for the "purpose of erecting on Bunker Hill a more fitting and enduring monument to the memory of the brave men who fell there in the cause of human liberty." King Solomon's Lodge (1783) then gave the Association the

ground which it owned, together with the monument it had erected to the memory of Bro. Warren, on condition "that some trace of its former existence" might be preserved in the monument to be erected. On June 17, 1825, Grand Lodge opened at 8 a.m. and a procession was formed on the Common which marched to Bunker Hill in Charlestown. There, in the presence of Bro. Lafayette (the apron he wore is in the Grand Lodge archives), representatives from five New England States along with the Grand Lodge of New Jersey, Grand Master John Abbot, and Senior Past Grand Master Isaiah Thomas, assisted in laying the cornerstone and Lafayette and Bro. Daniel Webster addressed the great gathering. The monument was completed and dedicated June 17, 1843, but without the presence of the Grand Lodge. It was during the antiMasonic era and a resolution to attend was defeated .

Inside the present obelisk is a model of the first monument that had been erected by King Solomon's Lodge. It is made of the finest Italian marble and, including the granite pedestal on which it stands, is about nine feet in height and bears substantially the same inscription as the former one. The memorial is now under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service (1976) and anybody can climb the 294 steps to the top without charge. From windows you can view Boston and, in particular, Charlestown Navy Yard where the U.S.S. Constitution (Old Ironsides) is berthed.

*(Contributing source: Cornelius Moore in the Voice of Masonry, published in The Freemasons Repository, Nov. 1881, Vol. 11.)*