

MILITARY MEDICAL HISTORY

MILITARY MEDICINE, 181, 7:714, 2016

Paul Revere and Forensic Dentistry

Mike F. Nola, PhD

“Listen my children and you shall hear.” Generations of American children learned to recite these words from Longfellow’s famous poem.¹ What most did not learn, however, is that the silversmith Paul Revere also practiced dentistry.

During the early morning of April 19, 1775, Revere and William Dawes were sent by Dr. Joseph Warren to warn the patriots at Lexington and Concord that the British garrison stationed in Boston was about to raid the rebel munitions stored at Concord. Warren apparently had an inside informer, and the colonials were able to remove the munitions in advance of the British Regulars’ arrival.² The Harvard-trained Dr. Warren³ was a wanted man as he had become a major voice of resistance to British rule.⁴

Although Joseph Warren was gifted intellectually, he did not enjoy the good fortune of durable teeth, and Revere fashioned ivory false teeth for his friend.

On that fateful day of June 17, 1775, newly commissioned Major General Joseph Warren met his demise at Bunker Hill during the British third frontal assault⁵ on the redoubt. “Now Joseph Warren was dead at the age of thirty-four, shot through the face, his body horribly mutilated by British bayonets.”⁶

National Museum of Health and Medicine, Defense Health Agency—Research, Development and Acquisitions Directorate, 2500 Linden Lane, Silver Spring, MD 20910.

The National Museum of Health and Medicine, a Department of Defense museum founded as the Army Medical Museum in 1862, is committed to documenting the nation’s military medical heritage while sustaining a repository of contemporary medical technology to advance military medicine. This series of articles illuminates objects and collections of interest to AMSUS readers. For more about NMHM, visit www.medicalmuseum.mil.

The contributor hereby certifies the contribution to be a work of the U.S. Government, which has been prepared by an officer or employee of the U.S. Government as part of his or her official duties, and therefore precluded from copyright protection under 17 USC §105. The contribution is in the public domain by operation of laws of the United States of America.

The opinions and assertions contained herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the National Museum of Health and Medicine or the Department of Defense (DoD), any of the military services or other DoD components or any other government agencies, and does not constitute an endorsement by the DoD of any of the opinions expressed, or any information, products, or services contained therein.

doi: 10.7205/MILMED-D-16-00044

He was buried in a shallow grave by British Captain Walter Sloane Laurie, who stated that he “stuffed the scoundrel with another rebel into one hole.”⁷ When the British left Boston 9 months later, two of Warren’s brothers, along with Paul Revere, found the unmarked grave and exhumed General Warren’s body, which was unrecognizable. Revere, however, was able to identify Warren’s remains by the wiring that he himself had used to fasten Warren’s false teeth. This was the first forensic dental identification of a military service member ever performed in this country. Dental tools attributed to Paul Revere (Fig. 1) are on display at the National Museum of Health and Medicine.



FIGURE 1. In 1776, Paul Revere, a dentist and silversmith, helped identify the remains of Major General Joseph Warren, after examining a dental implant he had made for Warren some years earlier. These tools are attributed to Revere. (M-007.02901) (National Museum of Health and Medicine photo illustration by Matthew Breitbart/Released).

REFERENCES

1. Longfellow HW: Paul Revere's Ride. *The Atlantic Monthly*, January 1861. Available at: <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1861/01/paul-revere-s-ride/308349/>.
2. David HF: Paul Revere's Ride, pp 96-97. New York, NY, Oxford University Press, 1994. (Although indisputable documentation has never been provided, circumstantial evidence strongly suggests that the informer was none other than Margaret Kemble Gage, the American wife of the British General Thomas Gage.)
3. Nathaniel P: Bunker Hill: A City, A Siege, A Revolution, p 67. Viking, NY, Penguin Group, 2013.
4. Benjamin LC: Defiance of the Patriots, p 83. New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 2010.
5. David M: 1776, p 193. New York, NY, Simon and Schuster, 2005.
6. David M: John Adams, p 22. New York, NY, Simon and Schuster, 2001.
7. Fischer DH: Paul Revere's Ride. p 285. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.