



Friday, July 22, 2011

More About Warren Street

Yesterday's post "What's Behind a Name?" raised the question of why and for whom Hudson's main street had been renamed Warren Street in 1799. Two readers suggested that Warren Street may have been named for Revolutionary War hero Joseph Warren. One reader speculated that Joseph Warren was best known in Massachusetts and had no obvious connection with Hudson, but the founders of Hudson came from Massachusetts soon after the Revolutionary War, so that may be all the connection necessary. The other pointed out that Warren County, in the Adirondacks, which was established in 1813, was named for General Joseph Warren and suggested that this eponym may have been part of a trend in New York that originated here in Hudson.



Since Joseph Warren may well have been the person for whom Warren Street was named, a little biographical information about him is in order. He was born in Roxbury, Massachusetts, in 1741, and graduated from Harvard College in 1759. After teaching for a year at the Latin School, he studied medicine and opened a practice in Boston in 1764.

Warren got involved with the revolutionary cause in 1767, when he wrote a series of articles for the Boston Gazette, under the pseudonym "A True Patriot," reacting to the passage of the Townshend Acts. After the Boston Massacre in 1770, he became the chairman of the Committee of Safety and delivered famous orations on the first and second anniversaries of that event.

In 1774, when Samuel Adams was in Philadelphia at the first Continental Congress, Warren took over for him in Boston, raising militias and procuring arms and powder. On April 18, 1775, it was Warren who directed Paul Revere and William Dawes to raise the alarm about British troop movement. After the Battles of Lexington and Concord, Warren worked to ready the militia for future battles, and on June 14, 1775, he was elected second general in command of the Massachusetts forces.



Three days after Warren was made a general, British forces landed at Charlestown, and Warren rode to Breed's Hill, where patriot troops were encamped to defend Boston. Warren refused to take command but instead volunteered to go into the line. In the final assault by the British, Warren was struck in the head by a musket ball while trying to rally the militia and died instantly--just six days after his thirty-fourth birthday.

The Boston National Historical Park website calls Joseph Warren "the hero of Bunker Hill" and goes on to say that "by dying on that hill that June day in 1775, he became the embodiment of the young nation's sacrifice." His death was immortalized in this painting by John Trumbull.



Every New England state has a town named Warren, but curiously they are not all named in honor of Joseph Warren. Warren, New Hampshire, and Warren, Rhode Island, were named for Sir Peter Warren, a British naval officer who commanded the attack on the French fortress of Louisbourg in Nova Scotia in 1745. Still, it is not out of the question that a city in New York, with strong ties to New England, might name its main street after an early hero of the Revolutionary War, but so far that's only conjecture.

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