AN EMINENT SURGEON

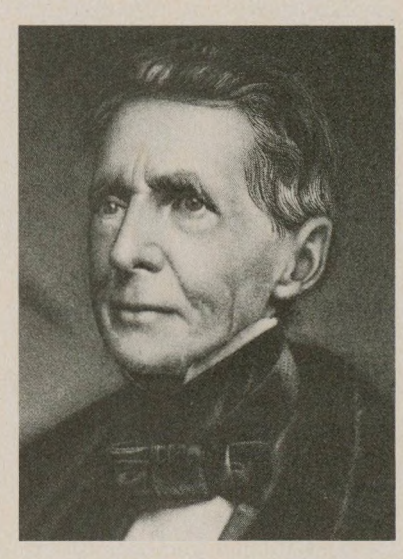
▪ Dr. John Collins Warren, the distinguished Boston surgeon who performed the first public operation under ether anesthesia and was a founder of Massachusetts General Hospital, was born August 1, 1778. A member of a famous surgical dynasty and a Harvard professor for more than 30 years, he pioneered the excision of diseased bones and joints, introduced staphylorrhaphy for the repair of cleft palates, and was the first in the United States to operate for a strangulated hernia. He lobbied for the world's first Anatomy Act, collected specimens that formed the nucleus of Harvard's Warren Museum, played a prominent role in establishing the American Medical Association and served as its president in 1850.

Antecedents. John Collins Warren, whose great-great-great grandsire migrated to the Massachusetts Bay Colony with Governor Winthrop in 1630, was the nephew of physician-patriot Joseph Warren, and the eldest of 17 children of John Warren, a founder of Harvard Medical School and its first professor of anatomy and surgery.

Joseph Warren, who was born on a Roxbury farm in 1741, was graduated from Harvard College and studied medicine for five years as Dr. James Lloyd's apprentice. In 1764 he started his own practice and soon became one of Boston's outstanding physicians, as well as a leader of the Liberal party. He presided over the Massachusetts provincial congress, drafted the "Suffolk Resolves," which challenged British rule and sent his friend Paul Revere to warn the countryside that the British troops were coming.

Although Joseph Warren was offered the post of chief surgeon of the Continental Army, he refused and asked to be appointed a line officer. In his first battle, while covering the retreat of militiamen from Breed's Hill, he was shot in the head and died on June 17, 1775.

John Warren (1753-1815) studied medicine for two years under his older brother and began to practice in Salem. He participated in the Boston Tea Party and served as a senior surgeon in the Continental Army. After the Revolution he gave a series of anatomy lectures that were so well received that Harvard's president asked him to draw up plans for a medical course. In 1782 his proposals were adopted and he was appointed the first professor of the new school.



Dr. John Collins Warren.

Initially his Boston home was on the site now occupied by the Jordan Marsh Company, but in 1785 he moved to a large house on School Street. There he cultivated fruit, converted a room to a miniature apothecary shop for his students, and prepared so many anatomical specimens that the back windows were filled with drying preparations of legs and arms.

Known for his surgical skill, John Warren performed one of the first amputations at the shoulder and excisions of the parotid gland. He helped establish the Boston Medical Society and from 1804 until his death he was president of the Massachusetts Medical Society.

Training. John Collins Warren received his early education at home, then attended the Public Latin School and was class valedictorian at graduation. At Harvard College, where he was a founder and president of the Hasty Pudding Club, he received his baccalaureate in 1799 and delivered the Latin valedictory. He had no desire to study medicine and his father wanted him to have a business career, but since there were no suitable positions available he studied French and worked as an apprentice in his father's office before he sailed to England.

In London he paid a fee to become Surgeon William Cooper's dresser at Guy's Hospital for a year and attended lectures by Sir Astley Cooper and courses in midwifery and physiology. He wrote home that he was acquiring a taste for surgery and saw a good operation with the pleasure he formerly experienced "at the successful solution of Euclid's problems." Continuing his training, he studied with Alexander Monro (secundus), John and Charles Bell in Edinburgh. While living at the home of Parisian obstetrician Antoine Dubois, young Warren was a pupil of Guillaume Dupuytren, Jean-Nicolas Corvissart, and naturalist Georges Cuvier.

Awarded an honorary M.D. by St. Andrews University in 1802, Warren returned to Boston, became his father's partner and sometimes made 50 house calls a day. He was appointed adjunct professor of surgery at Harvard in 1806, succeeded to his father's chair in 1815, and four years later received an honorary M.D. from the young medical school.

Hospital Organizer. When the medical school moved from Cambridge, to Boston in 1810, Drs. Warren and James Jackson set about raising funds to build an affiliated teaching hospital with features of some European institutions, including a system for keeping records. At the completion in 1821 of

this new facility, the Massachusetts General Hospital, Jackson was appointed head of the medical service and Warren chief of surgery. Nurses later commented that the tall, thin, austere surgeon seemed to give his undivided attention to the patient he was examining but he saw everything that was happening on the wards.

In carefully prepared, boldly executed operations, he excised tumors, amputated limbs, performed numerous lithotomies, achieved notable success extracting cataracts and introduced John Hunter's tech-

Physician-patriot Joseph Warren.

nique for correcting aneurysms. On October 16, 1846, while dentist William T. G. Morton administered ether anesthesia to a young house painter named Gilbert Abbott, Warren quickly removed a superficial vascular tumor from the left side of the youth's neck. When the patient awoke and reported that he had felt no pain, Warren told the audience: "Gentlemen, this is no humbug." Quite casually he noted in his journal that night: "Did an interesting operation . . . while the patient was under the influence of Dr. Morton's preparation to prevent pain." But it was soon recognized that the historic operation ushered in a new era in surgery.

Workaholic. Admitting that he was early conditioned "to fly from indolence and repose," Warren was active in many professional organizations, the Society of Natural History, the Humane Society, and to make productive use of leisure time he organized the Thursday Evening Club for "scientific conversation." When he became president of the Massachusetts Temperance Society, he disposed of a cellar of fine wines and thereafter the family butler bearing two silver pitchers asked guests if they preferred rain water or Cochituate water.

A prolific author of essays, memoirs, and scientific articles, Warren published an early paper on diseases of the heart, treatises on physical education, the nervous system of men and animals, and a monograph entitled *Surgical Observations on Tumors.* His interest in paleontology led to his obtaining the most perfect skeleton in existence of a mastodon, but many years later it was purchased by J. Pierpont Morgan who donated it to the American Museum of Natural History.

The surgeon's first wife and mother of his six children, Susan Mason Warren, died in 1841 and two years later the 65-year-old widower married Anne Winthrop, a young woman in her 30s who predeceased her husband. Although a painfully thin food faddist who often seemed in delicate health, he remained active almost to the end of his life. In April 1856 he had several episodes of dizziness and abdominal pain but he insisted on riding to see a patient a week before he died on May 5. One of his survivors was his 25-year younger brother Dr. Edward Warren who wrote about his medical experiences on three continents and was his father's biographer.

Descendants. Jonathan Mason Warren (1811-1867), the second son of the eminent surgeon, received his M.D. at Harvard in 1832 and spent three years in postgraduate training in London, Paris, and Vienna. Soon after he returned to Boston, he took charge of a large practice when his father visited European colleagues. A gifted plastic surgeon, Jonathan reconstructed noses, performed the first free transplant of human skin, and repaired more than 100 cleft palates. He assisted at the initial ether demonstration and a few weeks later he introduced a cone-shaped mask that was used to administer anesthesia at Massachusetts General Hospital where he was senior surgeon in the 1860s.

His son "Coll," the second J. Collins Warren (1824-1927) took some courses at Harvard Medical School as an undergraduate and during the Civil War he was an acting assistant surgeon in charge of two hospital tents near Richmond, Virginia. After obtaining his M.D. in 1866, he studied abroad, brought home some dressings from Sir Joseph Lister, and published an article on the British surgeon's antiseptic methods. Known as "The Scientist," Dr. J. Collins Warren contributed studies of the healing of arteries after ligature, the development of rodent ulcers, surgical pathology, and therapeutics while he taught at Harvard for 36 years. One of his children John (1874-1928) became associate professor of anatomy at Harvard. Another son, Joseph Warren was a Harvard law professor and the father of Dr. Richard Warren.

A noted cardiovascular surgeon, Dr. Richard Warren received his M.D. at Harvard in 1934, interned at Mass General and, after a residency at Peter Bent Brigham and a research fellowship at the University of Pennsylvania, he joined the faculty of his alma mater.

During World War II as a lieutenant colonel in charge of surgery in a military hospital in Europe, he advanced the treatment of circulatory injuries. For two decades after the war, he served as chief of surgery on the cardiovascular division of the Roxbury Veterans Administration Hospital and then became head of the VA's general surgical section in Washington. He was appointed clinical professor of surgery at Harvard in 1956 and professor emeritus in 1971.