

Salve Regina University

## Digital Commons @ Salve Regina

---

Faculty and Staff - Articles & Papers

Faculty and Staff

---

1976

### Phrenology and the Boston medical community in the 1830's

Anthony A. Walsh

Salve Regina University, [walsh@salve.edu](mailto:walsh@salve.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.salve.edu/fac\\_staff\\_pub](https://digitalcommons.salve.edu/fac_staff_pub)



Part of the [History Commons](#), and the [Psychiatry and Psychology Commons](#)

---

Walsh, Anthony A., "Phrenology and the Boston medical community in the 1830's" (1976). *Faculty and Staff - Articles & Papers*. 33.

[https://digitalcommons.salve.edu/fac\\_staff\\_pub/33](https://digitalcommons.salve.edu/fac_staff_pub/33)

#### Rights Statement



In Copyright - Educational Use Permitted. URI: <http://rightsstatements.org/vocab/InC-EDU/1.0/>

This Item is protected by copyright and/or related rights. You are free to use this Item in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. In addition, no permission is required from the rights-holder(s) for educational uses. For other uses, you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s).

## PHRENOLOGY AND THE BOSTON MEDICAL COMMUNITY IN THE 1830s\*

ANTHONY A. WALSH

In this paper I shall discuss some less well-known aspects of the Boston medical community's interest in phrenology in the 1830s. Phrenology, as you recall, is the term which was adopted by Johann Christoph Spurzheim (1776-1832) to refer to his systematization of the psychophysical, physiological, anatomical, and organological views which were first associated with Franz Joseph Gall (1758-1828) who was his teacher.<sup>1</sup> It seems especially appropriate to me to be discussing this topic in Philadelphia; for there were three events which occurred here prior to the period I will focus on, the date of any one of which could be considered the beginning of phrenology's history in this country.<sup>2</sup> First, it was in this city in 1786, according to later votaries of phrenology, that Benjamin Rush (1745-1813), in his *Enquiry into the Influence of Physical Causes Upon the Moral Faculty*,<sup>3</sup> is said to have anticipated Gall's views by espousing the belief in the interaction of the physical and the mental processes and by his additional belief in the innateness of certain mental powers.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, it was Rush who first used the word phrenology itself although with a different meaning than it ultimately acquired.<sup>5</sup>

\* Read in a briefer version at the 50th anniversary meeting of the American Association for the History of Medicine, Philadelphia, May 1, 1975. The author wishes to acknowledge and express his gratitude for the assistance of Mr. Richard J. Wolfe of the Countway Library of Medicine for his help in phases of this research.

<sup>1</sup> On the history of the use of the word "phrenology" see P. S. Noel and E. T. Carlson, "Origins of the word 'phrenology,'" *Amer. J. Psychiat.*, 1970, 127: 154-157. The word phrenology itself was never used by Gall to describe his system. Gall preferred terms such as organology or craniognomy to describe his studies.

<sup>2</sup> R. E. Riegel discusses phrenology in America during its early years in his "Early phrenology in the United States," *Medical Life*, 1930, 37: 361-376, and "The introduction of phrenology to the United States," *Amer. Hist. Rev.*, 1934, 39: 73-78.

<sup>3</sup> (Philadelphia: Charles Cist, 1786). This has been republished with an introduction by E. T. Carlson (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1972).

<sup>4</sup> This work was viewed as being so important to the history of phrenology that it was republished and included an introduction by George Combe (1788-1858) in 1839 (Philadelphia: Haswell & Co.). A copy of this rare item is in the collection of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia. A quotation from Combe's introduction is contained in A. Boardman "Introductory essay," in G. Combe, *Lectures on phrenology*, 3rd ed. (New York: Kearny, 1846), p. 50 and *The Phrenological Journal and Magazine of Moral science* (Edinburgh), 1839, 12:276-278.

<sup>5</sup> See Noel and Carlson (n. 1 above), p. 155. In 1839 a sterling silver Grecian vase was commissioned by the

The second event from which the history of phrenology in America could be dated involved another well-known Philadelphian, Nicholas Biddle (1786-1844). On a trip to France as Secretary to Gen. John Armstrong, Biddle attended the self-coronation of Napoleon (1769-1821) in 1804,<sup>6</sup> and two years later on a tour of Europe he was an auditor at Gall and Spurzheim's anatomical lectures in Germany. In 1807 he returned to Philadelphia and brought home a curious souvenir, a human skull marked personally by Spurzheim indicating the location of the cerebral organs on its surface.<sup>7</sup> This direct contact with the founders of phrenology is the earliest on record for an American.<sup>8</sup>

The next event for which Philadelphia can claim priority occurred in March 1822. At that time America's first formal society devoted to the study of phrenology was formed here. Involved in the organization of this group and serving on its governing board were the Philadelphia physicians Philip Syng Physic (1768-1837), who was its President, and William E. Horner (1793-1853), John Bell (1796-1872), Benjamin Coates (1797-1881), Wm. P. S. [C.] Barton (1786-1856), and Aaron B. Tucker.<sup>9</sup> Following this event phrenology became a topic of interest elsewhere in the country too but toward the end of that decade the initial enthusiasm began to slacken. By the

---

auditors who had attended a series of lectures delivered in New York City by George Combe. The vase was to be presented to Combe as an expression of their gratitude and esteem. In addition to an inscription, the vase contained the likenesses of the important figures in phrenology's history and these included Gall, Spurzheim, Combe, the American Charles Caldwell, and one other likeness one would not expect, that of the Father of American Psychiatry, the "phrenologist" Benjamin Rush (see Boardman, *op. cit.* [n. 4 above] p.x). On Caldwell and phrenology see E. F. Horine, *Biographical sketch and guide to the writings of Charles Caldwell, M.D.* (Brooks, Ky.: High Acres Press, 1960). Also see on Rush E. T. Carlson and M. M. Simpson, "Benjamin Rush's use of the moral faculty," *Bull. Hist. Med.*, 1965, 39: 22-33.

<sup>6</sup> On the life of Biddle see *Dictionary of American Biography*, s. v. "Nicholas Biddle," and an interesting article on Biddle's descendants today by R. Reif, "At home in a national landmark," *New York Times Magazine*, October 25, 1970, pp. 84-86.

<sup>7</sup> G. Combe, *Notes on the United States of North America during a phrenological visit 1838-9-40*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1841), vol. 1, p. 188.

<sup>8</sup> John Collins Warren learned of Gall's "craniognomy" when he was in Paris in 1801 and 1802 but Gall had not yet arrived there and it appears that Warren never met him or Spurzheim personally (see text *infra*). Also see E. Warren, *The life of John Collins Warren, M.D. compiled chiefly from his autobiography and journals*, 2 vols. (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1860), vol. 2, pp. 10-13. See also Riegel (n. 2 above). E. Warren's life of J. C. Warren is also available on microfilm. See the "American Culture Series II." Reel 114 (No. 1), University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Michigan (Series No. xviii, "Medicine").

<sup>9</sup> Announced in the *Philadelphia J. Med. & Phys. Sciences*, 1822, 4: 204-205. On pp. 72-113 of this same volume John Bell's "On phrenology, or the study of the intellectual and moral nature of man" which he delivered before "The Central Phrenological Society" at Philadelphia on 4 and 18 March 1822 is reproduced in its entirety.

beginning of the 1830s, however, Americans knew enough about this doctrine to have reached a temporary verdict as to its ultimate utility even though their study had been restricted because of their dependency on indirect and second-hand accounts of Gall and Spurzheim's views (neither founder had yet visited here). In 1828 Gall died. Four years later, in 1832, Spurzheim began to receive invitations to visit the United States, particularly from Boston. Accepting these requests he left France early that summer, and settled in Boston on the evening of August 20, 1832.

In 1832 Boston was highly regarded as a center of medical education and practice and it was competing successfully with Philadelphia which had been considered to be the center of American medicine for many years due to the excellence of its medical school. The Massachusetts Medical College at Harvard was about fifty years old at this time,<sup>10</sup> Massachusetts General Hospital was celebrating its eleventh successful year,<sup>11</sup> and it was but two years since Boston's "leading surgeon," John Collins Warren (1778-1856), had been successful in obtaining the passage of the world's first "anatomy act."<sup>12</sup> When Spurzheim arrived in Boston he had with him letters of introduction from friends in France. Several of these were addressed to Warren with whom the events in Boston may begin.

## II

It would not be prudent of me to elaborate upon the importance of John Collins Warren to Boston medicine on this occasion. His life and achievements are generally well known, as are the achievements of his ancestors and descendants; for his extraordinary family has had a decisive impact on the history of medicine there since the Revolution. Less well known, however, is the fact that Warren was America's first physician to become actively interested in Gall and Spurzheim's doctrines; and, in 1832, he could draw upon thirty-one years of continuous research and reflection on these theories when he met with Spurzheim for the first time.

It was in 1801, while he was a student in Paris, that Warren first learned of Gall's "craniognomy."<sup>13</sup> Later, around 1809, he obtained a copy of Cuvier's (1769-1832) report on Gall and Spurzheim's *Mémoire* which they had pre-

<sup>10</sup> See the discussion of its founding in R. Truax, *The Doctors Warren of Boston* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968), p. 89 and *passim*; and, H. R. Viets, *A Brief History of Medicine in Massachusetts* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1930), p. 108 and *passim*.

<sup>11</sup> Truax, *ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 152-154.

<sup>13</sup> Warren (n. 8 above), 2: 10.

sented to the Institute of France in 1808,<sup>14</sup> and with this in hand he proceeded to examine point for point those then novel views on the structure and function of the brain.<sup>15</sup> Warren reported that he followed the writings of Gall and Spurzheim thereafter "with unabating interest," conducted extensive comparative anatomical studies which involved assembling a large collection of brains and crania of both human and animal subjects, and quite early introduced the results of his labors into his lectures in Boston and Cambridge.<sup>16</sup> In 1820 he made his research on "phrenology" a topic of "an annual dissertation before the Massachusetts Medical Society,"<sup>17</sup> and in 1822 published a small book summarizing his findings.<sup>18</sup> He must have been delighted to meet Spurzheim that eventful Boston summer and have the opportunity to meet one of the men whose writings on the functions of the brain he had been assiduously studying for over a quarter of a century. Furthermore, I believe we may presume that it was no doubt partly due to Warren's personal interest in phrenology and his influential status in Boston at that time that the medical community there received Spurzheim so warmly.

Spurzheim's arrival in Boston was announced in the local papers, and his American publisher<sup>19</sup> noted that "curiosity was soon awake to see a man whose fame had long preceded him and who had attracted the attention of

<sup>14</sup> F. J. Gall and G. Spurzheim, *Recherches sur le système nerveux en général et sur celui du cerveau en particulier; Mémoire présenté à l'institut de France, le 14 Mars 1808* (Paris: Schoelle & Nicolle, 1809 [Reprinted in Amsterdam: Bonset, 1967]).

<sup>15</sup> See Cuvier, et al., "Rapport sur une mémoire de MM. Gall et Spurzheim sur l'anatomie du cerveau," in *Institut de France, Académie des sciences. Procès verbaux des séances de l'académie . . . an 1808-1811*, Tome IV (Hendaye, 1913), "Séance du lundi 25 Avril 1808," pp. 48-64. An English translation appeared the following year (1809), see *Edinburgh Med. & Surg. J.*, 1809, 5: 36-66.

<sup>16</sup> Warren (n. 8 above), 2: 11.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> J. C. Warren, *A comparative view of the sensorial and nervous systems in men and animals* (Boston: Ingraham, 1822). This little book evoked some controversy at the time since Warren seemed to conclude that an appeal to comparative anatomy to support the phrenological thesis was not justified. He also seemed to indicate that he could not accept the assumption of a mind controlled by the physical and material organization of matter, i.e., the brain. He suggests (on pp. 108-109 of this work) a belief in the immateriality of man's "soul." See also B. H. Coates' article replying to a positive review of this work, with which Coates could not entirely agree, in *Philadelphia J. Med. & Phys. Sciences*, 1823, 1: 58-80. This article by Coates had been an address delivered before "The Central Phrenological Society" of Philadelphia that year. Warren's work is available on microfilm. See the "American Culture Series II," Reel 105 (No. 4), University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Michigan (Series No. xviii, "Medicine").

<sup>19</sup> Nahum Capen (1804-1886). Biographical information on Capen will be found in the *Dictionary of American Biography*, s.v., "Nahum Capen," and in E. Burke, "Nahum Capen," *United States Democratic Review*, 1858, 41: 397-412.

the whole civilized world."<sup>20</sup> A series of polite engagements began and included meeting with Warren to examine and discuss Warren's anthropological collection.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, regular visits to public institutions were scheduled and two series of public lectures, one given in Boston and the other in Cambridge, to groups which Warren delightfully described as "a promiscuous assembly of ladies and gentlemen."<sup>22</sup> Spurzheim's itinerary was hectic for it also included daytime lectures on the anatomy of the brain at the Medical School which had been arranged by Drs. Winslow Lewis (1799-1875), J. Greely Stevenson (1779?-1835), and John D. Fisher (1797-1850).<sup>23</sup>

On Wednesday September 19, the prestigious *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* reviewed Spurzheim's anatomical and public lectures which had begun the previous Friday. They informed their readers that

. . . the beauty and skill of his illustrations [at the anatomical bench] excited the admiration of all present . . . [; and, that however] well or ill the learned in the old world have thought of the doctrines of Phrenology, taught by Dr. S.; a wonderful familiarity with the anatomy of the brain, and corresponding skill in its dissection, have been accorded him in every country he has visited. How richly such a meed is merited, we can now bear testimony from personal observation . . . [, they wrote; and, in his] . . . popular lectures on Phrenology . . . [, they added, his] apparatus is ample, his manner pleasing, and his explanations clear and satisfactory. . . .<sup>24</sup>

For the next four weeks Spurzheim continued unabatedly in his indoctrinatory mission in the Athens of America. On October 17 it was happily re-

<sup>20</sup> N. Capen, *Reminiscences of Dr. Spurzheim and George Combe: and a review of the science of phrenology from the period of its discovery by Dr. Gall, to the time of the visit of George Combe to the United States, 1838, 1840* (New York: Fowler and Wells, 1881), p. 10. Capen's remarks support the fact that Boston was "prepared" for Spurzheim's visit. Bostonians knew enough about his work to make his visit most timely and important (q.v. pp. 115-119).

<sup>21</sup> Warren (n. 8 above), 2: 12.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> J. C. Warren, "The collection of the Boston phrenological society—a retrospect," *Ann. Med. Hist.*, 1921, 3: 1-11 [7].

<sup>24</sup> *Boston Med. & Surg. J.*, 1832, 7: 99. In his *Funeral Oration . . . at the burial of . . . Spurzheim* (Boston: Marsh, Capen & Lyon, 1832) Charles Follen also makes a distinction between the anatomical and phrenological portions of Spurzheim's presentations in evaluating him when he noted that "in his anatomical demonstration of the brain, . . . [Spurzheim] endeavored to unfold the design of nature in the complicated structure of this organ, by tracing its gradual development from its lowest and simplest beginning in the spinal marrow, to its continually increasing, various and harmonious ramifications. This scientific demonstration of the brain, which was made without any reference to the peculiar doctrines of Phrenology, together with his discoveries of some of the constituent parts of this organ, obtained for Dr. Spurzheim here the same high respect as an anatomist of the brain, which had been accorded to him in Europe by the eminent men in that department" (pp. 14-15).

ported that he continued "to attract crowded and delighted audiences," and that "... among the constant attendants . . . [at his lectures were Boston's] . . . most distinguished physicians, lawyers and divines, and citizens best known for their scientific and literary attainments. . . ." <sup>25</sup> But, although all appeared to be going well, Spurzheim's violation of the "natural laws" was beginning to have an effect and his overexertion had damaged his health. On the evening of October 17 he showed the first signs of what was to become a fatal illness, but he continued with his schedule. His condition became worse as the week progressed but he insisted on lecturing again on Friday. He received little rest over the weekend and, despite the pleas of his friends, continued to lecture the following week. On Friday evening October 27 he returned to his lodgings never to leave them again. Fifteen days later, after what appears to have been an heroic effort on the part of the entire Boston medical community—but particularly on the parts of Drs. William Grigg, J. Greely Stevenson, John Ware (1795-1864), and James Jackson (1777-1867)—Spurzheim died, ostensibly of a continued fever. It was November 10, and just eleven weeks after he had arrived. <sup>26</sup> A complete account of his illness, treatment, and post-mortem examination was prepared by Dr. Jackson on Tuesday November 13 and published in a Boston newspaper. <sup>27</sup>

It is an understatement to note that Spurzheim's sudden death was shocking to all residents of Boston. <sup>28</sup> Immediately after this sad event, on Sunday November 11, his most intimate friends gathered and with President Josiah Quincy (1772-1864) of Harvard in the chair, and, with Warren and eleven other prominent Boston physicians and other friends in attendance, formal plans were made for the funeral. Shortly thereafter, Warren performed a public autopsy at the Medical College, <sup>29</sup> preceding which he gave a lecture

<sup>25</sup> "Lectures on phrenology," *Boston Med. & Surg. J.*, 1832, 7: 162.

<sup>26</sup> I have discussed Spurzheim's American tour and last days in greater detail in two sources. See A. A. Walsh, "The American tour of Dr. Spurzheim," *J. Hist. Med. All. Sci.*, 1972, 27: 187-205, and A. A. Walsh, *Johann Christoph Spurzheim and the rise and fall of scientific phrenology in Boston, 1832-1842* (Durham, N.H.: Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, 1974), especially Chapter 5.

<sup>27</sup> *Boston Daily Advertiser and Patriot*, 15 November 1832. A copy of this article is in the "Warren papers," volume 46—"Spurzheim"—Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Mass. Much of it is also discussed in N. Capen, Biography of Spurzheim in J. G. Spurzheim, *Phrenology, in connexion with the study of physiognomy* (Boston: Marsh, Capen & Lyon, 1833). The report was republished in *The Phrenological Journal and Miscellany* (Edinburgh), 1832-1834, 8: 193-199.

<sup>28</sup> I have discussed this period in some detail elsewhere, see Walsh, n. 26 above.

<sup>29</sup> The original notes on Warren's autopsy which ostensibly are in his hand are in the "Warren papers," n. 27 (q.v. N. B. Shurtleff's "Anatomical report on the skull of Spurzheim, read before the Boston Phrenological Society," *Annals of Phrenology*, 1835, 2: 72-78). The measurements of Spurzheim's skull will be found in Walsh (n. 26 [1974]), pp. 537-538. Spurzheim's brain is said to have weighed 3 pounds 7 ounces 1 dram. or 55 ½ ounces avoirdupois—outweighing Gall's by 361 grams (1559 [Spurzheim] versus 1198 [Gall]). These latter

on the "investigations and improvements and other labors" of his lamented friend. Two days later on November 14, and perhaps at Warren's instigation,<sup>30</sup> the Boston Medical Association held a "special meeting" too and publicly announced that they had been delighted with Spurzheim's visit and instruction and that their "acquaintance with him . . . inspired them with high respect for his researches in Anatomy and Physiology, and a deep interest in his opinions on the moral and physical improvement of Man." They formally resolved to march in a body at his funeral and to waste no time in recommending his views to their fellow citizens.<sup>31</sup> On Saturday November 17 Spurzheim's body was accompanied to the Old South Church by a procession of medical men, and three thousand people are said to have attended the funeral that day.<sup>32</sup>

On the evening of the funeral yet another formal gathering of Spurzheim's Boston friends took place and it was out of this assembly that the Boston Phrenological Society was formed. The main goal of this group was to be the examination of the fundamental data of phrenology, i.e., "the doctrine maintained by phrenologists of the coincidence of certain external manifestations on the cranium, with the intellectual [cerebral] faculties and predominating moral tendencies of individuals."<sup>33</sup> A constitution was prepared and on December 31, 1832—Spurzheim's birthday—the proposed group became a reality.<sup>34</sup> On Wednesday January 9, 1833, the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* announced its officers, and informed their readers that the

---

figures are from E. A. Spitzka, "A study of the brains of six eminent scientists and scholars belonging to the American Anthropometric Society . . .," *Trans. Amer. Philos. Soc.*, 1908, 21: 175-308 [211-212]. On another occasion Spitzka made different estimates, predicting that both men should have had heavier brains (see p. 208). Dr. Robert M'Kibben "of Belfast" who attended the "post mortem" reports that it took place on 11 November 1832 (*The Phrenological Journal and Miscellany*, 1832-1834, 8: 199-201 [199]). I have seen it suggested elsewhere, however, that it may have taken place on the 12th. See also "Development of the head of Dr. Spurzheim," *Boston Med. & Surg. J.*, 1833, 9: 129-130.

<sup>30</sup> According to Truax (n. 10 above), p. 154 Warren "was a founder of, or active in . . . the Boston Medical Association. . . ." Thus, with his interest in Spurzheim and possible influence in this organization it is very likely that he was involved in these proceedings.

<sup>31</sup> Published in Follen (n. 24 above), p. 33.

<sup>32</sup> Spurzheim's skull, brain, and heart were preserved and his remains were buried in Mount Auburn Cemetery, Cambridge. For more details of this period see my treatment of this topic elsewhere (n. 26). Also see the brief discussion in A. A. Walsh, "Is phrenology foolish? A rejoinder," *J. Hist. Behavioral Sci.* 1970, 6: 358-361. Other accounts of these events may be found in the *Boston Med. & Surg. J.* 1832, 7: 225-227 (Wednesday, 14 November 1832); 1832, 7: 239-240 (Wednesday 21 November 1832); 1832, 7: 292 (Wednesday, 12 December 1832); and, 1832, 7: 319-324 (Wednesday, 26 December 1832). The last contains extracts from Follen's "Oration" (n. 24).

<sup>33</sup> See n. 36 above, pp. 3-5.

<sup>34</sup> Announced in the *Boston Daily Evening Transcript*, 31 December 1832.

objects of this new society were "founded on principles that would have been most gratifying to the late lamented founder of the science."<sup>35</sup> With the creation of the Boston Phrenological Society the study of phrenology in this country took on new and renewed meaning. Prior to this event, most of the phrenological societies which had formed elsewhere in America had been of the social club variety—with the exception of the earliest one at Philadelphia.<sup>35a</sup> The Boston group, on the other hand, sought to approach the study of phrenology rigorously and to that end they proceeded as serious inductive scientists.

### III

Subsequent to Spurzheim's death, the Boston medical profession continued to express its interest in and concern with phrenology in several ways. First, there was direct and open involvement in the activities of the Phrenological Society. Second, phrenology was supported through the literary arm of the community, the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*; and, third, there was the spiritual support of many individuals who became involved on their own but who were less publicly vocal concerning their views. I will comment briefly on these areas of involvement in the time remaining.

It is safe to say that throughout its active existence, the Boston Phrenological Society was dominated by members of the medical profession. When officers were elected for the first year, for example, five of the nine members of the board were active physicians at the time. One of that group, moreover, the vice-president Dr. Jonathan Barber (1784-1864), was given the responsibility of outlining in detail the goals of the organization and the methods it was to follow in its inquiries. He did this in a forty-four printed page inaugural address which was subsequently the first publication of the newly formed group.<sup>36</sup> Over the next decade, physicians continued their involvement as executive officers of one type or another. In the beginning nearly one-third of the total membership of around seventy-five were physicians and this proportion remained reasonably constant as the membership increased in later years. Additionally, the medical members were active in instructional roles. For example, Dr. William Ingalls (1769-1851) gave lec-

<sup>35</sup> 1833, 7: 353.

<sup>35a</sup> The author discusses the Philadelphia Medical Community's involvement with, and interest in, phrenology in "The 'new science of the mind' and the Philadelphia physicians in the early 1800s," to be published shortly in the *Transactions & Studies of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia* [in press].

<sup>36</sup> J. Barber, *An address delivered before the Boston Phrenological Society, on the evening of its organization at the Masonic Temple, Dec. 31, 1832* (Boston: Marsh, Capen & Lyon, 1832).



Fig. 1

tures on the anatomy of the cranium, and other physicians lectured regularly on special topics. Elisha Bartlett (1804-1855), who was immortalized in Sir William Osler's *An Alabama Student*, addressed this organization at least on one occasion<sup>37</sup> and Samuel Gridley Howe (1801-1876)—the first director of the Perkins School for the Blind—was one of the society's most devoted supporters and lecturers who also served in various capacities on its governing boards including that of president. Dr. Nathaniel Shurtleff (1810-1874) was the curator of the collection of crania and in that capacity he could be found at various times during the 1830s traveling about the Northeast collecting casts of heads of criminals or other exceptional characters for the society's museum. In 1835, Shurtleff prepared and published for the use of the society a small phrenological guide designed to accompany a bust (Fig. 1)

<sup>37</sup> W. Osler, *An Alabama Student* (New York: Henry Frowde, 1908), pp. 108-158 ("Elisha Bartlett: A Rhode Island Philosopher"), and E. Bartlett, *An address delivered at the anniversary celebration of the birth of Spurzheim and the organization of the Boston Phrenological Society, January 1, 1838* (Boston: Marsh, Capen & Lyon, 1838).

which had been approved by Spurzheim.<sup>38</sup> In the middle 1830s the Boston group sponsored the publication of a translation of Gall's six-volume work on the functions of the brain.<sup>39</sup> Dr. Winslow Lewis, Jr., (1799-1875) a member of the BPS Council, a man who Packard claimed trained some four hundred private medical students in his career,<sup>40</sup> is credited with this translation although Pasamanick uncovered evidence that it was translated in part by Isaac Ray (1807-1881)—which is interesting in itself.<sup>41</sup> Other active participants from the Boston medical community at that time include John Flint (1804?-1875), Marshall S. Perry (1805-1859), and J. F. Flagg (1789-1853) all of whom assumed leadership roles in the BPS.<sup>42</sup> And, of course, there were others.

The general work of this "scientific" group, to reiterate, is best described as having been directed at the examination of the phrenological claims that the brain was the organ of the mind, that the mind was a congeries of faculties with specific determinable cerebral locations, and, that, other things being equal, the form of the skull was a fair representation of the size, power, and configuration of the internally contained cerebral mass. The group emphasized the inductive gathering of instances which would either support or negate these claims; and, in the process, they sought to explore the relationship which phrenological theory would have in the treatment of insanity and other diseases associated with cerebral structure and function.

The Boston Phrenological Society at its height was a vigorous research organization. Meetings were held twice a month for many years, a journal was issued—*The Annals of Phrenology*—which lasted through two stout volumes of around five hundred pages each, and the group attained an international reputation becoming a model in the process for other similar societies in this country. From what I have been able to discover the society slowly disbanded at the end of the 1830s since their reason for being (viz., to ascertain the reasonableness, accuracy, and truthfulness of the phrenologi-

<sup>38</sup> [N. B. Shurtleff], *An epitome of phrenology* (Boston: [Marsh, Capen & Lyon], 1835).

<sup>39</sup> (Paris, 1825). See F. J. Gall, *On the functions of the brain and of each of its parts: with observations on the possibility of determining the instincts, propensities and talents, or the moral and intellectual dispositions of men and animals, by the configuration of the brain and head*, translated by Winslow Lewis, Jr. (cf. n. 41), 6 volumes (Boston: Marsh, Capen & Lyon, 1835).

<sup>40</sup> F. R. Packard, *History of medicine in the United States*, 2 volumes (New York: Hoeber, 1932), vol. 2, 1022.

<sup>41</sup> B. Pasamanick, "An obscure item in the bibliography of Isaac Ray," *Amer. J. Psychiat.*, 1954, 111: 164-171.

<sup>42</sup> Flint and Flagg were involved as members of the committee for publication of the Society's journal, the *Annals of Phrenology* (see Walsh, 1974, n. 26 above, pp. 359 and *passim*), M. S. Perry was at one time the Society's Secretary, *ibid.*, p. 367.

cal thesis) was to their minds fulfilled. As a result of their investigations the membership came to the conclusion that the doctrines as laid down by Spurzheim and Gall represented a true picture of nature and that phrenology, therefore, was entitled to be ranked among the exact sciences. Having reached this conclusion, and, being perplexed by the then increasing ubiquity of the ill-trained sideshow variety bumpologists, and being disinclined to become involved in what might have been then the legitimate applied aspects of the new science, the Boston Phrenological Society as a formally organized group ceased functioning and the membership, reluctantly, went their separate ways.

I mentioned earlier that although the Boston Phrenological Society was most directly involved in phrenological research in Boston, interest in phrenological matters was more widespread there than the activities of that one organization alone would indicate. Additionally, it should be remembered that phrenology was, of course, generally the topic of the moment in other sections of our country during this decade also. But Boston seems to have been, as it is oftentimes affectionately called, the proverbial "hub" of this as well as other activities. One foreign correspondent, for example, suggested that more than half of the Boston medical profession in the middle 1830s were actively pursuing phrenological inquiries; and, although it would be difficult to verify such an assertion, my research into the activities of the medical profession in Boston at that time has led me to believe that those who were not involved with phrenology were probably the exception rather than the rule. In this context, I would like to turn again to the other ways in which the medical profession became involved.

There was a class of men in Boston and elsewhere in the 1830s who might well be described as "theoretical phrenologists," or "phrenologists of the studio," i.e., "men of liberal education, following the professions of medicine, law, [education,] or divinity, . . . [studying] the subject of [phrenology] in their leisure hours" in private.<sup>43</sup> Of this number there were many in Boston. Outside of the medical profession and outside of the Boston Phrenological Society, for example, were such men as Horace Mann (1796-1859), William Ellery Channing (1780-1842), and Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882).<sup>44</sup> Within the medical profession there were many also, but

<sup>43</sup> See A. Leighton, "Phrenology in the United States," *Phrenological Journal and Magazine of Moral Science* (Edinburgh), 1843, 14: 127-139 [128], reprinted in *The American Phrenological Journal and Miscellany*, 1843, 5: 348-362 [349].

<sup>44</sup> I mention those individuals and discuss their interests briefly in a different context in "George Combe: A portrait of a heretofore generally unknown behaviorist," *J. Hist. Behavioral Sci.*, 1971, 7: 269-278. See also Reigel (n. 2 above).

foremost among this group were John Collins Warren and perhaps at least additionally his co-editors of the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*.

The *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* was, during the period in question according to Truax, "the acknowledged mouthpiece" of the Medical College and the Massachusetts General Hospital.<sup>45</sup> The journal was founded through Warren's instigation,<sup>46</sup> and in the 1830s it appears to have been edited by a club of sorts which met on occasion to read papers and otherwise discharge their editorial duties. Included in this group with Warren were Drs. James Jackson, John Graham, and Walter Channing (1786-1876) initially, and later Drs. George Hayward (1791-1863), John Ware and John W. Webster (1793-1853).<sup>47</sup> Throughout the 1830s and at least until 1843 this prestigious "mouthpiece" of the leading medical institutions of Boston persistently indicated their support of phrenology, their belief in its legitimacy as a science, and their belief in its value to the medical practitioner. In the "Medical Intelligence" section of their journal were numerous notices over these years announcing phrenological lectures, books, journals, and the like. Phrenological articles appeared from time to time also, as did book reviews and commentary on debatable issues. You may be surprised to learn additionally that this journal gave Orson Fowler and his *American Phrenological Journal* the heartiest of receptions, and between 1838 and 1842 they gave his writings, "research," and his new journal the best of notices. Fowler's journal, you may recall, eventually came to epitomize practical nonscientific popular phrenology at its worst. In the later years of the 1830s and into the 1840s the editorial "we" of the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* adopted the more explicit position—present but less strongly stated in earlier years—that phrenology had finally become, despite all controversy, an established and legitimate science and an important part of the *corpus medica* of the era. This spiritual support from the "physician-phrenologists of the studio" through the "mouthpiece" of the medical institutions of Boston persisted and in actuality continued beyond the Boston Phrenological Society when its activities had ceased.

But it may also be argued that scientific phrenology in Boston began and ended with John Collins Warren. For, while I would hesitate to speculate at this time on the degree of involvement he had in establishing the editorial policy of the journal he founded, a journal which as I said supported phrenology totally at that time, he most certainly indicated his interest in

<sup>45</sup> Truax (n. 10 above), p. 151.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154 and Viets (n. 10 above), p. 126.

<sup>47</sup> Viets, *ibid.*

phrenology in other ways. You will recall that it was Warren who began studying phrenology as “craniognomy” in 1801. During the 1830s, he used Spurzheim’s own collection of skulls and casts for his lectures at the Medical School; and, additionally, when the Boston Phrenological Society’s vast collection of crania was ultimately cast aside it was Warren who purchased it and donated it to Harvard where it may be seen to this day.<sup>48</sup> In 1847 at the age of sixty-nine Warren summarized his views on this topic in this way (and note that he uses the present tense at that late date):

The importance of phrenology is derived, according to my view, [he contended,] from the fact that it leads to the development of the anatomy and physiology of the nervous system; and also the study of the forms of crania enables us in some measure, to understand the degree of intellectual power possessed by individuals.<sup>49</sup>

This statement summarizes quite well the basic beliefs which all legitimate “scientific phrenologists” of the 1830s also held—physicians and laymen alike—and it was only when phrenology became associated with individuals of dubious scientific merit in later years that its nature as a “legitimate science” became something much less.

<sup>48</sup> This is discussed in Walsh (n. 26 above) and Warren (n. 23 above). Also see P. Yakovlev, “The ‘Crowbar Skull’ and mementoes of ‘phrenological hours,’ ” *Harvard Medical Alumni Bulletin*, October, 1958.

<sup>49</sup> Warren (n. 8 above), p. 13.