

Skeleton In Armor Tale Is Unsolved

One of the most tantalizing mysteries that relate to the City of Fall River is the problem of who was the Skeleton In Armor.

The skeleton itself was found near the site of the Old Gas Works Building on Hartwell Street by Hannah Borden Cook. Mrs. Cook was a young housewife, and on a May morning in 1831, she went to a sandbank to get sand in order to scour her knives.

As she was putting some sand from a hill into a bucket, the hill itself gave way and revealed a human skull. When Mrs. Cook brought back seachers to unearth whatever lay in the hill, they discovered the skeleton of a young man who had been placed in a sitting position in a crude grave about a foot beneath the ground.

The body was in double coverings of coarse, dark bark which were taken away, revealing a brass breastplate, and a brass belt. The belt consisted of brass tubes strung together and used for protection below the breastplate.

Beside the body was a quiver of arrows, which disintegrated in the air.

The skeleton was removed from its burial place and lodged in the Fall River Atheneum, a private subscription library, located in the Town Hall. The Atheneum was just south of the present City Hall, and burned in the Great Fire of 1843.

From the time of its discovery the skeleton excited considerable interest, and some of the theories as to its origin are bizarre in the extreme.

For instance, in the third volume of the American Magazine, published in Boston in 1839, John Stark "rather inclines to the belief that the remains found at Fall River belonged to one of the crew of a Phoenecian vessel."

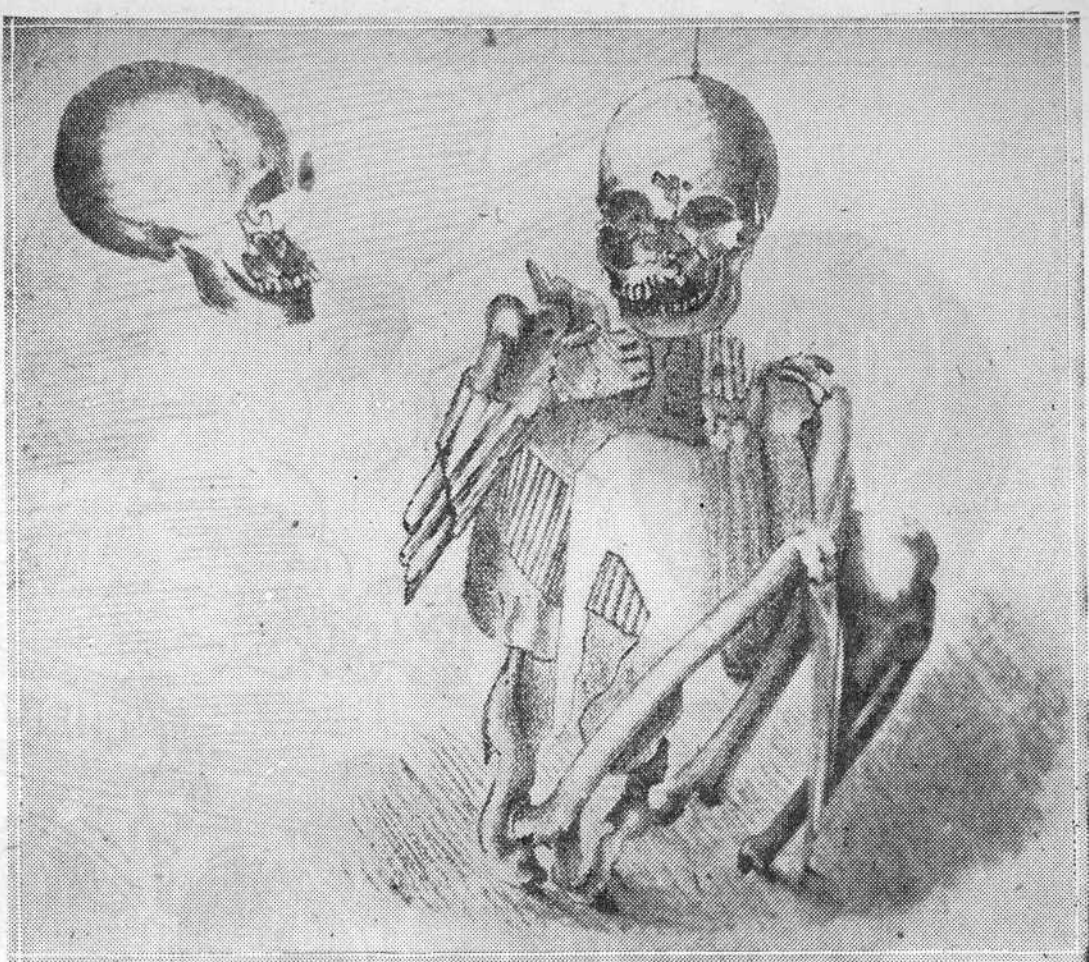
Stark's theory was based on the notion, widespread at the time, that the Trojans, in some fashion, colonized Central North America, after the fall of their city.

It was widely believed at the time that North American Indians were the descendants of Hector and of Priam.

The general fame of the skeleton rests, of course, on Longfellow's poem about it. The poet was visiting his brother, Samuel, who was the minister of the Unitarian Church here, and heard of the skeleton during his stay before proceeding to Newport. His theory, as expressed in the poem, is that it is the figure of a Norseman who was also responsible for the building of Newport's Old Stone Mill.

Whatever the value of the poem as literature, it is not regarded as having much weight historically.

Usually historians consider the skeleton to be that of an Indian, perhaps even Massasoit, although



WORLD-FAMOUS SKELETON: A drawing of the Skeleton In Armor before it was destroyed in the Great Fire of 1843 reveals the crouching position in which the body had been buried. The feet had disintegrated and some of the skull, but experts at the time said the teeth proved the skeleton was that of a young man. In the drawing a portion of the breastplate covering the skeleton's chest can be clearly seen. The skeleton was found in 1831, and at the time the drawing was made, was in the Fall River Atheneum.

in the early 1930s an attempt was made to link it with the Portuguese explorer, Miguel Corte-Real, who is thought to have been responsible for some of the markings on Dighton Rock.

Corte-Real visited Massachusetts shores in 1502, but his eventual fate has never been known.

The skeleton itself was consumed in the fire that destroyed the Atheneum. All that remains of it are two of the tubes from the belt the skeleton wore. These are preserved at the Fall River Historical Society Building on Rock Street.

Although the skeleton is generally thought to have been an Indian, some question still remains.

Whether analysis of the tubes would indicate where or how they were made is still not known.

The riddle of the Skeleton in Armor is today, 122 years after its discovery, still unanswered.

MAYOR INAUGURATED

When Mayor John H. Abbott was inaugurated at the 48th city government on Jan. 1, 1900 there were a few persons in the audience who were in City Hall on the day the building was dedicated Dec. 30, 1845.

'White Way' Light System Inaugurated Here in 1913

When Mayor James H. Kay threw the electric switch which lit up "White Way," the South Main Street shopping section, in August of 1913, he signalled the 63rd anniversary of street lighting in Fall River.

The lighting of the city's thoroughfares now has continued for 103 years.

It all started back in October, 1847, seven years before the town emerged as a city, that the advocates of a light or white way got through a motion to erect street lamps.

The proponents of street lighting, however, did not gain their objective until April, 1850. An appropriation of \$375 for lights was expended under contract with the Fall River Iron Works Co.

In 1852 the citizens voted to increase the street lighting appropriation to \$500.

When the city came into being in

1853, John Driscoll of St. Mary's Band and Frederick A. Norton, clerk in the office of the Superintendent of Streets were engaged as lamplighters. The wages for the caretakers of the lamps started at \$4 a week, rose to \$5 and became stabilized at \$6. The routes were long and the lamps were scattered.

Twenty-five years after its incorporation as a city, Fall River spent \$14,633 for lighting purposes. Gas was superseding fluid or naphtha.

A municipal crisis over finance developed in 1887 which left the city without lights for two weeks.

Mayor John W. Cummings, after a running battle with the Council over the appropriation for lighting finally directed the marshal to cause the street lights to be lighted. The order was obeyed and the lights were turned on again.