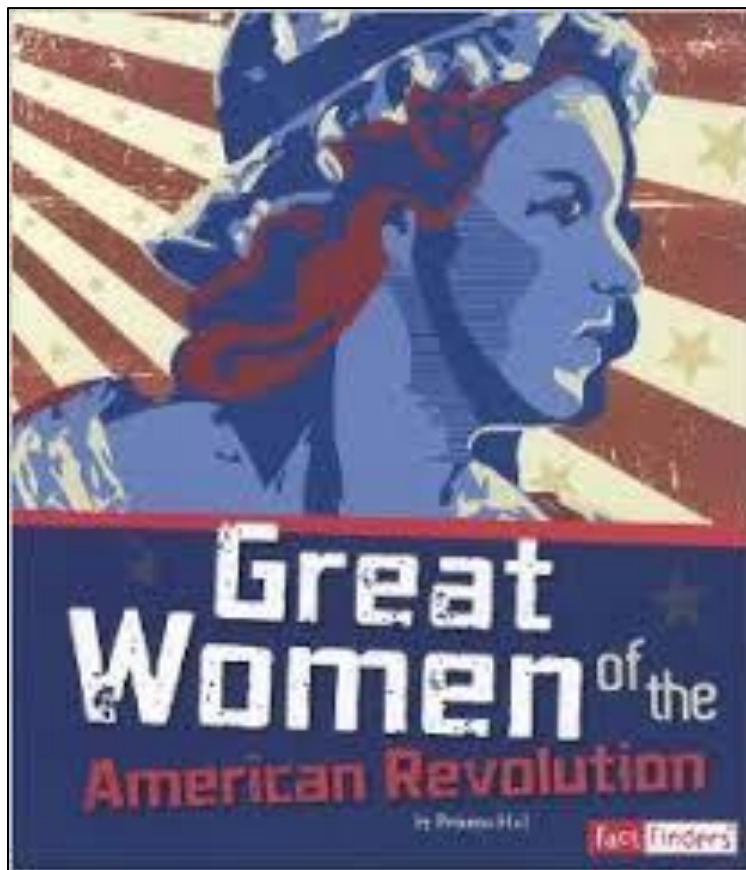


CONTRIBUTIONS OF WOMEN DURING THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

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During the American Revolution thousands of women took an active role in both the American and British armies. Most were the wives or daughters of officers or soldiers. These women, who maintained an almost constant presence in military camps, were known as "camp followers". As a camp follower, a woman was paid a small wage and was supplied with a half ration of food for herself.

Because women frequently did not serve any military function during the war, their individual names were not listed in the records of the day--- and are therefore mostly unknown to us. It is also difficult to state accurately what their duties were as camp followers.

It may be surmised though, that their duties consisted primarily of cooking, mending, laundry, childcare, and nursing the sick.

While the above mentioned tasks were performed by the majority of women found within camp life, an occasional woman found herself placed--- or placed herself---in extraordinary circumstances. Her participation in such situations were frequently well beyond the roles dictated by 18th-century society.

While I cannot list every woman's contribution made during the American Revolution---I'll try to note some of the more interesting and significant ones.

It is suffice to say that patriotism was not limited to any one section of the country and that while history raves about the heroics of men in war---there was great female courage displayed as well.

As you will see, there were noble women who should receive due recognition from posterity, as well as a generous amount of praise.

### ANN BATES



Because women were considered too simple to understand complex military strategy during the American Revolution--- men spoke freely around them. Thus, they made great spies, providing food and peddling wares to enemy camps while listening for important information.

Ann Bates was one such person. A Philadelphia schoolteacher, loyal to the crown, she assumed a false name and pretended to be a peddler while counting Continental Army troops and supplies for the British.

How many others played similar roles may never be known--- as many were probably never caught spying, and their secret role may never have been documented.

However, it was not only spies that affected the Revolution. Some women supported the cause in various other ways.

## CONTRIBUTIONS OF WOMEN DURING THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

### MARTHA WASHINGTON



Like the wives of other officers Martha Washington joined the army as a camp follower. Since she did not join the army immediately, some people thought she was against the War. But those rumors were put to a rest as she soon started serving in the continental camp. Martha's main role was to take care of her husband, General Washington. In addition to this, Martha Washington was a hostess in the army camp, and looked after the soldiers enlisted in the War.

As the first---first lady of America---Martha Washington received numerous honors.

\*The USS Lady Washington was named in her honor, which was the first U.S. Military ship to be named after a woman.

\*In 1902, she became the first woman to be honored on a US postage stamp.

\* She is also the only woman whose portrait has appeared on a US currency note. (on a #1 Silver Certificate of the 1886,1891, and 1896 series, which are no longer printed)

### DEBORAH SAMPSON



One of the most remarkable individuals of the Revolution was a young lady by the name of Deborah Sampson. It was her desire to avoid hard labor on the family farm that led her to impersonate a man and join the American army. Sampson first enlisted early in 1782. When she failed to report for duty after a night spent imbibing at a local tavern, her true identity was discovered.

In May of 1782, she tried again. Deborah cut her hair and wrapped a cloth firmly around her chest. Thus, disguised as a man, she again enlisted---this time in Captain George Webb's 4<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Regiment using her brother's name---Robert Shirliffe.

Deborah participated in several battles---fighting for her country. Her identity was again discovered during the summer of 1783 by a physician who treated her when she became seriously ill. The kindly doctor helped her keep her secret until the war ended---taking her to his house to recover in private. At the end of the war, she was given an honorable discharge and she subsequently returned to Massachusetts where she married.

*\*Trivia: Deborah's husband was the only man to receive a widower's pension from the Revolutionary War.*

## CONTRIBUTIONS OF WOMEN DURING THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

### MARY LUDWIG HAYS



In 1777, William Hays enlisted in the Continental Army. Following her husband, that winter, Mary Ludwig Hays joined the army's winter camp in Pennsylvania and became a "camp follower".

During the training of the troops, Mary and other women served as "water girls"---carrying drinking water for the troops. Mary Ludwig Hays got her nickname during this time. Since Molly was a common nickname for Mary in the eighteenth century, the troops would shout "Molly! Pitcher!" whenever they wanted water. By supplying water to the troops during the battles, Mary thereby received the nickname "Molly Pitcher." (Many believe Molly Pitcher is a legend which cannot be specifically documented.)

In any regard---during the Monmouth, New Jersey Campaign of 1778---Mary Ludwig Hays saw her husband shot in the arm. She rushed to his side---and then took over his position at the cannon--firing several rounds at the oncoming British forces. Her bravery and good aim earned the respect of other soldiers. They fought on with renewed enthusiasm, sending the British into retreat. Shortly after the war ended John died and Mary remarried and became known as Molly Hayes McCauley.

### PHYLLIS WHEATLEY



Phyllis Wheatley was a slave and a poet in colonial America. She was also a patriot and a symbol for abolitionists. In 1871, at the age of seven, Phyllis was bought as a slave by the Wheatley family of Boston. The Wheatley children took it upon themselves to teach Phyllis how to read and write.

Phyllis discovered the joy of putting words together in poems. She became a celebrity---reading her poems in public. She used her poetry to influence people and felt strongly that the issue of slavery separated whites from true heroism. She had herself been a part of slave trade, and through her poetry she tried to make people understand this inhumane practice. Her poems were also about learning and virtue, patriotism, battles, and the greatness of America. One of her poems was about George Washington---who was the leader of the Patriot Army. She even got to read the poem to him in person. Phyllis was given her freedom in 1778, when the Wheatley's all passed away or left the colonies.

Phyllis Wheatley was the first published African-American poet.

## CONTRIBUTIONS OF WOMEN DURING THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

### ABIGAIL ADAMS



Abigail Adams is remembered for the letters she wrote to her husband during the Revolution while he was serving in the Continental Congress. Her letters and ideas give perspective on the condition of women in America during the eighteenth century.

Her political views were radical and progressive. She advocated property rights for married women and called for more opportunities for them. She believed that women should not serve merely as a decorous companion to their husbands, and wanted women to recognize their intellectual capabilities. She stressed female education because she knew that an educated woman could influence the lives of her husband as well as her children.

*Excerpt from her March 31, 1776 letter reads:*

“I long to hear that you have declared an independency. And, by the way in the new code of laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make, I desire you would remember the ladies and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors. Do

not put such unlimited power into the hands of the husbands.

Men of sense in all ages abhor those customs which treat us only as the servants of your sex. Regard us then as being placed by Providence under your protection, and in imitation of the Supreme Being make use of that power only for our happiness. “

And in a May 17, 1776 letter to John Adams--- Abigail wrote: “I cannot say that I think you are very generous to the ladies, for while you are proclaiming peace and good-will to men, emancipating all nations, you insist upon retaining an absolute power over wives. But you must remember that arbitrary power is like most other things which are very hard, very liable to be broken, and, notwithstanding all your wise laws and maxims, we have it in our power not only to free ourselves, but to subdue our masters, and without violence--- throw both your natural and legal authority at our feet.” (I’m not sure-but it sounds to me like she may have been threatening to withhold sex.)

In addition to her views on women's rights, Abigail Adams was also against slavery. She believed that slavery was a threat to the American democratic experiment.

In a letter to her husband dated March 31, 1776, she wrote that Virginians' “passion for liberty” was doubtful since they “deprived their fellow creatures” of freedom.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century---where women in America were relegated to the domestic sphere---they were taught to read the Bible, but formal education was not available. WOMEN were expected to be subservient to their husbands---

## CONTRIBUTIONS OF WOMEN DURING THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

but the condition of SLAVES was even worse. However---it was during this decade of the Revolution--- that an anti-slavery movement started in the northern colonies with Abigail Adams being one of the first voices.

Abigail Adams's letters to her husband John Adams while he was serving in the Continental Congress in Philadelphia---serve as an eyewitness account of the American Revolution---and much of what she had to say--- made its way into our founding documents.

Later in life, as first lady---Abigail Adams was called "Mrs. President" for her efforts in shaping the country.

### HANNAH ARNETT



If time machines had existed, not to mention the newspaper---the Los Angeles Time's headline in 1776 would have read: PROUD FEARLESS WOMAN SPEAKS MIND.

Hannah Arnett butted into a meeting to which she was not invited, and turned the hearts and minds of the men in attendance. The men---citing poor battlefield reports of the ill-equipped Patriots--- were thinking about giving up and returning to the British side by signing a Proclamation of loyalty to Britain.

Hannah called them cowards, which they might have become. She insisted that they not give up, although she was considering giving up her marriage if her husband gave up the fight. So he had to agree with her.

The meeting ended with the men deciding to continue the fight. It's a good thing they did. Thanks to Hannah, the move towards independence continued.

## CONTRIBUTIONS OF WOMEN DURING THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

### LYDIA DARRAGH



Lydia Darragh was a woman who kept a secret from her husband. A woman with a conscience was a good description of Lydia. Lydia was a Quaker, someone whose religious beliefs prevented her from getting involved with the war.

The British found this convenient, using her house for meetings. At one such meeting, Lydia overheard the British plan a surprise attack on General George Washington and his men at a nearby camp. She personally delivered the information to Washington's troops, turning a British victory into disappointment.

But how could she get involved if her religion forbade her doing so? Through prayer, she came to the conclusion that many would suffer and die if she did not act.

This is another example of a woman getting involved where only a woman could.

### SYBIL LUDINGTON



Why is Paul Revere known for his ride? How about the female Paul Revere? That's what Sybil Ludington is known as. Sybil's ride was twice as far as Paul's.

Sybil's ride became necessary because the British had ransacked Danbury, Connecticut. Danbury was a Patriot supply center. They were then headed for Fredericksburg, New York.

A young soldier arrived at Sybil's father's house. (Colonel Ludington---Sybil's father---was in charge of the local volunteers.) Needing someone to go at once to gather the troops, Sybil jumped at the chance. She rode to the many villages, informing everyone what was happening.

Thanks to her bravery, the Patriots were able to force the British back to Long Island so from there, they sailed away. **Chalk up another win for the women!**

## CONTRIBUTIONS OF WOMEN DURING THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

### BETSY ROSS



Have you ever heard of Elizabeth Griscom? She is credited with making the first American flag. But we know her better as Betsy Ross.

Betsy was ex-communicated from her Quaker society when she married John Ross. It was not acceptable for a Quaker to marry a non-Quaker, so she was “read out”, rather than “run out”. The couple set up an upholstery business and had only been married two years when the Revolutionary War broke out. She made tents and blankets, repaired uniforms, and stuffed paper tube cartridges with musket balls for the Continental Army.

While guarding ammunition in January, 1776, her husband died in an explosion. Later that year, she met with George Washington, George Ross, and Robert Morris and this meeting led to the sewing of the first American flag. (Although some say there is lack of proof that she actually made the first flag)

Betsy remarried--two other times, continued in the upholstery business for 10 years and died at the age of 84.

**Trivia Note:** George Washington attended the same church as Betsy and John Ross. Benjamin

Franklin's nephew attended the wedding. Betsy Ross has been buried in three different locations: Christ Church Cemetery, Mt. Moriah Cemetery, and now on Arch Street in the courtyard adjacent to the Betsy Ross House in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

### CATHERINE MOORE BARRY



Cowpens. Ever heard of it? Well, it's in South Carolina. A battle there helped bring about the end of the Revolutionary War. It was 1781. The British, under command of General Cornwallis was out to crush a group of Patriots commanded by a General Morgan. General Morgan, realizing how out-manned he was, appealed to Catherine Moore Barry for help.

She knew every inch of the land she lived in. She knew all the short cuts, the trails, where Patriots lived, and how to contact them. Single-handedly, Catherine rounded up the necessary local Patriots to join General Morgan's troops.

With Catherine's help, General Morgan laid a trap for General Cornwallis and his men. The plan worked. General Cornwallis was defeated, retreating into the hands of General George Washington at Yorktown, Virginia.



## CONTRIBUTIONS OF WOMEN DURING THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

With his surrender there, the colonies won their independence from Britain.

Again a woman's hand had assisted the Patriots in their war effort.

### MARTHA BRATTON



Martha Bratton was an arsonist. She blew up a storehouse. She injured others. So for this--- should we call her a heroine??? Sure, why not? After all, she did this to help her country.

Martha and her husband were entrusted with a precious commodity back then---gun powder. With her husband away, Martha was left in charge. Hearing that the British were planning to steal the gun powder, Martha set a trap, blowing up the building as the British soldiers arrived. She even admitted doing the dastardly deed when captured.

She was let go, but later questioned about her husband's whereabouts. She nobly refused to betray her husband--- but was spared by a British officer from severe punishment. In the hour of victory, she remembered mercy and repaid the debt to the British soldier, when the same officer was captured by Patriots and scheduled for hanging.

Realizing the cruelty of war, Martha set up a hospital---and became to many a guardian angel---nursing both British and American soldiers.

### ELIZABETH ZANE



Women wear aprons for good reason---they come in handy. At least, the men at Fort Henry, in what is now West Virginia---sure thought so.

Under attack from Indians one fine day late during the Revolutionary War, there was a shortage of gunpowder. With no men or time to spare, Elizabeth Zane volunteered to run to her brother's house a short distance away to retrieve some needed gunpowder. The Indians did not try to shoot her on the way there. But, on the way back, they noticed that she was carrying gunpowder in her apron. The Indians opened fire, barely missing her with arrow and musket shot.

Reinforcements arrived the next day to save the fort from falling to the Indians.

Had it not been for Elizabeth--- that day might have been too late.

## CONTRIBUTIONS OF WOMEN DURING THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

### EMILY GEIGER



Searching Emily Geiger did no good. The important message she was carrying could not be found. It was not in writing and not on her person--- unless you count her brain. She had memorized the important message.

All this came to be because in 1781, General Nathaniel Greene needed reinforcements as the British were coming. When a messenger was needed, Emily stepped forward. She knew the countryside.

At first, she was able to avoid the British. But, she was caught and questioned. The British needed her searched---and being polite gentlemen--- they called for women to search her.

While she waited, Emily ATE the secret message. She subsequently got the message--- which she had memorized--- through to General Thomas Sumter, who arrived in time to save the day.

A paper meal saved Emily Geiger's life--- and the lives of many others as well.

### MARY MURRAY



How could one woman stop the British army without any weapon??? Without firing a single shot??? Well---by being charming!!!

Mary Lindley Murray had an unusual situation. While she was a supporter of American independence, her husband was loyal to the British.

Knowing that British troops had landed to trap retreating Americans, Mary invited the British commanders to tea. Her hospitality stalled the British long enough for the Americans to pass by New York safely.

Thus, another woman, using her brains instead of her brawn, helped to defeat the British and hasten independence.

## CONTRIBUTIONS OF WOMEN DURING THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

### MERCY OTIS WARREN



Mercy Otis Warren was a political writer and propagandist of the American Revolution. She wrote the first history of the Revolutionary War. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, topics such as politics and war were thought to be the province of men. Few men and fewer women had the education or training to write about these subjects. Mercy was an exception.

Even during the years before the American Revolution--- Mercy were espousing Revolutionary ideas trying to reach the common people. She published poems and plays that attacked royal authority in Massachusetts and urged colonists to resist British infringements on colonial rights and liberties.

Warren formed a strong circle of friends with whom she regularly corresponded, including Abigail Adams, Martha Washington, and John Winthrop's wife, Hannah.

She became a correspondent and adviser to many political leaders, including Samuel Adams, John Hancock, Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, and especially John Adams, who became her literary mentor in the years leading to the Revolution.

Prior to the American Revolution, in 1772, during a political meeting at the Warren's home, they formed the first Committees of Correspondence along with Samuel Adams.

All of Mercy Otis Warren's work---some of which made fun of the British--- was published anonymously until 1790. Being known could have carried a high price for her---punishment and possibly jail time.

Mercy Otis Warren is regarded as being among the most influential writers of the Revolutionary War. She completed her literary career with a three-volume *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution*.

While many may not think of women as Liberty Fighters, without them we might have lost the war.

Women encouraged the men who fought for freedom, as well as showing bravery and valor on their own---which entitles them to honorable remembrance throughout the centuries.

The contributions of the Women of the Revolution should be remembered---along with the other brave Patriots who actually signed the Declaration of Independence---all of them--- pledging to the cause of liberty--- "their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor."