

Breaking Out of the Historical Private Sphere: Women's Involvement in the American  
Revolution

Research Thesis

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by

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## **Introduction**

The beginning of the history of the thirteen original colonies transitioning into the United States of America has been greatly overshadowed by a masculine tone with the successes and influences of men, whether it is a hero of a battle or a Founding Father. Whenever history was taught and retold, it seems as if the presence of women during this time of revolt and rebellion in the colonies was lacking. Due to the patriarchal hold on women's involvement with anything outside of the private sphere, women could not have been as openly involved as a man during times of war. However, where there is a will, there is a way, and in the case of the American Revolution, women would not let their gender be the variable to force them to remain in the shadow of men when it came to help in fighting for independence.

Women during this time proved this thought by becoming more involved with the Revolutionary War by starting women's groups to help with gathering supplies for troops, writing and publishing articles in local newspapers, to something as unconventional as serving in battle alongside men. Women such as a Massachusetts soldier Deborah Sampson, Esther de Berdt Reed, a writer and advocate for women's involvement in helping the Continental Army, or even the female playwright and propagandist Mercy Otis Warren are only a few examples of the women that were involved in numerous ways to support the cause of gaining independence from England.

Women, particularly Caucasian women, were coming out of the homemaking and subordinate roles that had always been in place and instilled by their patriarchal communities. As Laurel Thatcher Ulrich explains in *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750*, women had been maintaining the homes with taking care of the children and tending to household chores; along with being the faith encouragers of the house

and being obedient to men. “Obedience was not only a religious duty but a legal requirement... By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law; that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage...under whose wing, protection, and cover, she performs everything.”<sup>1</sup>

Outside of the home, however, women were able to obtain small-scale work. This work would range from spinning and weaving for a seamstress position, becoming a nurse, and also being a midwife to assist in the deliveries of babies throughout the community. Quoting historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, she writes that,

Housewives commanded a limited domain. But they were neither isolated nor self-sufficient. Even in farming settlements, families found it essential to bargain for needed goods and services. For prosperous and socially prominent women, interdependence took on another meaning as well. Prosperity meant charity, and in early New England charity meant personal responsibility for nearby neighbors.<sup>2</sup>

The common misconception with early colonial women and during the times of the Revolutionary War was that women were bound to their homes with the children and strictly homemaking work. Ulrich does illustrate that women were able to come out of the boundary that had been instilled before their times and were coming out of their private spheres, slowly toeing the edges with the ability to see past the walls of the home. Women were willing to serve their families; they were skilled producers; they were intelligent traders, and “because her realm includes servants as well as young children, her ability to direct, to inspire, and to nurture others is as important to her success as hard work.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ulrich, Laurel Thatcher. *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750*. New York, NY: Vintage Books, Random House, Inc. 1980. 6-7.

<sup>2</sup> Ulrich, Laurel Thatcher. *Good Wives*. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Ulrich, Laurel Thatcher. *Good Wives*. 14.

Women were coming out of their private sphere and breathing light into the public sphere of the political realm during the time of unrest in the colonies. Contrary to few sources featured in the secondary literature, women were not just being domestic house workers that stayed at home and just cared for the children—as Laurel Thatcher Ulrich’s *Good Wives* has already proven. The purpose of the research that follows is to illustrate a few examples of what could have been many women throughout the colonies becoming more involved with activities that were not typical for female involvement—writing satires that poked fun at British officials, publishing broadsides and articles in the papers to rally women together to participate in boycotts, along with disguising themselves as men in order to fight on the battlefield.

### **Historiography**

Elizabeth Evans centers her research in *Weathering the Storm: Women of the American Revolution*, written in 1975, around eleven women that were immersed in the American Revolution and found themselves living through times of unrest. She argued that women could have bettered the nation if they shared political power with men during the Revolution, and the sources used were letters, journals, colonial records, archives, correspondence with Thomas Jefferson and George Washington, memoirs, and poems. “Women made no incursions into politics, small breakthroughs in religious sects, and only illegal and accidental inroads into the military establishment. While Americans were shouting ‘Taxation without representation is tyranny!’ against the British, they were denying political positions and the vote to women who paid taxes,”<sup>4</sup> Evans argues. “Yet, judging from the writings of those who lived during the second half of the eighteenth century, women could have bettered the nation had they shared political

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<sup>4</sup> Evans, Elizabeth. *Weathering the Storm: Women of the American Revolution*. New York, NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1975. 4.

power with men. Instead, they were relegated to the role of housewife, laboring over the hearth and breast-feeding a seemingly endless procession of babies.”<sup>5</sup> Evans does mention in her argument that “women made no incursions into politics, small breakthroughs in religious sects, and only illegal and accidental inroads into the military establishment.”<sup>6</sup> This statement is incorrect; women *were* becoming politically involved more than before with one prime example being political thinker and playwright Mercy Otis Warren. Evans reaches a tad too far with assuming that *no* women made incursions into politics; her own research in this book are not region specific. Secondary source readings show that Warren absolutely immersed herself in the political realm, even with her family (described later in Rosemarie Zagarri’s *A Woman’s Dilemma and the American Revolution*). Then again, Evans goes on to contradict herself in the same section saying that Abigail Adams was involved with politics as a result of influencing her husband John Adams. Also, Evans states that women only become illegally involved or accidentally involved in the military realm of the American Revolution. Yes, illegally they were involved because women were prohibited from enlisting in the military. However, there is not an instance where someone accidentally becomes involved with the military or accidentally joins to fight when she knows she is not allowed to join in the first place. There is cognitive thought behind the women’s involvement in the military, and this research shows just that. Normally, people join the military for a purpose, and in this case, these women joined for the purpose of helping fight the British away to gain their own independence. Evans also writes that women would spend most of their married life either pregnant or nursing children, and as Laurel

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<sup>5</sup> Evans, *Weathering the Storm*. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Evans, *Weathering the Storm*. 4.

Thatcher Ulrich explained in *Good Wives* and as this research will show, women were doing far more than having babies and taking care of them.

Mary Beth Norton in her 1980 *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750, 1800*, writes, "In eighteenth-century America, women's lives centered upon their homes and families. Thus, this book, too, necessarily concentrates upon the familial realm. Its guiding assumption is that colonial women's attitudes toward themselves, their families, and the world around them were shaped by a combination of their own daily experiences and society's expectations of them. Accordingly, it carefully delineates the range of female roles, emphasizing the troika that defined the life of the mature woman— wife, mother, and household mistress— but paying attention as well to a female's earlier experience as a daughter and her later one as a widow."<sup>7</sup> Norton included black and white women into her research for this book for early American history. She hoped to "examine eighteenth-century women's self-perceptions, the influence of their sexual identity on all phases of their lives, and, perhaps most importantly, the impact of the American Revolution upon them."<sup>8</sup> One of her conclusions is "the noting that the preindustrial American women's essential economic contribution to the household gave her a social status higher than that of both her European contemporaries and her nineteenth-century descendants."<sup>9</sup>

Eighteenth-century Americans proved to have very clear ideas of which tasks were properly 'feminine' and which were not; of what behavior was appropriate for females, especially white females; and of what functions 'the sex' was expected to perform. Moreover, both men and women continually indicated in subtle ways that they believed women to be inferior to men. Far from having a high status and an excellent opinion of themselves and their abilities, most of the white women who lived in pre-revolutionary

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<sup>7</sup> Norton, Mary Beth. *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980. 159. xiii.

<sup>8</sup> Norton. *Liberty's Daughters...* xiii.

<sup>9</sup> Norton. *Liberty's Daughters...* xiv.

America turned out to display low self-esteem, to have very limited conceptions of themselves and their roles, and to habitually denigrate their sex in general.<sup>10</sup>

Rosemarie Zagarri's 1995 biographic on Mercy Otis Warren, writer, political thinker, correspondent, and a consultant to political leaders (*A Woman's Dilemma: Mercy Otis Warren and the American Revolution*), relates how women had to overcome being a woman in order to be a patriot. She was not expected to join or was not welcomed to join the resistance. Zagarri writes that Warren "produced several caustic political satires lampooning British tyranny in the 1770s," including *The Adulateur* and *The Motely Assembly*. This author agrees with Zagarri when she argues that Mercy Otis Warren's life demonstrated "how an exceptional woman could manipulate existing gender roles with great success, but also how constricting those roles could ultimately be."<sup>11</sup> Women could break out of their private sphere into the public arena, but were also struck down because of their gender.

Historian Carol Berkin describes in her 2005 *Revolutionary Mothers: Women in the Struggle for America's Independence* that for "many Americans the Revolution is their last greatest romance with war. We read it as a story of noble generals, brave citizen-soldiers, dashing French noblemen, eloquent statesmen, and freedom-loving wives and daughters. In popular vignettes of the war, there are heroic commanders standing tall in rowboats, and lovely women busily stitching together the new American flag... Although the Revolution is acknowledged to be a 'war,' it is both a quaint and harmless war, for there is much that is missing in the tales we tell: the violence on and off the battlefield, the families torn apart by political choices, the destruction of homes and crops, the cries of frightened children, the

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<sup>10</sup> Norton. *Liberty's Daughters*. xiv.

<sup>11</sup> Zagarri, Rosemarie. *A Woman's Dilemma: Mercy Otis Warren and the American Revolution*. Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1995. xviii.

screams of women raped by soldiers, the weariness of a war-torn country, the sickly scent of death and dying in makeshift hospitals, the hunger, dislocation, and for many, both white colonists and Indians, the final exile from their homeland.”<sup>12</sup> Berkin argues that the Revolution sharply divided colonists against one another because of the topic of independence, “pitting neighbor against neighbor.”<sup>13</sup> She contends that the “limitations the founders of the nation placed upon equality were acts of conformity to the social views of the days as much as deliberate exclusions.”<sup>14</sup> Even though people were rising up against Great Britain, Berkin argues, does not mean that the tension was an invitation for women to join in nor to address the challenges people raised against race and gender. “Most eighteenth-century Americans grew up in a world of fixed truths about the capacities of men and women, the character of rich and poor, the inherent virtues and shortcomings of white and black. The Revolution disturbed and occasionally reconfigured, but it did not fully dislodge the power of those truths... Fulfilling the Revolution’s promise of equality became the task of the centuries that followed.”<sup>15</sup> Berkin seems to argue that only three women are associated with being involved in the Revolution: Abigail Adams, Betsy Ross, and Molly Pitcher, and says that “historical memory is faulty” with these cases.<sup>16</sup> Berkin “examines a war that continually blurred the lines between battlefield and home front, and it views that war through the eyes of the women who found themselves, willingly and unwillingly, at the center of a long and violent conflict.”<sup>17</sup> Women “transformed peacetime domestic chores and skills into wartime activities,” traveling with the army, being cooks,

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<sup>12</sup> Berkin, Carol. *Revolutionary Mothers*. New York, NY: Borzoi Books, 2005. iv.

<sup>13</sup> Berkin. *Revolutionary Mothers*. iv.

<sup>14</sup> Berkin. *Revolutionary Mothers*. x.

<sup>15</sup> Berkin. *Revolutionary Mothers*. x.

<sup>16</sup> Berkin. *Revolutionary Mothers*. xi.

<sup>17</sup> Berkin. *Revolutionary Mothers*. xv.



laundresses, and nurses for the men, while “on many occasions, they took a wounded husband’s place at the cannon, and on a dew occasions, they donned men’s clothing and took up arms against the enemy troops.”<sup>18</sup> Berkin argues that women stepped into the political sphere in the 1760s and 1770s in boycotting the purchase of British goods (tea, cloth, etc.) The research that follows reinforces this idea of women participating in the political sphere with printing broadsides and articles that rally women together politically and ultimately having them choosing a side in the rebellion.

Joan Gundersen writes in the 2006 *To be Useful to the World: Women in Revolutionary America, 1740-1790* that “The economic, social, and political changes of the era of the American Revolution reworked women’s roles so that they daughters of the Revolution lived in a new world very different from that their mothers knew, and yet very familiar.”<sup>19</sup> She studied three pre-Revolutionary households and the women in them to illustrate what life was like for women before the Revolution began. Economic, social, and political changes of the era of the American Revolution reworked women’s roles so that the daughters of the Revolution lived in a new world very different from what their mothers knew. The households that the author writes about are chosen deliberately in the sense that she wanted women whose lives could be connected to the Revolution’s events, who lived in geographically different regions, and who could introduce experiences of Native American, African, and European women. One of the main arguments that Gundersen has in her writing is that women between 1740 and 1790 lost many more rights and opportunities than they gained during that period. The current research will contend just the opposite—women were being heard; they were being published; reaching

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<sup>18</sup> Berkin. *Revolutionary Mothers*. xv-xvi.

<sup>19</sup> Gundersen, Joan R. *To be Useful to the World: Women in Revolutionary America, 1740-1790*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006. xiii.

out to a wider audience through print and rallying women together to fight a cause and participate in something that was not just targeted toward men. Women were becoming more politically active now with participating in boycotts and becoming correspondents with major male political figures, and fighting for independence. Freedom was not something that was gendered—men were not fighting the British for *just* men; they were fighting for both themselves and women, to ensure that the newly founded United States was able to pursue its happiness.

In the 2011 volume *In the Words of Women: The Revolutionary War and the Birth of the Nation, 1765-1799*. The editor contends that countless volumes have been written about the American Revolution and the early Republic. “The central roles that George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, and other giant figures played continue to have an extraordinary hold on the imagination of readers young and old. It should not be otherwise. Yet an incomplete picture of the formative years of the United States emerges, because a large segment of the population— women— have either been ignored or relegated to footnotes.

Yes, acknowledgements of the importance of such women as Warren and her writings, of the insightful Abigail Smith Adams’s correspondence... Nonetheless, too often women were viewed as incidental to the men who dominated the course of momentous occurrences and affected their lives. Anecdotes of Elizabeth “Betsy” Ross sewing a flag or Margaret Corbin (“Molly Pitcher”) manning the cannon after her husband was killed or Lydia Darragh, ‘a little poor insignificant old woman,’ alerting General Washington to an imminent British attack are stirring stories but that is all they are, stories. They tell us nothing of the women’s ideas or of their reactions to the events unfolding around them. And those events were significant.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> North, Louise V., Janet M. Wedge, and Landa M. Freeman. *In the Words of Women: The Revolutionary War and the Birth of the Nation, 1765-1799*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011. xxxi.

This compilation is an account of women based on their own words, letters, diaries, journals, pamphlets, poems, plays, depositions, and newspaper articles. The editor's main points include that gender roles are established early by parents and reinforced by local religious leaders; women who are obedient are exemplifying proper behavior and greater intelligence; white women's lives changed during the Revolutionary War to having to manage homes and farms and participating in political sphere with boycotting; education became more accepted for the (white) elite after the war, while Black women were still slaves and Native American women lost some stature and influence. The authors argue that women in history are just delegated footnotes and are 'stories'. This overview is accurate; since the 1970s, women's history (including the Revolutionary War period) has been grazed over and has not been given much thought. The point of the following research is to add to the conversation—to make more stories known of prevalent women during this time and to open the door to further research for the advancement of the history of women.

### **Women using the written word during the Revolution**

Women during the Revolution were beginning to share their voice and opinions outside of the home. Female writers would publish their works in local papers to connect with one another and to serve as the spark to ignite the women to come together for the cause. One particular example is an article published in the Pennsylvania Gazette on June 21, 1780 by England-born Esther de Berdt Reed, the wife of George Washington's military secretary, Joseph Reed, "The Sentiments of an American Woman." She begins her writing with an explanation that women during the time of the Revolution are doing as much as they are able to, saying that

women “aspire to render themselves more really useful”<sup>21</sup>, she contends that this sentiment was true in the North and the South as well, arguing that “On the commencement of actual war, the Women of America manifested a firm resolution to contribute as much as could depend on them, to the deliverance of their country.”<sup>22</sup> In this publication, she rallied women to express their patriotism and to become politically active, calling for women to partake and help in the Revolution. She writes

Who, amongst us, will not renounce with the highest pleasure, those vain ornaments, when she shall consider that the valiant defenders of America will be able to draw some advantage from the money which she may have laid out in these; that they will be better defended from the rigours [sic] of the seasons, that after their painful toils, they will receive some extraordinary and unexpected relief; that these presents will perhaps be valued by them at a greater price, when they will have it in their power to say: *This is the offering of the Ladies*. The time is arrived to display the same sentiments which animated us at the beginning of the Revolution, when we renounced the use of teas...rather than receive them from our persecutors...<sup>23</sup>

With her article, she was able to gather several upper-class women to form the Ladies Association of Philadelphia, whose members would go around to houses and collect and raise money for the Continental Army.<sup>24</sup> Reed explained in her broadside that women were willing to sacrifice their extravagancies in order to help the Army win the war. “Shall we hesitate to wear a clothing more simple; hair dressed less elegant, while at the price of this small privation, we shall deserve your benedictions,”<sup>25</sup> claiming that the sentiments of an American woman had not

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<sup>21</sup> Reed, Esther de Berdt. “The Sentiments of an American Woman.” *The Pennsylvania Gazette*. June 21, 1780.

<sup>22</sup> Reed. “Sentiments...” June 21, 1780.

<sup>23</sup> Reed. “Sentiments...” June 21, 1780.

<sup>24</sup> Jacqueline Beatty. “Encyclopedia of Greater Philadelphia.” Ladies Association of Philadelphia. 2013.; Reed. “Sentiments...” June 21, 1780. “National Women's History Museum: Esther De Berdt Reed.” Education & Resources. William B. Reed. *The Life of Esther De Berdt, Afterwards Esther Reed, of Pennsylvania*. Philadelphia: C. Sherman, 1853.

<sup>25</sup> Reed. “Sentiments...” June 21, 1780.

changed since the beginning of the troubles with Great Britain; women still wanted to help in any way that they could, including by raising money, making shirts, or sewing linens. These women were putting the soldiers ahead of themselves and thinking about their country first and the individual second.

Correspondence between George Washington and Esther de Berdt Reed between July and August of 1780 focused on Reed asking of Washington what he wanted done with the money that the Ladies of Philadelphia Association raised. Mentioned in her first letter to Washington, Reed told Washington of the money the Ladies' Association had made in an endeavor to help support the cause of the Revolution.<sup>26</sup> She wrote, "The Ladies are anxious for the soldiers to receive the benefit of it and wait your directions how it can be best disposed of."<sup>27</sup> She asked Washington what he thought was the best way the money could be used and continued to mention that the ladies raised the amount of "200,580 doll. [sic] and £625.6.8 in specie [sic] which makes in the whole paper money 300,634 dolrs [sic]".<sup>28</sup> Washington responded to Reed by applauding the patriotism that the Association's members showed for their country and thanked the ladies for their help, even expressing his gratitude in a letter to Reed's husband. Washington went on to tell her that the money should go toward buying linen in order to make shirts for the men.<sup>29</sup> He wrote,

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<sup>26</sup> "To George Washington from Esther De Berdt Reed, 4 July 1780," *Founders Online*, National Archives.

<sup>27</sup> "To George Washington from Esther De Berdt Reed, 4 July 1780," *Founders Online*, National Archives.

<sup>28</sup> "To George Washington from Esther De Berdt Reed, 4 July 1780," *Founders Online*, National Archives.

<sup>29</sup> "From George Washington to Joseph Reed, 4 July 1780," *Founders Online*, National Archives.

This fresh mark of the patriotism of the Ladies entitles them to the highest applause of their country. It is impossible for the Army, not to feel a superior gratitude, on such an instance of goodness. If I am happy in having the concurrence of the Ladies, I would propose the purchasing of course linnen, [sic] to be made into shirts, with the whole amount of their subscription. A shirt extraordinary to the soldier will be of more service, and do more to preserve his health than any other thing that could be procured him...<sup>30</sup>

With the Continental Army being made up of on-call militiamen, drafted men, and contracted men, supplies that were a universal product to benefit everyone was ideal. However, in a later letter, Reed wrote “an idea prevails among the Ladies, that the soldiers will not be so much gratified, [sic] by bestowing an article to which they are entitled from the public, as in some other method, which will convey more fully the idea of a reward [sic] for past services, and an incitement for future duty—those who are of this opinion propose the whole of the money to be changed into hard dollars, and giving each soldier two, to be entirely at his own disposal.”<sup>31</sup>

Washington’s response to Reed’s idea of giving the men the money channeled that of a true leader. Washington knew what could have happened if the soldiers were to have been paid.

A few provident soldiers will, probably, avail themselves of the advantages which may result from the generous bounty of two hard dollars in spicie [sic] – but it is equally porbably [sic] that it will be the means of bringing punishment on a number of others, when propensity to drinking, overcoming all other considerations, too frequently leads them into irregularities, and disorders which must be corrected.<sup>32</sup>

Keeping the men focused on what was more important at hand versus finding their answers at the bottom of a beer glass was the price Washington was willing to pay when directing Esther de Berdt Reed to spend the money on something that would be to the benefit of everyone. The

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<sup>30</sup> “From George Washington to Esther De Berdt Reed, 14 July 1780,” *Founders Online*, National Archives.

<sup>31</sup> “To George Washington from Esther De Berdt Reed, 31 July 1780,” *Founders Online*, National Archives.

<sup>32</sup> “From George Washington to Esther De Berdt Reed, 10 August 1780,” *Founders Online*, National Archives.

concentration was to end the war as soon as possible, and if men were to wander off to taverns in search of a drink instead of fighting for independence, the forces behind the fighting would have dwindled.

After the Townshend Duties were passed and the seed for contempt against Parliament was growing inside the colonists, papers were being published by community members who were angry with the Duties passing, which were aimed toward including women in protesting against these taxes and the merchants that supported it. One example was a flyer that was passed around Boston that urged people to boycott purchasing from a merchant by the name of William Jackson, since he did not participate in the boycott that the colonists had begun. The flyer reads, “William Jackson, an importer; at the brazen head, northside of the town-house, and opposite the town-pump, in Corn-hill, Boston. It is desired that the Sons and Daughters of Liberty, would not buy any one thing of him, for in so doing they will bring Disgrace upon themselves, and their Posterity, for ever and ever, Amen.”<sup>33</sup>

This publication demonstrates that those who authored the flyer knew that not only men were purchasing goods that would have been sold by merchants (such as William Jackson), but women were also purchasing goods that would have been tainted by the Townshend Duties taxes.

As historian Mary Beth Norton writes in *Liberty's Daughters* that a new dialogue was being formed in broadsides and political calls for action. Female readers of many broadsides, and any political calls for action during the Revolution, were now being told that their participation

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<sup>33</sup> “Massachusetts Historical Society Collections Online: William Jackson, an Importer; at the Brazen Head.” MHS Collections Online 1768-1770.

in patriotic duties could have been more important than “the efforts of male committees and congresses, represented an extraordinary departure from the past American devaluation of the feminine role.”<sup>34</sup>

A letter that was published in a July 21, 1780 edition of the *Maryland Gazette* had an interesting start. The article was addressed to ‘Madam’, but to what madam? Inferring from reading the letter, the intention was it to be for any woman that would have read it. The author began the letter with describing that the American women in the colonies wanted it to be known that women were becoming more and more involved in the Revolutionary cause and were helping the Continental Army against the British. The opening reads:

The American women have long aspired to the honour [sic] of giving soldiers of the continental army some public mark of the esteem they entertain of their virtue; They have manifested this disposition throughout the Thirteen United States... Being one of the states neighbouring [sic] to the theatre of war, we have hastened to form the desired association... We are not unacquainted with the sentiments of the American women in the other states, and we hope you will not disapprove our sending you an account of the steps we have taken; such alteration may be made in these as the difference of places and circumstances may render necessary, but this account will serve at least to mark the outlines of a plan which we present to you.<sup>35</sup>

The letter described an event that took place where three to four women were appointed to different wards that would go around to the homes of women and would “go to every house in their ward, to present to each woman and girl, without any distinction, a paper, one of which you will find enclosed.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Norton, Mary Beth. *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980. 159.

<sup>35</sup> *The Maryland Gazette*. “A Letter from a Lady in Philadelphia to her Friend in this Place, June 20, 1780.” July 21, 1780. [I have not been able to find the paper that was alleged to be enclosed with this letter.]

<sup>36</sup> *The Maryland Gazette*. “A Letter from a Lady...” July 21, 1780.



The selected women traveled to cities from the countryside, having to walk far distances; women who had health issues still found it necessary to come to meetings, finding “strength in their patriotism;” and a woman that was still nursing a baby that was “soon relieved from her distress by a lady who was not yet out of her chamber, generously offering to nurse it during her absence,”<sup>37</sup> found it in her will and patriotism to leave the baby behind and proceed to her patriotic duties. Women were leaving their homes, their families, young children, and private lives behind so they could become more politically involved in the Revolution and doing whatever was necessary in lending help to the Continentals. Their country came before themselves, and these patriots had no problem proving it.<sup>38</sup> The letter had an interesting take on the case of Loyalist women in America. Women that were born in America and identified as patriots who were anti-British gave those Loyalist women an opportunity to change their ways and to join the cause. The letter states that:

some of our female fellow-citizens an opportunity of relinquishing former errors, and of avowing a change of sentiments by their contributions to the general cause of liberty and their country; being born Americans, they could not see so laudable a design in agitation, without desiring to partake the glory.<sup>39</sup>

Women who were born in America, should be for the Americans instead of the British because they were exactly that, American. Proving that the sentiments of these American women were growing to support the soldiers, this group of ladies encountered a woman that was so frightened to donate money to Washington’s Army because the sum she could give was very small, and her Master was a Tory. She had refused to give up her name at first, but the women did give in

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<sup>37</sup> *The Maryland Gazette*. “A Letter from a Lady...” July 21, 1780.

<sup>38</sup> *The Maryland Gazette*. “A Letter from a Lady...” July 21, 1780.

<sup>39</sup> *The Maryland Gazette*. “A Letter from a Lady...” July 21, 1780.

because the ladies more or less lied to her and told her that they knew no Tories that were in America, in order to persuade her to donate money.<sup>40</sup>

Another noteworthy woman that was present in the public sphere was Mercy Otis Warren, a writer, historian, and propagandist during the Revolution. Warren published farces, satires, and other dramas during this time that were written with the intent to mock the British that were in power around where she lived, but were the works ambiguous enough to not specifically mention any of the officials by name. It was as if she was trying to steer the minds of the American people that read her writings in the directions of associating her characters with that of the British, and lead them toward supporting an independent nation.

In *The Motely Assembly*, one of Warren's main characters, a Mrs. Flourish, was a very outspoken woman about the involvement of women in politics, she told a male character that she was sick of hearing that women like her were so lucky to be as accomplished as she was allowed to be, as the man said.<sup>41</sup>

I mean it as such Mr. Runt; if your sex are so weak and undiscerning, as to prefer the fading, short lived, perishable trifle beauty, to the noble exalted, mental accomplishments, which only are of intrinsic value, Mr. Runt; it is fit they should be mortified. O why has Heaven permitted our passive sex to be so long deceived and misled by the idle and groundless opinion of the superior wisdom of the male sex! in animal strength I grant their superiority; and I have found some capable of pleasing; but few very few indeed capable of informing me.<sup>42</sup>

Another line in *The Motely Assembly* is of the same female character, Mrs. Flourish, telling the women in the set to be careful as to what they say when the British Captain entered, knowing

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<sup>40</sup> *The Maryland Gazette*. "A Letter from a Lady..." July 21, 1780.

<sup>41</sup> Mercy O. Warren. *The Motley Assembly: A Farce*. Published for the Entertainment of the Curious. Boston: Printed and sold by Nathaniel Coverly, in Newbury-Street, 1779.

<sup>42</sup> Mercy O. Warren. *The Motley Assembly*. Scene I.

what she and the other characters were discussing could have been seen as treason.<sup>43</sup> The acknowledgement of potentially treasonous behavior in front of a British official is interpreted as a mockery toward Great Britain. If a British official would have read this farce and interpreted it in the way that Warren wanted each individual audience member to do so, then that official would have known that the colonists knew what they were doing in the face of rebellion and knew it was against the Empire. It also would have made the official paranoid because there was no telling if this story was true.

In *The Adulateur*, Warren formed her satire around the foreseen treatment of Americans by the British and the inevitability of war. The opposing characters were interpreted as those of Tories and Whigs, whose personalities were quite different. The Whig characters were brave and self-reliant, and the Tories were rude and only out for themselves. Near the end of the play, one of the Whig characters had a monologue and described the feelings he had toward the Tory character and how he was too late to help save his country.<sup>44</sup>

O my poor country!—  
 I've wak'd and wept, and would have fought for thee,  
 And emptied every vein, when threatn'd ruin...  
 The shameless tyrant snuffs the base perfume;  
 With unrelenting heart and brazen front  
 He rears his guilty head amidst the fear  
 Of Servia's virtuous sons, whose latest breath  
 Shall execrate a wretch, who dare enslave,  
 A generous, free and independent people.<sup>45</sup>

With the contribution of *The Adulateur* to the American public, Mercy Warren's writing was a sure sting to the British. Openly comparing the Loyalists to rude and self-centered people

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<sup>43</sup> Mercy O. Warren. *The Motley Assembly: A Farce*.

<sup>44</sup> Mercy O. Warren. *The Adulateur*. Boston: Printed and sold at the New Printing-Office, 1773.

<sup>45</sup> Mercy O. Warren. *The Adulateur*.

contrary to the self-made American Rebels was another shot from Mercy Warren that hurt the British image in the Colonies. She was a woman taking an openly public and political stance against the Empire, outside of the typical private realm of a woman.

“Patriotic Poesy,” a poem published in 1768 addressed to female patriots and Daughters of Liberty in America, was another example of women reaching out to one another in organizing a boycott on imported goods. “If the Sons (so degenerate) the Blessing despise, Let the Daughters of Liberty, nobly arise, And tho’ we’ve no Voice, but a negative here, The use of the Taxables, let us forbear, (Then Merchants import till yr. Stores are all full May the Buyers be few and yr. Traffick be dull.)”<sup>46</sup> Upon doing so, it raised the bar to include women in a communal activity such as boycotting, again going out of the private sphere of the nuclear home and into the man’s public sphere of being included in political matters. Women were now more apt to not only boycott local merchants but also to influence female friends and associates to do the same in the cause. Women were being just as publicly and politically capable as men were.

### **Women’s involvement in other ways—boycotting, fighting, etc.**

During this time of unrest, women were stepping out of their spheres in order to help the cause and the fight against the British in order to gain independence. One of the ways women were becoming more involved was through boycotting. Women were taking part in the buying and exchange of goods in their local towns and communities, where their voices could be heard and actions could be taken in order to protest the English goods that were being circulated by merchants.

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<sup>46</sup> Whitfield J. Bell, Butler Stuart Lee, and Clarfield Julie. “Trivia.” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (1977): 307-09.

One such woman that became involved with boycotting goods, especially British tea, was Penelope Barker of Edenton, North Carolina. Barker was a woman that formed and organized the Edenton Tea Party that formed in North Carolina in order to boycott British goods that were being sold to the colonists.<sup>47</sup> Barker had assembled fifty women to sign a resolution that supported the First Provincial Congress of North Carolina that “prohibited the importing of British Manufactured goods, which included tea.”<sup>48</sup> This action was in response to the 1773 Tea Act, which stated:

An act to allow a drawback of the duties of customs on the Exportation of tea to any of His Majesty’s colonies or plantations in America; to increase the deposit on Bohea [sic] Tea to be sold at the India Company’s sales; and to empower the Commissioners of the Treasury to grant licenses to the East India Company to export tea duty-free.<sup>49</sup>

Of course, this Tea Act angered the men and women of the colonies because Great Britain allowed for a monopoly to be held by the British-owned East India Company on the sale of tea.<sup>50</sup>

There was a letter submitted to the *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser* on January 31, 1775 that included a section of the resolution that was printed that also included the names of the women who signed the resolution on the 25 of October in 1774. The unknown author of the letter to the paper included a paragraph that is seemingly addressed to the countrywomen of the area, to introduce the resolution as women who were giving remarkable proof of their patriotism. The resolution concludes that “faithfully American ladies follow the laudable example of their

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<sup>47</sup> Cumming, Inez Parker. “The Edenton Ladies’ Tea-Party.” *The Georgia Review*, Vol.8 No. 4. Winter 1954. 389-395

<sup>48</sup> Claghorn. *Women Patriots...* 19.; Cumming “The Edenton Ladies’...” 389-395.

<sup>49</sup> Tea Act of 1773. 10 May 1773. America’s Homepage: Historic Documents of the United States online resource.

<sup>50</sup> Tea Act of 1773. 10 May 1773. America’s Homepage: Historic Documents of the United States online resource, [ahp.gatech.edu/tea\\_act\\_bp\\_1773.html](http://ahp.gatech.edu/tea_act_bp_1773.html)

husbands, and what opposition your Ministers may expect to receive from a people thus firmly united against them.”<sup>51</sup>

The resolution states that the women who were involved in the creation of the document could no longer be indifferent to this situation (the Tea Act and the rising tensions with Great Britain) that was affecting the livelihood and happiness of their country. Writing this resolution, the ladies stated, was a “duty which we owe, not only to our near and dear connections who have concurred in them, but to ourselves.”<sup>52</sup> The resolution contended:

As we cannot be indifferent on any occasion that appears nearly to affect the peace and happiness of our country, and as it has been thought necessary, for the public good, to enter into several particular resolves by a meeting of members deputed from the whole Province, [sic] it is a duty which we owe, not only to our near and dear connections, who have concurred in them, but to ourselves, who are essentially interested in their welfare, to do every thing [sic] as far as lies in our power, to testify our sincere adherence to the same; and we do therefore accordingly subscribe this paper, as a witness of our fixed intention and solemn determination to do so.<sup>53</sup>

These women represented the frustrations and anger that many colonists were feeling in regard to their Mother government across the pond, and that these women were willing to show their support for boycotting the abuse and advantages that were being taken in regard to the colonists. The response from England in regard to the resolutions and boycott that the Edenton Tea Party denoted, was very negative. One well-known reaction that took place in London, was printed in a newspaper. Philip Dawes of London created a cartoon that mocked the Edenton Tea Party entitled “A Society of Patriotic Ladies, at Edenton in North Carolina.”<sup>54</sup> This cartoon was a

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<sup>51</sup> Unknown author. *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, 31 January 1775. British Library Newspaper Archive.; Cumming. “The Edenton Ladies’...” 389-395.

<sup>52</sup> *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*...

<sup>53</sup> *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*...

<sup>54</sup> Philip Dawe(s) [I saw two variations of his name on online resources], “A Society of Patriotic Ladies, at Edenton in North Carolina.” Great Britain. 25 March 1775. Online images source from the Metropolitan Museum of Art online archives.

satirical attack aimed at these women. It clearly undermined and undercut the women's abilities to be politically engaged. The cartoon reinforced gender roles that were followed at the time and seemingly pushed women back into the home and into their private spheres of not being able to be politically involved in any kind of important matter.<sup>55</sup>

The cartoon portrays women in a negative light. Women are drawn in a rather unattractive manner that are too busy to pay attention to other factors that are surrounding them. The women

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<sup>55</sup> "A Society of Patriotic Ladies..."

are drawn in such a way that they have striking resemblances to men—some are very manly. The features are very strong and predominate— just noticing the chins and noses of the women, they are not drawn soft as women are normally depicted, but hard and very straight edged. Women were no longer acting like women but were, instead, acting like men.<sup>56</sup>



Very noticeably, there is a child that is drawn under the table, not being tended to while being pestered by a dog tugging on its ear. This particular scene in the cartoon is depicting the women as being too busy with politics and being outside of their realm in the homes and taking

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<sup>56</sup> “A Society of Patriotic Ladies...”



care of the domestic duties. They are so heavily involved with participating in politics that they neglect their domestic duties and ignore children and end up being terrible mothers. *How could a woman let a dog hurt her child? Why is she not paying attention to the baby instead of the politics?* are questions that could be raised by other women in London that viewed this paper, also hinting at women in London judging the women in the colonies as terrible, insubordinate mothers. Of course, going to the opposite side of the spectrum and looking at it from a different perspective, this cartoon also could be for the viewing of men to confirm what the cartoon is trying to portray—women are becoming too manly and becoming more involved in things that they should not be a part of.<sup>57</sup>

The text of the resolution that the women are writing on the table is very different and has a different tone than the original text. The document in the photo reads,

We the ladyes [sic] of Edenton do hereby solemnly engage not to conform to ye pernicious Custom of Drinking Tea or that we, the aforesaid Ladyes [sic], will not promote ye wear of any manufacture from England, until such time that all Acts which tend to enslave this our Native Country shall be repealed.<sup>58</sup>

The actual resolution that was written by the Edenton Tea Party stated,

As we cannot be indifferent on any occasion that appears nearly to affect the peace and happiness of our country, and as it has been thought necessary, for the public good, to enter into several particular resolves by a meeting of Members deputed from the whole Province, it is a duty which we owe, not only to our near and dear connections who have concurred in them, but to ourselves who are essentially interested in their welfare, to do every thing [sic] as far as lies in our power to testify our sincere adherence to the same; and we do therefore accordingly subscribe this paper, as a witness of our fixed intention and solemn determination to do so.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> “A Society of Patriotic Ladies...”

<sup>58</sup> “A Society of Patriotic Ladies...”

<sup>59</sup> Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser...

The tone of the satire versus the tone of the actual resolution is very mocking and undermining. The cartoon writing does undermine the intelligence of the women of Edenton with making them seem unintelligent and too ignorant to write a proper resolution that is coherent and sound. The ladies of Edenton put together an articulate piece of writing, whereas the cartoonist created something that would come from women that were not educated and did not have the proper diction. The cartoonist seems like the mocking younger sibling that is poorly behaved and is a bully at school that does not get his way and is jealous of his older sister because she is well behaved and is very amiable. Regardless of the cartoon, the ladies of the Edenton Tea Party gained notoriety and remained popular in the colonies, contrary to the feelings they were gaining in London.<sup>60</sup>

### **Women in forms of battle**

Not only were women being seen in the public and political eye, they were also secretly serving alongside men in battle. A matter like this was completely unheard of because women were supposed to be staying inside their separate sphere of domestic work and small occupations, such as Ulrich mentioned in *Good Wives*.<sup>61</sup> Women were to stay at home taking care of the house, the children, the cooking, and the cleaning, along with being a midwife and taking care of the household. However, this was not the case for some women. Those women who did not stay to their domestic and communal duties were stepping out of the boundaries of womanly work into the realm of what men had been involved with for centuries. Going around and asking for money for supplies or writing broadsides was simply not enough to be involved in

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<sup>60</sup> Cumming. "The Edenton Ladies' ..." 391.

<sup>61</sup> Ulrich. *Good Wives*. 6-7.

the Revolution. These women who felt that it was not enough took things to the next level and were involved in the brutality of war.

Women were making their way into battlefields disguised as men or fighting alongside their husbands, sacrificing their lives, and even being integrated into secret spy rings that were developing as a result of imminent British occupation.

For example, Margaret Cochran grew up an orphan from the age of five and eventually married John Corbin, a soldier that was enlisted as a matross in the Pennsylvania Artillery First Company of the Continental Army.<sup>62</sup> Upon their marriage and Corbin's enlistment, they went east with the rest of the army. "Wives of the soldiers often cooked for the men, washed their laundry and nursed wounded soldiers. They also watched the men do their drills and, no doubt, learned those drills, too," historian Debra Michals argues.<sup>63</sup> Cochran, however, did even more.

During the Battle of Fort Washington on Manhattan Island, on November 16, 1776, Margaret Corbin disguised herself as a man and joined her husband on the battlefield, where she commenced in helping him load his cannon. Tragedy struck, and her husband was unfortunately killed in the heat of battle. Margaret Corbin took it upon herself to continue with the fight. She "quickly and heroically took over firing the cannon against the British. Other soldiers commented on 'Captain Molly's' steady aim and sure-shot."<sup>64</sup> Unfortunately, she too was struck

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<sup>62</sup> As defined by Merriam-Webster online dictionary, a matross is a "gunner's mate (as during the American Revolution) that assisted in loading and firing and sponging guns."

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/matross>

<sup>63</sup> Michals, Debra. "Margaret Cochran Corbin." National Women's History Museum. 2015.; United States Military Academy West Point. "Who is Margaret Corbin?" United States Military Academy West Point Corbin Forum.; James, Janet Wilson, Edward T. James, and Paul Samuel Boyer, eds. *Notable American Women, 1607-1950*. Vol. 1. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971. Page 385.

<sup>64</sup> Michals. "Margaret Cochran Corbin.;" Daughters of the American Revolution, Captain Molly Corbin Chapter. "Captain Molly Corbin." July 7, 2003.; West Point. "Who is Margaret Corbin?"

with shrapnel from enemy artillery and almost lost her left arm, along with receiving wounds in her jaw and left breast; her injuries left her unable to use her left arm for the rest of her life.<sup>65</sup>

Margaret Corbin struggled often after the death of her husband on the battlefield and also from the wounds that she endured, including difficulty in supporting herself monetarily.

Historian Debra Michals writes that Corbin was

Left to support herself alone, Corbin struggled financially. After she recovered, Corbin joined the Invalid Regiment at West Point, where she aided the wounded until she was... discharged in 1783. Then, on July 6, 1779, the Continental Congress, in recognition of her brave service, awarded her with a lifelong pension equivalent to half that of male combatants. Congress also gave her a suit of clothes to replace the ones ruined during the conflict.<sup>66</sup>

The Continental Congress granted her a pension that she would receive for the rest of her life, albeit half of what a man would receive, but this was still a small recognition and a great step to recognizing the full potential of women. She would later be buried at the Military Academy of West Point with military honors, alongside receiving recognition with her name on a plaque in Fort Tryon Park. The story of Margaret Corbin is another prime example of how far many

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...; James, Janet Wilson, Edward T. James, and Paul Samuel Boyer, eds. *Notable American Women, 1607-1950*. Page 385.

<sup>65</sup>Michals. "Margaret Cochran Corbin."; *Daughters of the American Revolution*, Captain Molly Corbin Chapter. "Captain Molly Corbin." July 7, 2003.; West Point. "Who is Margaret Corbin?" ...; James, Janet Wilson, Edward T. James, and Paul Samuel Boyer, eds. *Notable American Women, 1607-1950*. Page 385.

<sup>66</sup> Michals. "Margaret Cochran Corbin."; *Daughters of the American Revolution*, Captain Molly Corbin Chapter. "Captain Molly Corbin." July 7, 2003.; West Point. "Who is Margaret Corbin?" ...; James, Janet Wilson, Edward T. James, and Paul Samuel Boyer, eds. *Notable American Women, 1607-1950*. Page 385.; Ross, Emily. 1972. "Captain Molly: Forgotten Heroine of the Revolution." *Daughters of The American Revolution Magazine* 106, no. 2: 108.; Collins, Gale. *America's Women: 400 Years of Dolls, Drudges, Helpmates, and Heroines*. New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2003. 81-82.

women during this time of conflict were willing to go in order to support and rally behind their country's cause in order to win the fight against the British.<sup>67</sup>

Deborah Sampson was a woman who was initially denied entry into the Continental Army because her unsuccessful disguise as a man revealed her true gender. Again, this reiterates women belonging to their own private sphere at home and doing domestic work, not fighting alongside men at war. In her memoir, *The Female Review: or, Memoirs of an American Young Lady*, she describes how she was a Continental soldier for three years and how she was upheld as an American soldier and completed her duties extremely well, including “with punctual exactness, fidelity and honor, and preserved her chastity inviolate.”<sup>68</sup>

After being wounded twice, she was being treated for a fever. This, unfortunately, was when her gender was revealed for the second time.<sup>69</sup> After being honorably discharged upon the discovery of being a woman, there was a problem with her pension and whether or not she would be paid for her time served. Historian Alfred Young writes in *Masquerade: The Life and Times of Deborah Sampson, a Continental Soldier*, that Sampson presented a persistent campaign for nearly three decades for her right to a pension. She even went as far as going on a tour and

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<sup>67</sup> Ross. “Captain Molly...” 108.; West Point. “Who is Margaret Corbin?”

<sup>68</sup> Deborah Sampson, Herman Mann, William Beastall, and George Graham. *The female review: or, Memoirs of an American young lady: whose life and character are peculiarly distinguished--being a Continental soldier, for nearly three years, in the late American war. During which time, she performed the duties of every department, into which she was called, with punctual exactness, fidelity and honor, and preserved her chastity inviolate, by the most artful concealment of her sex.: With an appendix, containing characteristic traits, by different hands; her taste for economy, principles of domestic education, &c.* Dedham [Mass.]: Printed by Nathaniel and Benjamin Heaton, for the author. 1797.

<sup>69</sup> Sampson, Mann, Beastall, and George Graham. *The female review...*

delivering addresses “about her exploits.” Sometimes, she even wore a soldier’s uniform. Young argues that Sampson was America’s “first itinerant woman lecturer.”<sup>70</sup>

Paul Revere campaigned on her behalf to receive a pension by writing to Congressman William Eustis, asking for him to consider the type of woman Deborah Sampson had become after donning the male uniform while in battle. She may have violated those gender norms in the past, but after the war, he described how she had become a wife and mother. Revere discusses that every person he came into contact with that knows Sampson had nothing but positive words to say of her; she was a good, moral woman that had come into ill times with money, and she and her family did not have very much land. Sampson’s health was in a state of decline since being wounded in battle.<sup>71</sup>

Revere goes on to mention his thoughts of hearing about a woman soldier. He thought that Sampson would have been a tall, mean, uneducated, masculine female, but she was the contrary, being a small, educated woman who was very polite and enjoyable to be around and did not deserve to live the way that she did – she deserved more.<sup>72</sup> With the help of Paul Revere’s letter to Congressman Eustis and the way Deborah Sampson was described to be an amiable person that deserved more than the cards that she was dealt, Deborah Sampson was granted pension in 1818 and began to have a monthly allowance to make her life somewhat better after being wounded during the war.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Young, Alfred F. *Masquerade: The Life and Times of Deborah Sampson, a Continental Soldier*. New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2005. 11

<sup>71</sup> “Letter from Paul Revere to William Eustis, Member of Congress. February 20 1804.” *Massachusetts Historical Society Online Archives*.

<sup>72</sup> “Letter from Paul Revere to William Eustis, Member of Congress. February 20 1804.” *Massachusetts Historical Society Online Archives*.

<sup>73</sup> The National Archives; Washington, D.C.; *Ledgers of Payments, 1818-1872, to U.S. Pensioners Under Acts of 1818 Through 1858 From Records of the Office of the Third Auditor of*

Lydia Darragh was another noteworthy woman who became involved in the Revolutionary War through the means of being a spy. Darragh was born in Ireland and married William Darragh in 1753. The couple moved to British America a few years later. They were both Quakers and ended up settling in Philadelphia, feeling at home in a Quaker community. Quakers, historically, were pacifists. The spying that Darragh participated in would have been a way to intercept the violence that would have been going on around her community, while still allowing her to practice her Quaker ways and avoiding violence. Lydia Darragh became a patriot spy that helped General Washington during an attack that was to happen in December of 1777 after the British stormed into Philadelphia.

When Washington's October bid to retake the city [Philadelphia] failed, he and his troops retreated to Whitemarsh. Nearly one-third of Philadelphia's population evacuated the city. As well-known Quakers, the Darraghs felt relatively safe in their home. British General Sir William Howe established his camp across the street from the Darraghs', where he was easily spied by Lydia. Her fourteen-year-old son John smuggled her coded notes about British activities to her eldest son Charles, a Patriot soldier.<sup>74</sup>

Later, during their occupation, the British troops warranted the use of the Darragh home in order to hold meetings. After mild persuasions from Darragh herself along with one of her cousins that was serving in the British Army, the family was still permitted to stay inside their home along with the British soldiers that would also be in company.<sup>75</sup>

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*the Treasury; Record Group Title: Records of the Accounting Officers of the Department of the Treasury; Record Group Number: 217; Series Number: T718; Roll Number: 2.*

<sup>74</sup> Darrach, Henry, David Bacon, John Drinker, and Geo. J. Scattergood. "Lydia Darragh, of the Revolution." *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 23, no. 1 (1899): 86-91.; Bohrer, Melissa Lukeman. *Glory, Passion, and Principle: The Story of Eight Remarkable Women at the Core of the American Revolution*. New York, NY: Atria Books, 2003. 125-153.; Berkin. *Revolutionary Mothers*. 139-141.; Claghorn. *Women Patriots*. 60-61.

<sup>75</sup> Michals, Debra. "Lydia Darragh." National Women's History Museum.; Bohrer. *Glory, Passion, and Principle...* 125-153.; Claghorn. *Women Patriots...* 60-61.

A secret meeting was hosted on December 2 1777, and the family had been ordered to stay in their bedrooms until the meeting had ended. Darragh did not heed this order and instead hid in a closet close by the meeting where she listened in on the meeting and overheard the British discuss an attack being planned for December 4 at Whitemarsh.<sup>76</sup>

Upon learning this information, Darragh made it her mission to warn him about the upcoming attack. After the conclusion of the meeting and the ability to return back to her duties, she received a pass to travel to a mill for flour. On the day of the attack, she trekked to the mill for the flour and headed to a Patriot message center known as the Rising Sun Tavern. Darragh told a Continental officer about what she had overheard in her home and told him about the attack that was going to happen. This officer then told Colonel Elias Boudinot of what Darragh said, and sent notice to the Continental Army at Whitemarsh. "Either way, Darragh's bravery gave Washington time to prepare his troops. After four days of minimal fighting in what was ultimately a standoff, Howe and his troops returned to Philadelphia."<sup>77</sup>

Upon returning to Philadelphia, the British began an investigation into who leaked their plan. "Darragh was questioned, but officers believed her denials that no one had been awake

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<sup>76</sup> Darrach, Henry, David Bacon, John Drinker, and Geo. J. Scattergood. "Lydia Darragh..." 86-91.; Berkin. *Revolutionary Mothers*. 139-141.; Claghorn. *Women Patriots...* 60-61.

<sup>77</sup> Darrach, Henry, David Bacon, John Drinker, and Geo. J. Scattergood. "Lydia Darragh..." 86-91.; George Washington from William Dewees Jr." 4 December 1777. *Founders Online*, National Archives. Boudinot, Elias; President of the Continental Congress, Commissary General of Prisoners in the Army of America during the Revolutionary War, Director of the Mint, etc. *Journal or Historical Recollections of American Events during the Revolutionary War*. Philadelphia, PA: Frederick Bourquin, 1894. (The title page says this was copied from Boudinot's original manuscript.; Claghorn. *Women Patriots...* 60-61.; Young, Alfred F., editor. *The American Revolution: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism*. De Kalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1976. 391.



during the soldiers' meeting."<sup>78</sup> The importance of Darragh's breaking out of the bond of the home and into such a male dominated event was portrayed when she delivered the news to the officer in a tavern.

Much like Lydia Darragh's escapade was the story of another woman named Nancy Hart. She was also known as Anne Morgan and infamously as Aunt Nancy. Nancy Hart was a woman who was six-foot tall with red hair, crossed eyes, and daring. Married to Captain Benjamin Hart of the Continental Army, she was no stranger to the idea of war close by her. Similar to other families that were living in the rebellious states, Hart's family was no exception to the arrival of British soldiers in her town.<sup>79</sup>

As the secondary literature states, there were six Tories commanded by Colonel John Dooley who ordered Hart to make them a meal as the Loyalists were passing through. Hart sent her younger daughter out for a supposed trip to acquire water, but Hart had instructed her daughter to signal her husband and the nearby neighbors.<sup>80</sup>

The Loyalists went inside the Hart home and began to settle in, leaning their muskets in one corner of the room. While the Tories were occupied, Hart acted quickly in order to start the removal of the weapons from her home in order to make the Tories unprepared and thus more easily overtaken. Upon removing two of the guns, the British noticed what had been taking place

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<sup>78</sup> Michals, Debra. "Lydia Darragh.;" Bohrer. *Glory, Passion, and Principle...* 125-153.; Berkin. *Revolutionary Mothers.* 139-141.

<sup>79</sup> Claghorn. *Women Patriots...* 97-98.; Coulter, E. Merton. "Nancy Hart, Georgia Heroine of the Revolution: The Story of the Growth of a Tradition." *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 39, No. 2. June 1955. 118-151.; Ashmore, Otis. "Wilkes County, Its Place in Georgia History." *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No. 1. March 1917. 59-69.; Hume. "Press, Published History..." 200-209.

<sup>80</sup> Claghorn. *Women Patriots.* 97-98.; Coulter. "Nancy Hart..." 118-151.; National Society Daughters of the American Revolution Nancy Hart Chapter, Milledgeville, Georgia. "Nancy Hart." N.d.; Hume. "Press, Published History..." 200-209.

while they were not paying attention, and Hart grabbed one of the muskets, and pointed it at the men. She demanded that they not move toward her when “one Tory misjudged her and approached. She fired her rifle and killed him. Just then her husband arrived with their sons and neighbors to help.”<sup>81</sup>

The ultimate fate of these British soldiers was grim. The 1912 newspaper article recounted:

Skeletons of the six Tories captured at her dinner table and afterwards hanged to trees near her home by Nancy Hart more than a century and a half ago, were unearthed last week by a squad of hands at work grading the Elberton and Eastern railroad...The place where the skeletons were unearthed, together with the fact that they were so close together, near the surface, with no sign or trace of...a coffin anywhere around, makes the evidence convincing that these are the bones of the Tories captured by the revolutionary heroine who lives in history as the crossest-eyed and ugliest, as well as the bravest and most loyal woman of the period.<sup>82</sup>

Clearly, women served in many more capacities than just homemakers during the Revolutionary War.

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<sup>81</sup> *The Atlanta Constitution*. “Skeletons of Six Tories Hanged Near Elberton, Found.” 23 December 1912.; Claghorn. 97-98.; Coulter. “Nancy Hart...” 118-151.; Hume. “Press, Published History...” 200-209.

<sup>82</sup> *The Atlanta Constitution*. “Skeletons of Six Tories Hanged Near Elberton, Found.”

## **Conclusion**

Many early historical writings conclude that women were not granted many opportunities during the time of the American Revolution to step out of the sphere that they had been constricted to for a number of years—but the research on primary and some secondary sources show that this is just not the case for some of the women that were around during the time of the Revolution. This research has shown that women were taking risks in submerging themselves into public events that would have otherwise been dominated by men. Women, some of the main purchasers of goods in the colonies, were boycotting British merchants and encouraging others in their own communities to do the same—signing their broadsides as the “Daughters of Liberty.” The Daughters of Liberty title was an enormous step in the right direction to be included in the classification as a child of liberty, someone who fights the injustice, as they saw it of the British government and wanting to secede from their control—women were now classifying themselves and identifying with that title.

Many women in the thirteen United States in the face of the American Revolution and growing tensions with the British Empire proved to put their personal lives on hold and put their country’s best interest ahead of their own. At a time of a male-dominated-separate-sphere world, women broke from their silent mold and forced their voice to be heard. Through the propagandist drama writings from women such as Mercy Otis Warren, mocking the British right under their own noses and writing satirical resemblances of what was to come in time of unrest; to the women like Deborah Sampson that served alongside men in the heat of battle, risking not only their reputations but also their lives for their country; or women like English-born Esther de Berdt Reed, writing a broadside to rally women together across the thirteen-original-colonies and

help the cause and raise money for supplies for the Continental Army under General Washington. Gender was not a limiting factor in the minds of these women in the wake of a Revolutionary War, and they all proved that being a woman was more than domestic work and bearing children. They stepped out from behind the shadows of men, into the red glare, and out into the public world to help win America's recognizable independence from Great Britain.

Let us not lose a moment; let us be engaged to offer the homage of our gratitude at the altar of military valour, [sic] and you, our brave deliverers, while mercenary slaves combat to cause you to share with them, the irons with which they are loaded, receive with a free hand our offering, the purest which can be presented to your virtue,

By an American Woman<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Reed. "Sentiments of an American Woman."

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