

# ***Researching Women in the American Revolution***

Melanie McComb, Senior Genealogist, [melanie.mccomb@americanancestors.org](mailto:melanie.mccomb@americanancestors.org)

## ***How Did Women Show Patriotic Service?***

- Making home spun clothes
- Boycotting British goods
- Paying taxes
- Fundraising money for supplies for soldiers
- Battlefield service (camp followers, nurses, military service)

## ***Home Spun Cloth***

- Wool Act of 1699 forbade colonists from selling wool, wool cloth, or yarn outside of the colony it was produced; it also increased taxes for import/export.
- Daughters of Liberty founded in 1765. They boycotted British goods and made their own cloth.
- Spinning bees were very popular and were a way to bring communities together. Many became competitive and published in the newspapers how much yarn they produced during these gatherings.

## ***Boycotts***

- Foreign tea was not allowed in social gatherings
- “Liberty teas” were created from herbs and fruits
- Edenton Tea Party (October 25, 1774) - 51 women gathered to sign a statement of protest to give up tea and boycott other British products

## ***Taxes***

- Beef and supply taxes passed by colonial government to support the cause
- TIP: Look for the widows in the town records

## ***Fundraising***

- Funds were needed to support the Continental Army
- Philadelphia Ladies Association canvassed the city of Philadelphia to ask for money from each woman
- Donation amounts reported in the *Life and Correspondence of Joseph Reed*

## ***Battlefield Service***

### Camp Followers

- Many were widows, runaway servants, or those that faced poverty
- Some of the officers' wives also accompanied their husbands (ex. Martha Washington)
- They did the following tasks:
  - Cooking
  - Cleaning
  - Sewing and mending uniforms
  - Served as nurses to the sick and injured
  - Herded farm animals, milked cows, and foraged for food
- Widow's pension affidavits give insight into what life was like for women that followed their husbands to war (ex. Sarah Osborn Benjamin's pension file)

### Nurses

- Women were needed to heal the sick and treat the injured, relieving any men who could serve in battle
- Changes in Pay:
  - 1775 - One female nurse was employed for every 10 patients and one nurse matron for every 100 patients
  - Pay started at \$2/month for nurses; matrons \$4/month
  - In 1776, pay was raised to \$4/month for nurses
  - In 1777, pay way doubled to \$8/month for nurses; \$15/month for matrons

### Soldiers

- Some were awarded pensions (ex. Deborah Sampson and Margaret Corbin); others were awarded an annuity (ex. Mary Hays McCauley)
- Pension files can be found on Fold3.com
- Annuities can be found in state legislature minutes (check sites like Archive.org)

## ***Finding the Records***

- Newspapers
  - Early American Newspapers, Series I (1690-1876) Available from American Ancestors' Partner Databases <https://www.americanancestors.org/Search/External-Databases>

- Town Records
  - FamilySearch Catalogue (Search by Place>Name of Town>Town Records)
  - Ancestry.com (ex. Massachusetts U.S. Town and Vital Records database)
- Military Records
  - Revolutionary War pensions are online on Fold3.com (including widow's pensions)
  - Approved patriots can be found on the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) and Sons of the American Revolution (SAR) web sites
    - DAR – [www.dar.org/grs](http://www.dar.org/grs)
    - SAR – <https://sarpatriots.sar.org>
- Government Records
  - Fold3.com (Pennsylvania Archives)
  - Archive.org and HathiTrust.org
  - State historical societies and archives
- Loyalist Claims Commission
  - UK, American Loyalist Claims, 1776-1835 - <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/3712/>
- Confiscated Lands
  - May be found in newspaper articles when a property is up for sale
  - State-level records may include Acts of Attainder or “Forfeited Estates” files
  - Vermont – State Papers, Volume 6 – Sequestration, confiscation and sales of estates - <https://www.familysearch.org/library/books/records/item/431533-sequestration-confiscation-and-sale-of-estates>
- Manuscripts
  - Genealogical libraries (Brim-Deforest Library) - <https://www.americanancestors.org/the-brim-deforest-library>
    - Digital Library and Archives – <https://digital.americanancestors.org>
  - Local historical societies
  - University collections
  - ArchiveGrid - <https://researchworks.oclc.org/archivegrid/>

## **Published Sources**

Arendt, Emily J., “Ladies Going about for Money” *Journal of the Early Republic* (Summer 2014, Vol. 34, No. 2). Available on JSTOR at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24486686>.

Benes, Peter, *In Our Own Words: New England Diaries, 1600 to the Present* (Boston, MA: Boston University, 2009).

Claghorn, Charles Eugene, *Women Patriots of the American Revolution: A Biographical Dictionary* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1991).

Crowder, Jack Darrell. *Women Patriots in the American Revolution: Stories of Bravery, Daring, and Compassion* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co, 2018).

Grundset, Eric, *America's Women in the Revolutionary Era: A History Through Bibliography* (Washington, D.C.: National Society Daughters of the American Revolution, 2011).

Kierner, Cynthia A., *Southern Women in Revolution, 1776-1800: Personal and Political Narratives* (University of South Carolina Press, 1998).

Mullen, Jolene Roberts, *Connecticut Town Meeting Records During the American Revolution* (Westminster, MD: Heritage Books, 2011).

Norton, Mary Beth, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (Cornell University Press, 1996). Available to borrow on Internet Archive at <https://archive.org/details/libertysdaughter0000nort/page/n5/mode/2up>

Reed, William Bradford, *Life and Correspondence of Joseph Reed, Military Secretary of Washington, at Cambridge* (Philadelphia: Lindsay and Blakiston, 1847). Available on archive.org at <https://archive.org/details/lifeandcorrespo02reedgoog>.

### **Archived Education Programs**

American Inspiration Author Event: *Angelica: For Love and Country in a Time of Revolution* with author Molly Beer <https://www.americanancestors.org/video-library/angelica-love-and-country-time-revolution-author-molly-beer>

American Inspiration Author Event: *The Odyssey of Phillis Wheatley: A Poet's Journeys Through American Slavery and Independence* with author David Waldstreicher <https://www.americanancestors.org/video-library/david-waldstreicher-odyssey-phillis-wheatley-poets-journeys-through-american-slavery-and>

American Inspiration Author Event: *The Howe Dynasty: The Untold Story of a Military Family and the Women Behind Britain's Wars for America* with author Julie Flavel <https://www.americanancestors.org/video-library/julie-flavell-howe-dynasty-untold-story-military-family-and-women-behind-britains-wars>