

# Researching Women in the American Revolution

Melanie McComb, Senior Genealogist

THE BRUE FAMILY LEARNING CENTER



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## Meet today's presenter



Melanie McComb  
Senior Genealogist

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## OVERVIEW

- **Presentation** (50 mins.)
  - Patriotic Service
  - Battlefield Service
  - Finding the Records
- **Q&A** (10-15 mins.)

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# Patriotic Service

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**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)

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# Home-Spun Cloth

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**Wool Act of 1699**

- Forbade colonists from selling wool, wool yarn, or wool cloth outside of the colony it was produced
- Increased taxes (wool was taxed upon export and import)

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## Daughters of Liberty

- Established in 1765
- Organization composed solely of women
- Boycotted British goods and made their own, including homespun cloth

PROVIDENCE, March 12.

On the 4th Instant, Eighteen *Daughters of Liberty*, Young Ladies of good Reputation, assembled at the *House of Doctor Ephraim Bowen*, in this Town, in Consequence of an Invitation of that Gentleman, who had discovered a laudible Zeal for improving Home Manufactures. There they exhibited a fine Example of Industry, by spinning from Sunrise until Dark, and displayed a Spirit for loving their native Country, rarely to be found among Persons of more Age and Experience. The Doctor provided an elegant plain Dinner, and other Refreshments, for the fair Company; but they expended but very little Time in doing, and cheerfully agreed to omit Tea, to render their Contribution more useful. Besides the Influence of their Patriotism, before they separated, they unanimously resolved that the Stamp Act was unconstitutional; and that they would purchase no more *Foreign Manufactures* until

Providence Gazette 12 Mar 1766  
via Early American Newspapers

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## Spinning Bees

- Gatherings of women spinning yarn
- The amount of thread and yarn produced at the spinning bees was published in the newspapers




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THE following is an Account of the Performances of a Number of *Mifles* at Warren, in this Colony, who, at a late Spinning-Match in that Town, spun in one Day, of good Linen Thread, the Quantities ascribed to their respective Names, viz.

<i>Mifles</i>	<i>St. Kn. Tb.</i>	<i>Mifles</i>	<i>St. Kn. Tb.</i>
Lydia Cockrum,	4 11 0	Patience Miller,	3 11 25
Reb. Easterbrooks,	4 11 20	Roby Thurber,	5 5 0
Anna Easterbrooks,	6 4 0	Elizabeth Eddy,	5 8 15
Lydia Turner,	4 2 14	Betty Bowen,	5 4 0
Roby Luther,	4 9 20	Lois Cole,	5 1 36
Lilles Barton,	4 3 2	Rebecca Miller,	3 12 29
Polly Miller,	4 5 0	Nabby Bradford,	4 8 20
Lilles Hale,	4 4 0	Harty Cole,	5 2 34
Patience Hill,	5 4 0	Mary Cary,	4 13 13
Deborah Cole,	5 11 0		
Rebecca Nuning,	4 3 30	Total,	96 2 18

The Newport Mercury 26 May 1766  
(Early American Newspapers)

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# Boycotts

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### Tea Boycotts

- Foreign tea was not allowed in social gatherings
- "Liberty teas" were made instead from herbs and fruits
  - Labradore tea (also known as Hyperion Tea)
  - Yeepann tea (popular in North Carolina)
  - Raspberry Leaf Tea
  - Indian Lemonade Tea

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### Edenton Tea Party

- 51 women in Edenton, North Carolina, led by Penelope Barker, met on October 25, 1774
- The women signed a statement of protest to give up tea and boycott other British products



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# Battlefield Service

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## Camp Followers

- By the winter of 1777, about 2000 women marched with American troops
- 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

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## Sarah Osborn

- Accompanied her husband, Aaron Osborn to West Point and then travelled with the Continental Army
- She worked as a washerwoman and a cook




Photo courtesy of Wayne County Historical Society, Honesdale, PA

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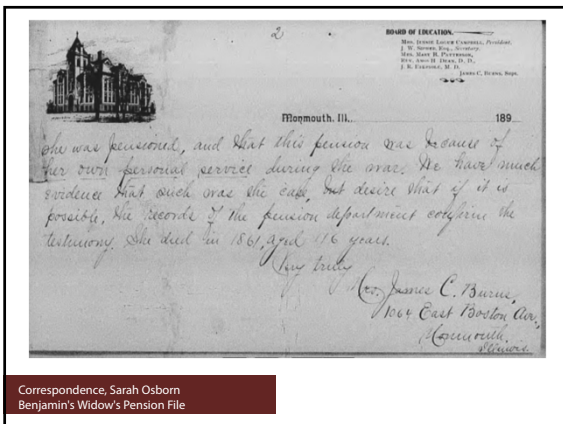
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### Nurses

- Women were needed to heal the sick and treat the injured, relieving any men who could serve in battle

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### Changes in Pay for Nurses

- 1775 - One female nurse was employed for every 10 patients and one nurse patron 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

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### Mary Pricely

- Served as a nurse on the warship, *The Defense*, in 1777
- Was paid thirty shillings for her service by the Maryland Council of Safety

*of the Council of Maryland, 1777-1778.* 423

That the said Treasurer pay to Joshua Mitchell Eight c. 8 Pounds per Act passed.

That the said Treasurer pay to Mary Pricely Thirty shillings Balance of Account passed by the Board.

That the said Treasurer pay to Capt. Forrester two hundred Pounds to be delivered over to John Gerock on Account to be expended for the use of the Hospital in Baltimore Town.

Journals and Correspondence of the Council of Safety, Vol. 16 via Archive.org

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### "Molly Pitcher"



Photo Credit: Library of Congress

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### Joseph Plumb Martin's Account of a Female Artillerist

“One little incident happened during the heat of the cannonade, which I was eyewitness to, and which I think would be unpardonable to mention. **A woman whose husband belonged to the artillery and who was then attached to a piece in the engagement, attended with her husband at the piece the whole time.** When in the act of reaching a cartridge and having one of her feet as far before the other as she could step, a cannon shot from the enemy passed directly between her legs without doing any other damage than carrying away all the lower part of her petticoat. Looking at it with apparent unconcern, she observed that it was lucky it did not pass a little higher, for in that case it might have carried away something else, and continued her occupation.”

(Source: <https://discoverjhistory.org/interpreting-the-life-of-molly-pitcher-2>)

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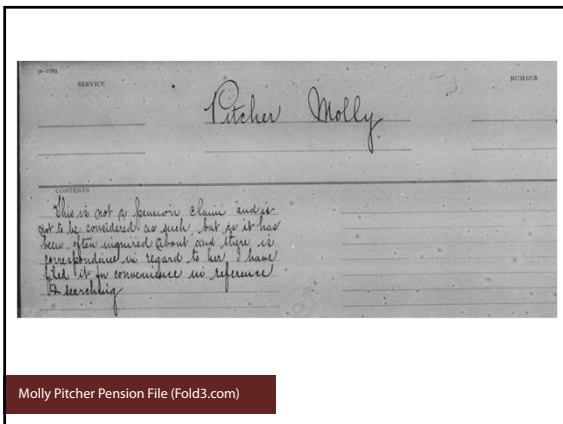
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Molly Pitcher Pension File (Fold3.com)

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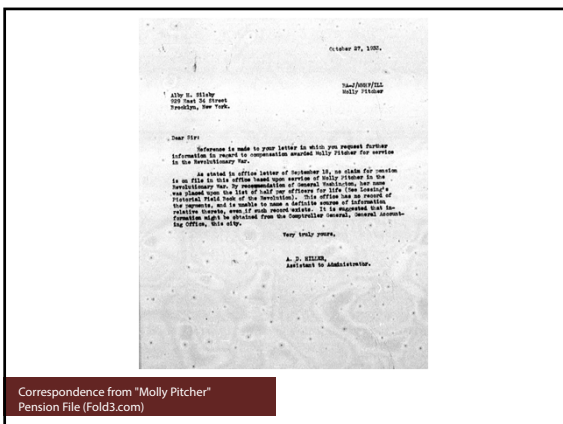
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Correspondence from "Molly Pitcher" Pension File (Fold3.com)

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## Mary Hays McCauley

- In 1822, she petitioned the Pennsylvania legislature for a widow's pension
- Was awarded an annuity for her own service during the war
- "That the state treasurer is hereby directed to pay to Molly M'Kolly, of Cumberland county, forty dollars immediately, and an annuity of forty dollars to commence on 1 Jan 1822, payable half yearly during life. 21 Feb 1822." (Source: The Statues at Large of Pennsylvania, Harrisburg PA, 1911, Laws Passed Session 1821/22)

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Thursday, February 21<sup>st</sup>, 1822.

The Governor this day approved and signed the following Acts of the General Assembly, and the Secretary of the Commonwealth returned the same to the Houses in which they respectively originated, that is to say;

- An Act authorising the election of an additional constable in the Township of Mountpleasant in Westmoreland County.
- ➔ An Act for the relief of Molly McKolly for her services during the revolutionary war.
- An Act to render valid certain Judgments irregularly rendered in the County of York.
- An Act for the relief of William Harbeson and Peter Kidd, old soldiers of the revolutionary war.

Executive Minutes of Governor Joseph Hiester, 1822, via Fold3.com

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### Margaret (Cochran) Corbin

- Her husband John Corbin was killed at the siege of Fort Washington in 1776
- Took over working a cannon until she was badly injured. Her wounds were significant, and she was sent to Philadelphia for medical treatment.
- The Executive Council of Pennsylvania, on June 29, 1779, granted Margaret Corbin \$30 and recommended to the congressional Board of War that she receive a disability pension.
- In 1779, Congress granted her a lifetime annuity of one-half monthly pay 'drawn by a soldier in the service of these states.'
- She was the first woman pensioner of the United States to receive a pension as a disabled soldier




Photo Courtesy of the West Point Museum Collection, United States Military Academy

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\* The two following Orders were drawn on the Treasurer, vizt: In favour of John Woods, for the sum of one hundred and fifty pounds, three shillings, and four pence, for Materials furnished to the Armed Boats and Gallies belonging to the State. And in favour of Margaret Corbin, for Thirty Dollars, to relieve her present necessities, she having been wounded and utterly disabled by three Grape shott, while she filled with distinguished Bravery the post of her Husband, who was Killed by her side, serving a piece of Artillery at Fort Washington.

Minutes of the Supreme Executive Council, Pennsylvania - 29 Jun 1779 via Fold3.com

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### Abner Weston Diary

*"Their hapend a uncommon affair at this time, for Deborah Samson of this town dress her self in men's cloths and hired her self to Israel Wood to go into the three years Servis. But being found out returnd the hire and paid the Damages."* (January 23, 1782 Entry in the Abner Weston Diary, in possession of the Museum of American Revolution, Philadelphia, PA)

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### Where can I find the records?

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### Newspapers

- Early American Newspapers, Series I (1690-1876)
  - Can be accessed from American Ancestors' "Library Databases From Home" web page

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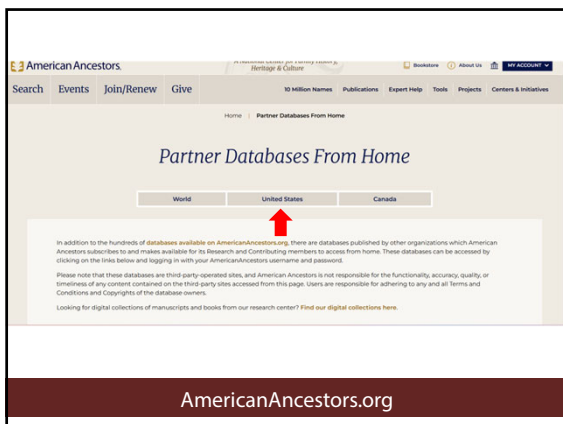
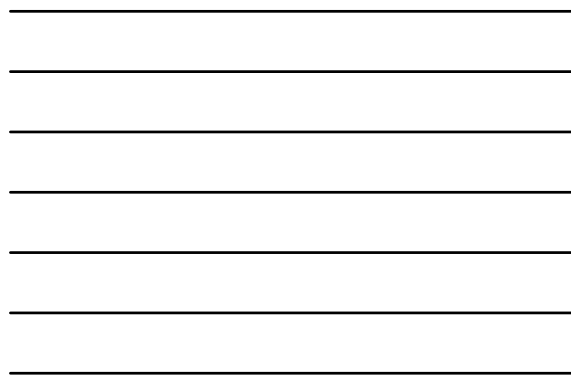
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## Town Records

- Town records can be found on FamilySearch (browsable through the catalogue)
- Some of the indexed records can be found on Ancestry.com
  - Ex. Massachusetts, U.S., Town and Vital Records database

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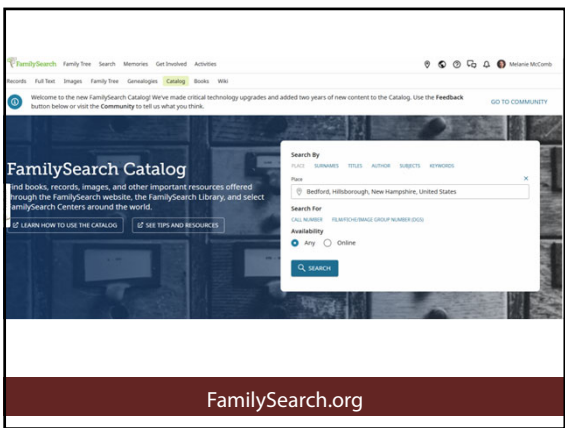
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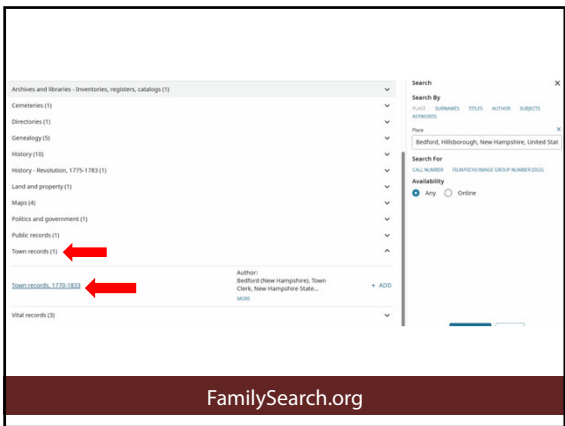
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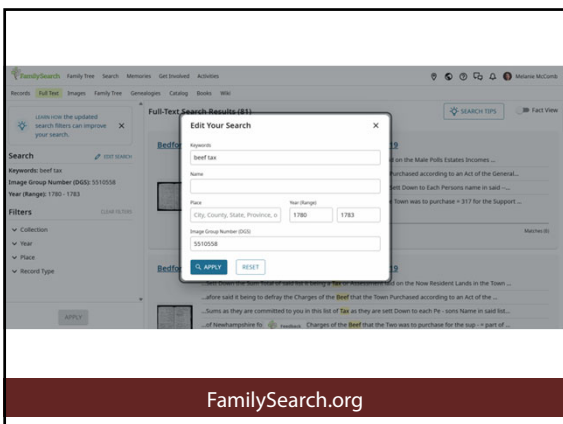
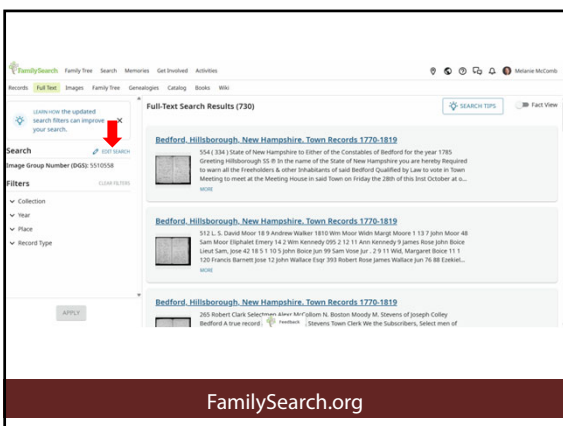
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## Manuscripts

- Genealogical libraries (NEHGS)
- Local historical societies
- University collections
- Archivegrid.com

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digital.AmericanAncestors.org

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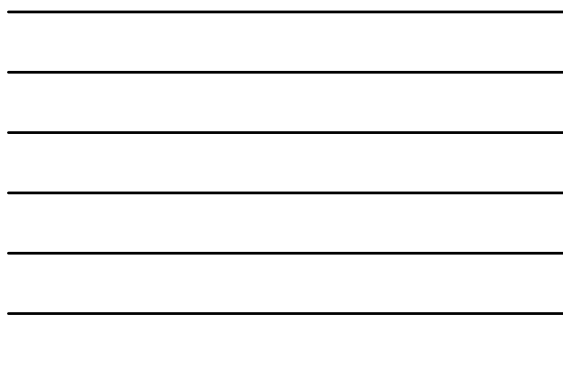
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**QUESTIONS?**

**Schedule a consultation**  
*consultations@americanancestors.org*

**Hire Research Services**  
*research@americanancestors.org*

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*Researching Women in the American Revolution*

Men were certainly not the only ones affected by—or involved in—the American Revolution. Women boycotted British goods, produced home-spun cloth and supplies for soldiers, and some even took to the battlefield. This presentation will look at women's role in the fight for American Independence and how to research your female ancestors during this period.

Come explore the past and bring your ancestors' Revolutionary War experiences into clearer focus!

Registration in this program includes access to a 60-minute live broadcast, recording, and other materials for the foreseeable future.

**Join the Recording**

Click here to join the live broadcast: <https://zoom.us/j/9562335927>

Live Broadcast: Saturday, March 21, 200 - 3:00 PM ET

If you are unable to attend the live broadcast, you will be able to watch a recording on this program page with access for the foreseeable future.

Lecture Recording

[AmericanAncestors.org/researching-women-american-revolution](https://AmericanAncestors.org/researching-women-american-revolution)

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*Upcoming Events*

**ONLINE SEMINAR**  
**Massachusetts Research: Four Centuries of History and Genealogy**  
Wednesdays, April 1, 8, 15, 22, 29, 6:00 – 7:30 PM ET

**HYBRID LECTURE**  
**From Tyranny to Freedom: Irish Contributions to the American Revolution**  
Presented by Melanie McComb  
April 18, 2:00 – 3:00 PM ET

**IN-PERSON EXHIBIT**  
**Patriots of Color**  
Family Heritage Experience, American Ancestors, Boston, MA  
April 23 – December 31, 2026

[AmericanAncestors.org/Events](https://AmericanAncestors.org/Events)

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**THANK YOU!**  
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