

A Bit of Women's History for Women's History Month

The accomplishments and contributions of patriotic women throughout America's War for Independence and the decade leading up to it are deserving of more attention, particularly during **Women's History Month** in March. While the Sons of Liberty actively influenced support for independence, especially in the New England colonies, through public protests and networks of patriots organized to resist the increasingly punitive measures imposed by the British, they had a less aggressive, but equally dedicated and effective, counterpart in the Daughters of Liberty.

The Daughters of Liberty formed chapters in many parts of New England, but the name was also a general term describing all women who, in a variety of ways, supported the cause of American liberty. They proved to be so vital to the eventual success of that cause that one of America's Founders, Samuel Adams, who was also one of the Sons of Liberty, is reported to have claimed that, "*With the ladies on our side, we can make every Tory tremble.*" These Daughters of Liberty organized and participated in boycotts of British goods, while also promoting and actively engaging in the manufacture of American-made goods, such as textiles and herbal alternatives to British teas, to alleviate shortages. They circulated petitions, and refused to favor men with their attentions if the men were reluctant to join the patriotic cause. As military actions increased between colonial militia and the British, and as the Revolutionary War was being waged, Daughters of Liberty sewed uniforms, made bullets, and raised funds to benefit the American soldiers. Some married women, including Martha Washington, often joined their husbands in the military camps, where many assisted the war effort by doing cooking and laundry, mending clothing, and caring for the sick and wounded – and were occasionally involved in the fighting.

One notable and courageous "camp follower" was Margaret Corbin. At the Battle of Fort Mifflin, in New York, Margaret was with her husband, helping him load the cannon he was manning. When he was suddenly killed in the attack, she, without hesitation, took over his position, firing with admirable accuracy until she herself was wounded. She survived and became the 1st American woman to receive a military pension.

Sybil Ludington, the 16-year-old daughter of the leader of a Connecticut militia regiment, Col. Henry Ludington, made a hazardous ride alone throughout a dark, rainy night in 1777, covering about 40 miles, to call the widely-scattered men of her father's regiment to arms after word was received that the British were attacking the town of Danbury.

Bostonian Sarah Bradlee Fulton has been referred to as the "Mother of the Boston Tea Party" for her considerable assistance behind the scenes of that historic event. She also organized a field hospital for the patriots wounded in the Battle of Bunker Hill and served as a nurse there. During the Siege of Boston, she became outraged when a group of British soldiers seized a shipment of wood that belonged to her and her husband. Not wanting such a valuable and needed commodity to fall into British hands, Sarah chased down the redcoats and the load of wood, demanding its return, and then boldly defied the British soldiers who threatened to shoot her, saying, "*Shoot away!*" Stunned, the British surrendered the shipment to her. In 1900, the D.A.R. had a memorial plaque placed at Sarah Fulton's gravesite, and a poem honoring her memory was written by Mary Jane Seymour. The words can also be applied to all the patriotic women who were part of our nation's fight for independence:

*"Yet not alone by men reclaimed, brave women too achieved their part.
With courage, love and loyalty, they bore war's cruel smart.
We turn no printed page today, their gracious deeds to magnify.
Within our hearts their memories rest, their influence cannot die.
...May we be wise and ever prize, the lessons taught us here,
That freedom comes by sacrifice and duty knows no fear."*

Priscilla Poese, Americanism