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Articles

Camp Followers, Nurses, Soldiers, and Spies: Women and the Modern Memory of the Revolutionary War

By Heather K. Garrett

Abstract: When asked of their memory of the American Revolution, most would reference George Washington or Paul Revere, but probably not Molly Pitcher, Lydia Darragh, or Deborah Sampson. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to demonstrate not only the lack of inclusivity of women in the memory of the Revolutionary War, but also why the women that did achieve recognition surpassed the rest. Women contributed to the war effort in multiple ways, including serving as cooks, laundresses, nurses, spies, and even as soldiers on the battlefields. Unfortunately, due to the large number of female participants, it would be impossible to include the narratives of all of the women involved in the war. Thus, this paper compares the accounts of some of the lesser-known women to the recognized women in the memory of the Revolutionary War, and seeks to understand why the three women mentioned above overshadowed those that were forgotten.

In 1779, on a bustling farm in Setauket, New York, Anna Strong frantically hung a black petticoat on a clothesline among white linens while looking around nervously. Anna's bizarre behavior caught the attention of her workers, but no one inquired the cause. Instead, everyone simply continued their tasks. By hanging the petticoat, Anna signaled Abraham Woodhull and Caleb Brewster that a message or a fellow Patriot had arrived, for this was her task as a member of the Culper Spy Ring, a network of spies behind the British lines that proved a crucial component to the Continental Army's military intelligence. This scene is in the very first episode of Craig Silverstein's *Turn: Washington's Spies* television series.

Ultimately, *Turn* is the 2014-2015 memory of the Revolutionary War. While *Turn* demonstrates the complexities of American loyalties and life during the war, and the unconventional roles that many played, the series also reflects the political correctness of the twenty-first century by including the women involved in the narrative. Still, most remain oblivious to women's participation in the Revolutionary War.¹

The protests of minorities during the Civil Rights, Women's Liberation, and New History Movements of the 1960s engendered and bolstered this interest in women's history, and the incorporation of women's narratives. Consequently, it was not until the 1960s that the women participants in the Revolutionary War receive anything more than scarce mentions. During the war, women were present on the battlefields and in the combat zones, contributing to the war effort as nurses, laundresses, cooks, spies, and even as soldiers. The contemporary public, however, remains unaware of these women's extensive contributions, particularly in the combat zones, because prior to the emergence of the New History Movement in the 1960s, and the consequent rise of women's studies, men dominated the focus and the authorship of history.² In combat zones, women's roles and contributions often overlapped, which blurred the lines of women's titles and positions to the point that most participants received the umbrella term "Camp Follower." These women cleaned, cooked, made and washed clothing, and assisted the injured and ill on and off the battlefields. Nonetheless, these "Revolutionary Heroines" – women Camp Followers and nurses, and the rare female soldiers and spies – risked their lives and suffered the same privations as the men, and therefore, their stories deserve recognition in the memory of the Revolutionary War.³ Ultimately, due to the male-

¹ *Turn: Washington's Spies*, Episode no. 1 (Pilot), first broadcast April 6, 2014 by AMC, directed by Rupert Wyatt and written by Alexander Rose and Craig Silverstein.

² The New History Movement began in the 1960s, and it focused on the social component in recording and analyzing history. The movement coincided with the Civil Rights and Women's Liberation Movements, which drew attention to minorities – the often forgotten peoples in history. Essentially, the rise of this newfound and inclusive ideology over the last fifty years led to new research in ethnic, social, and women's histories.

³ While it is not known who coined the term "Revolutionary Heroine," or how long it has been in use, it is a phrase prevalently used to describe the heroic women participating in any state or culture's revolution. For example,

centric record of history prior to the 1960s, these women have been largely overlooked – until now.

The Memory of the Revolutionary War

There is an overwhelming amount of literature on soldiers, spies, and nurses during the Revolutionary War, but few contain much information about the women that held these positions. While deciphering the women who served contractually under the army proves difficult, as many women acknowledged for their services did not have contracts stating their involvement, the accounts of impromptu soldiers, spies, and nurses deserve remembrance all the same. The term, Camp Follower, however, was associated with women, and therefore, returned results mainly regarding women. Camp Followers rarely had a large number of results, nor were many of the results devoted significantly to them. Frequently, the literature that did contain information of these women resulted in brief discussions, or blips, of the subject. Furthermore, most of these sources do not precede the 1960s, and the major periods of authorship on this subject were the late 1960s throughout the 1970s, the 1990s, and the 21st century.

In the immediate memory of the war, the early republic scarcely recognized any of the women's contributions in the combat zones. This lack of recognition may have been due to the tasks these women performed in adherence to the relatively rigid gender roles defined during the eighteenth century. By the end of the war, women gradually became the moral upholders and the patriotic enforcers of the home and society, and even though female soldiers and spies have never been conventional, the cooking, cleaning, and tending to the soldiers proved simply a part of a woman's role.⁴ Consequently, many of the authors in the

"Revolutionary Heroine" appears in: Kathleen Maher, "Emily Geiger: Revolutionary Heroine," *Constitution Daily* (blog), April 1, 2011, <http://blog.constitutioncenter.org/2011/04/emily-geiger-revolutionary-heroine/>; and Sarah Jane Gray, "Recasting 1789: The Revolutionary Heroine in French and British Literature" (PhD diss., University of Colorado, 2012), ProQuest, UMI Dissertations Publishing (UMI 3527291), <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.csusb.edu/docview/1082025983?accountid=10359>.

⁴ The egalitarian ideals of the American Revolution extended to the majority of men, but they also drove a larger wedge between the sexes, which resulted in a greater distinction regarding the concepts of masculinity and femininity, and the

immediate aftermath of the war did not differentiate between these roles—they simply referred to them as “women,” if they mentioned women’s effort at all, and hence, the lack of literature providing specific recognition.

Female Spies

As would be expected, documentation on spies and their endeavors proved scarce, and female spies’ contributions remained practically non-existent until the rise of women’s studies in the 1960s due to persistent – yet gradually changing – gender roles, and the consequent unconventionality of the incorporation of women into the historical narrative. For instance, in the early 1960s, Katherine and John Bakeless published a book called *Spies of the Revolution* (1962). Despite extensive accounts of the many spies that served both the American and British armies, the majority of the book focused on male spies. In fact, only one chapter is devoted to the opposite gender, and the entire chapter focused on one woman, the Philadelphia spy—Lydia Darragh (Darrah). There is no mention of any other female spy for either the Americans or the British. Furthermore, a significant portion of the chapter involved her connection with Major Clark, as she may have served him directly. A later chapter dedicated to the Culpers’ Spy Ring, like the *Turn: Washington’s Spies* series, provided extensive accounts of the men involved, but it failed to mention a crucial member of the circle, Anna Smith Strong, who hung petticoats on clotheslines as signals to fellow rebels. Certainly, by failing to mention, or more significantly, failing to focus on, the women so important to the secrecy and the success of the transportation of intelligence to the American lines, women other than Lydia Darragh failed to receive recognition in the historical narrative and the memory of the “Revolutionary Heroines” of the war. While this relative disregard

roles of men and women. These distinctions, in addition to the European eighteenth century social system – the Cult of Domesticity/True Womanhood, reinforced the later ideology of “Republican Motherhood,” as coined by historian Linda Kerber in her book, *The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment – An American Perspective* (1976). According to this term, the American woman not only retained her responsibility to domestic life, she also held the duty of a “Republican Mother” in raising patriotic citizens willing to defend and support their country when needed.

for women's roles in American history is not surprising, as Katherine and John Bakeless published this book just before the New History Movement, the Civil Rights Movement, and the new interest in gender studies, *Spies of the Revolution* marks the end of a historiographical period in which the focus of history and its memory, prior to these movements, remained male-centered.⁵

Ultimately, it is due to this male-centered documentation of history that women, though obviously present throughout history, receive little attention prior to the 1960s. As the 1960s movements gained momentum, authorship began reflecting these growing ideologies through their incorporation of women's histories, as well as women authors gaining recognition and popularity. Women like Gerda Lerner, Elizabeth Ellet, Joan Scott, and Linda Kerber, ultimately helped usher in this new era of female inclusivity. Later, women, such as Carol Berkin, Catherine Allgor, Nina Silber, and Caroline Janney, continued this movement as some of the most prominent female historians of the early twenty-first century.

As of the twenty-first century, historians began incorporating female spies into the narrative. In 2006, Alexander Rose's book *Washington's Spies: The Story of America's First Spy Ring*, on which the television series *Turn: Washington's Spies* is based, was one of the most popular books on spies.⁶ In contrast to Bakeless, Rose does a service to history and the memory of the war by providing the complete story of the Culper Spy Ring, as he includes the importance and the narratives of Anna Smith Strong and others. Still, the Culpers were not the only spies in the Revolution; therefore, while his case study contributes to the overall narrative of the spies during the war, it remains only one aspect of the subject.

In addition to case studies, several early twenty-first century authors started to incorporate the broader context of female participation in the war, but many of the narratives of these women still remained absent or briefly mentioned until later years. In 2005, Carol Berkin's book, *Revolutionary Mothers: Women in the Struggle for American Independence*, in addition to chapters devoted to other categories of women's contributions, provided a chapter (9) to "Spies, Saboteurs, Couriers, and Other Heroines,"

⁵ Katherine and John Bakeless, *Spies of the Revolution* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1962), 150-175.

⁶ Alexander Rose, *Washington's Spies: The Story of America's First Spy Ring* (New York: Bantam Books, 2006).

which mentions the brief stories of several women and their positions.⁷ Also in 2005, a brief journal article focused on not only Lydia Darragh, but also Patience Wright and Emily Geiger, yet the article contained little information about these women.⁸ Five years later, Sean Halverson's article "Dangerous Patriots: Washington's Hidden Army during the American Revolution," provided a background of the various spies affiliated with George Washington's army, as well as some individual stories of spies on both sides. Of the article's twenty-five pages, however, not even four pages were reserved for the female spies of the war. Halverson's section, "Women within the Web of Washington's Dangerous Patriots," highlighted female spies overall, and included the accounts of individual women, such as the Americans, Eliza Wilkinson, Lydia Darragh, and Anna Smith (Strong), as well as Tory women, an anonymous woman and Ann Bates.⁹ Nevertheless, the majority of the section gives a background of the tasks assigned to these women and the brutal treatment of female spies as prisoners of war like that of their male counterparts. Thus, because women, including female spies, remained absent from the historical context and narrative for so long, providing context of women's history and lives dominated the focus of early twenty-first century authorship.

Women Soldiers

Women soldiers also received scarce recognition prior to the 1960s except when their narratives proved useful. Despite historians' common estimates of more than one female soldier (Margaret Corbin as another) in the Continental ranks, typically, only one woman appeared in the literature—Deborah (Gannett) Sampson. However, authors discussing female soldiers emerged earlier than that of spies, in the antebellum era, appearing mostly as a source of inspiration to the American populace preparing for the Civil War.

⁷ Carol Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers: Women in the Struggle for America's Independence* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), Kindle book, Loc. 2168-2349.

⁸ Christine Graf, "From Eavesdroppers to Secret Agents: Women Spies of the American Revolution," *Appleseeds* 8, no. 4 (December 2005): 29-30.

⁹ Sean Halverson, "Dangerous Patriots: Washington's Hidden Army during the American Revolution," *Intelligence and National Security* 25, no. 2 (2010): 142-145.

As part of the Antebellum and Civil War era memories of female soldiers, Deborah Sampson stood as the most prominent figure universally remembered, but other women were celebrated according to their states or hometowns. For instance, Prudence Wright's story held a spot in the *History of the Town of Groton*, a book written by Caleb Butler in 1848.¹⁰ As early as 1860, however, Deborah (Gannett) Sampson, labeled a "heroine" of the Revolution and an "American Joan of Arc" in newspaper articles, served as an inspiration to the mobilizing nation preparing for the Civil War and dominated the memory of women in the American Revolution.¹¹ An 1862 article praised Sampson for her patriotism and zeal, but did not condone the action of a woman assuming a man's position as a soldier, for it combatted the social gender norms. Nonetheless, the author of the article stated that "her exemplary conduct... is worthy of record."¹² Therefore, while the populace of this era commended Deborah Sampson directly, they ultimately frowned upon the reason for her praise. This conflict within the 1860s culture and gender ideologies, in addition to her biography, explains why only Deborah (Gannett) Sampson remains in the memory of the revolutionary female soldiers during this era, as remembering female soldiers as a whole would have contradicted the status quo.

More than a century later, Deborah Sampson's narrative still served as *the* female soldier of the war. In 1972, Herman Mann published, *The Female Review or the Life of Deborah Sampson*, which essentially served as a biography of Deborah Sampson's life and her endeavors. Although Mann did mention multiple women and their stories, as well as the subject of female heroism, the book's primary focus was Sampson. Mann provided a background on Sampson's early life, her experiences throughout the war, as well as correspondence and other sources directly to, from, or about her.¹³ While Mann's attempts to include other

¹⁰ Caleb Butler, *History of the Town of Groton* (Boston: Press of T.R. Martin, 1848), 336.

¹¹ "An American Joan of Arc—A Heroine of the Revolution," *Cincinnati Daily Press* (Cincinnati, OH), March 23, 1860, accessed February 21, 2016, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84028745/1860-03-23/ed-1/seq-1.pdf>.

¹² "A Female in the Revolutionary Army," *The Smokey Hill and Republican Union* (Junction City, KS), July 3, 1862, accessed February 21, 2016, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84030186/1862-07-03/ed-1/seq-1.pdf>.

¹³ Herman Mann, *The Female Review; Life of Deborah Sampson* (New York: Arno Press, 1972).

female soldiers deserves appreciation, as he is one of the few, he focused on Sampson and did not devote any significant attention to other women who not only served in the Continental ranks, but also took arms against the British as civilians. However, this is not surprising, as the 1970s reflected the early stages of the movements' growing ideologies of incorporating women's histories.

As of the twenty-first century, however, other women began to emerge in the literature and the memory of the Revolutionary War. In a 2005 children's magazine article, Kathiann M. Kowalski highlighted not only Deborah Sampson, but also incidental female soldiers, such as Prudence Wright, Grace and Rachel Martin, Martha Bratton, and Nancy Hart, under the title "Women Warriors."¹⁴ Some of these women wore their husbands clothing and enlisted as actual soldiers, yet some simply acted as a soldier would in an emergency. Kowalski's article ultimately reflects the twenty-first century historians' interest in women's histories, as well as their intent to include previously overlooked peoples into the nation's cultural and social, history and memory. Furthermore, the article illustrated the relatively egalitarian focus of early twenty-first century historians regarding what they deemed important to teach to the nation's youth.

Camp Followers and Nurses

In contrast to the delayed recognition of female spies and soldiers, authors started acknowledging Camp Followers earlier than their unconventional counterparts due to the alignment of a Camp Follower's duties and early gender roles. The duties of a Camp Follower stood primarily as tasks already assigned to women within the social structure. Washing clothes, making meals, tending to the sick or wounded, all proved simply a woman's role. Therefore, Camp Followers returned a multitude of literature solely regarding women, as the term never applied to men, but only to women and children. Among this literature, several books primarily devoted to Camp Followers appeared, and likewise, several writings only briefly acknowledged their presence. Rarely,

¹⁴ Kathiann M. Kowalski, "Women Warriors," *Appleseeds* 8, no. 4 (December 2005): 24-27.

however, did these sources return a compilation of women in combat zones, in that, soldiers and spies included with the Camp Followers and nurses, hence the reason for this study.

In the Antebellum era memory, American Revolutionary War women seemed overlooked entirely in one source. In Mary E. Hewitt's 1852 book, *Heroines of History*, not a single woman from the Revolutionary period was mentioned. With a general title encompassing the *Heroines of History*, and its publication in New York, one could expect to see at least one woman from the nation's founding. Unfortunately, that was not the case, yet other women from Cleopatra to Joan of Arc achieved recognition.¹⁵ Precisely one hundred years later, however, Walter Hart Blumenthal published his book, *Women Camp Followers of the American Revolution*, which specifically focused on Camp Followers. This book is the most vital source in the discussion of Camp Followers, as it not only devotes its sections equally between the American and the British, but it is also one of the most cited sources discussing the subject. While Blumenthal does not primarily focus on any specific heroine, his book provides more context than any particular set of biographies.¹⁶ Nonetheless, in one century, and prior to the movements of the 1960s, Camp Followers progressed from being unacknowledged entirely to becoming a source's primary focus.

Just a few years later, in 1969, Elizabeth F. Ellet published a three volume series on *The Women of the American Revolution*, which included every type of contributing woman from Camp Followers, nurses, and politicians, to ladies' aid societies and the influential wives of prominent men. The series is specifically a collection of biographical accounts of these women and their contributions during the war. Like Blumenthal, Ellet's series became one of the most cited sources in the discussion of women in the Revolutionary War.¹⁷ In fact, most women's individual narratives found today, such as on websites like AmericanRevolution.org, are copied verbatim from Ellet's series.

¹⁵ Mary E. Hewitt, ed., *Heroines of History* (New York: Cornish, Lamport & Co. Publishers, 1852).

¹⁶ Walter Hart Blumenthal, *Women Camp Followers of the American Revolution* (Philadelphia: George S. MacManus Company, 1952).

¹⁷ Elizabeth F. Ellet, *The Women of the American Revolution*, 3 vols. (New York City: Haskell House Publishers Ltd., 1969).

Almost three decades later and beyond, Camp Followers did not hold the limelight as they had in the 1950s and '60s. Instead, authors incorporated Camp Followers into the larger conversation of women's participation as a whole. In 1996, Joan R. Gundersen published her book, *To Be Useful to the World*, which contained sections and the overall discourse of Camp Followers, but it also included the various other women on the homefront and in the political sphere as well.¹⁸ Moreover, Carol Berkin's book, like Gundersen's, held a broader perspective to the women of the war, and in addition to the chapter on spies, it contained a chapter dedicated solely to Camp Followers, as well as many brief narratives of various women involved in the war.¹⁹ Kowalski's 2005 article, mentioned earlier, also featured a very brief section on Camp Followers without providing any great detail to specific women or their deeds.²⁰ Six years later, Dona M. McDermott wrote a magazine article about the Camp Followers at Valley Forge. Again, this article contained more contextual information than individual narratives. While McDermott does name some of the individuals in the group of Camp Followers under Martha Washington, the content is mostly an overview of Valley Forge and the collective efforts of the women.²¹ While these texts do not primarily focus on the individual women and their stories, most, at the very least, discuss the most famous woman that served as a Camp Follower, nurse, and soldier—Mary Ludwig Hays McCauley, or “Molly Pitcher.”

Twentieth century historians often emphasized Molly Pitcher as the most remembered and the most prominent woman, in a combat zone, during the American Revolution. In 1905, for instance, Pauline Carrington Bouvé published her book, *American Heroes and Heroines*, which contained one chapter on Revolutionary War women. This lone chapter centered on Molly Pitcher.²² Seventy years later, Molly Pitcher was still a prevalent representative of Camp Followers, but she also gained fame as a Revolutionary War nurse. Ida Cohen Selavan's article, “Nurses in

¹⁸ Joan R. Gundersen, *To Be Useful To the World: Women in Revolutionary America, 1740-1790* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996).

¹⁹ Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers*, Loc. 880-1134.

²⁰ Kowalski, “Women Warriors,” 24-27.

²¹ Dona M. McDermott, “Remembering the Ladies,” *Cobblestone* 34, no. 8 (October 2013): 26-27.

²² Pauline Carrington Bouvé, *American Heroes and Heroines* (Boston: Lothrop Publishing Company, 1905), 120-128.

American History: The Revolution,” focused on Molly Pitcher as the most prominent nurse of the war.²³ In 1999, reflecting the solidified interest and acceptance of the New History Movement’s inclusion of women in the historical narrative, the Library of Congress published a calendar of historical “Women in Military Service.” The calendar told the stories of interesting women throughout history, such as Molly Pitcher and Isabelle “Belle” Boyd.²⁴ In 2005, however, Berkin argued that “Molly Pitcher” was fictional, in that, this name was given to many women that performed the task of cooling off the cannons; regardless, Molly Pitcher, “like Rosie the Riveter of World War II,” became legendary more as an icon than an actual person.²⁵ Nevertheless, Molly’s legacy has held consistent interest among historians.

Not only historians, however, discussed Molly Pitcher as one of the most prominent Camp Followers, nurses, or soldiers of the war, several states and cities, as well as the United States military and government, honored her service by granting her a soldier’s pay, and later, by erecting monuments, naming establishments and streets after her, and hosting events in her honor. In Molly’s lifetime, the General Assembly of Pennsylvania honored her contributions in 1822 by granting her “a lifetime soldier’s half-pay pension,” in an “act for the relief of Molly M’Kolly,” a total amount of forty dollars; after Molly’s death, in 1876, and later, in 1916, Pennsylvania erected monuments at her gravesite in Carlisle.²⁶ During World War II, the military named a “Liberty Ship” in her honor, the *SS Molly Pitcher*, which was launched and destroyed in 1943.²⁷ In 1978, the bicentennial of the Battle of Monmouth, the United States Postal Service issued a ten-cent postcard, “Molly Pitcher, Monmouth, 1778,” depicting the scene of Molly loading a cannon in commemoration of her heroism

²³ Ida Cohen Selavan, “Nurses in American History: The Revolution,” *The American Journal of Nursing* 75, no. 4 (1975): 592-594.

²⁴ United States, Library of Congress, *Women in Military Service* (Patrick AFB, FL: Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute, 1998), <https://www.loc.gov/r/r/frd/Heritage-Calendar/pdf-files/1999.pdf>, 20, 10. Isabelle “Belle” Boyd was a Confederate spy in the Civil War.

²⁵ Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers*, Loc. 66.

²⁶ United States, Library of Congress, *Women in Military Service*, 20.

²⁷ Linda Grant De Pauw, *In Search of Molly Pitcher* (Pasadena: Peacock Press of Pasadena, 2007), 57.

in battle.²⁸ “Captain Molly’s” memory, however, is still alive, as current-day establishments and infrastructure host her name. The U.S. government, for instance, hosts an annual event at Fort Bragg, “Molly Pitcher Day,” devoted to the heroine. Moreover, the states also do their part in memorializing Molly, as Pennsylvania named part of its Route 11 freeway, “Molly Pitcher Highway,” and New Jersey hosts the “Molly Pitcher Inn” in Red Bank.²⁹ Certainly, Molly is the most remembered heroine of the Revolutionary period.

The Women and Their Stories: Camp Followers

The term, Camp Follower, represented any women, and often their children, who followed the army to be near their husbands and fathers. Like other women actively involved on the battlefields, these women generally washed laundry, cooked meals, wove cloth and made clothing for themselves and the soldiers, and aided in the hospitals as nurses and matrons.³⁰ The more specialized tasks for women involved making musket balls and pellets, and making hospital supplies.³¹ These women served as nurses regularly or simply when needed, and therefore, due to the informality of the eighteenth century medical field, the titles “Camp Followers” and “Nurses” frequently represented the same women and their comprehensive tasks.³² Women of both the American and British ranks participated in these endeavors.

²⁸ David Blossom, “Molly Pitcher, Monmouth, 1778, UX77,” *United States Postal Service*, 1978, Postcard; also found on “United States Postal Cards,” *Webcitations.org*, accessed March 5, 2016, <http://www.webcitation.org/query?url=http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Crete/9404/post5.html&date=2009-10-25+05:55:25>.

²⁹ For information regarding these establishments, see the websites for the Fort Bragg Press Center and the Molly Pitcher Inn: <http://www.fortbraggpresscenter.com/go/doc/5287/1955838/Molly-Pitcher-Day-Celebration-set-for-November-16>, accessed February 21, 2016; and <http://themollypitcher.com/>, accessed February 21, 2016.

³⁰ Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers*, Loc. 880-1134; Blumenthal, *Women Camp Followers of the American Revolution*, 57; and others.

³¹ Blumenthal, *Women Camp Followers of the American Revolution*, 57.

³² Selavan, “Nurses in American History,” 592-594.

In addition to the tasks that Camp Followers often did to earn rations and to do their part to alleviate the soldiers' suffering, these women also suffered the same privations as the military. These women and their families often suffered a lack of supplies, contagious and deadly diseases, such as cholera, tuberculosis, pneumonia, typhus, smallpox, rheumatism, and dysentery, and food shortages that caused malnutrition, which exacerbated the susceptibility to illness.³³ Partly due to the adversities of camp life, as well as the necessity to maintain affairs at home, women and their children often could not bear this suffering year-round; therefore, most Camp Followers, and especially the wives of officers, participated only part-time—they stayed at home during the fighting season and traveled with the camps in the winter months when conditions proved too harsh to fight.³⁴

During the war, many considered Camp Followers burdens and did not welcome their presence. George Washington issued an order on August 4, 1777, prohibiting the allowance of the Camp Followers who were not absolutely necessary to the camp:

The multitude of women in particular, especially those who are pregnant, or have children, are a clog upon every movement. The Commander in Chief therefore earnestly recommends it to the officers commanding brigades and corps, to use every reasonable method in their power to get rid of all such as are not absolutely necessary; and the admission or continuance of any, who shall, or may have come to the army since its arrival in Pennsylvania, is positively forbidden.³⁵

While Camp Followers proved necessary for their contributions, their companionship, and their efforts to the camps, the added mouths to feed depleted the already scarce food supplies, and therefore, the government and some of the military viewed these women as burdens. To the soldiers tended to in the hospitals, fed by the cooks, or provided clean clothing, however, the Camp Followers rendered not burdens but welcomed women to comfort

³³ Gundersen, *To Be Useful to the World*, 159; and Selavan, "Nurses in American History," 593.

³⁴ McDermott, "Remembering the Ladies," 26-27.

³⁵ Blumenthal, *Women Camp Followers of the American Revolution*, 64-65.

them in times of need. Welcomed or not, these women came and left with the seasons and contributed what they could.

Due to various factors, such as literacy rates and a lack of time, the narratives that emerged for these women typically involved officer's wives – the stories of the average soldier's wife/Camp Follower proved a rarity. Nonetheless, while the conditions for an officer's wife may not have been as harsh as it was for the family of an average soldier, their accounts still contribute to the historical narrative of women in combat zones.

The following narratives reflect the experiences of the various women involved in the war effort as Camp Followers. Many of these women, regardless of status, contributed by laboring in the same tasks they would have done at home according to eighteenth century gender roles. Despite the ubiquity of their tasks, their experiences suggest the conflicted loyalties of some, the hardships of others, and the prevailing desire to assist their country in its time of need.

Lucy Knox (1756-1824) was a rebel from the start. She was born into a wealthy and prominent Loyalist family, as her father was the Provincial Governor of Massachusetts. In 1774, however, she married the handsome American colonist and bookstore owner, Henry Knox, despite her parents' reluctance and protests.³⁶ As the wife of General Henry Knox, Lucy served as a Camp Follower when her health allowed. Lucy's unsteady health could have also been a cause for the only trial in the Knox's marriage—the death at infancy for ten of their thirteen children.³⁷

Lucy's persistence to experience the adversities of military camp life never ceased after Henry's enlistment into the American army. After the British seized Boston, legend states that as the couple fled the city, "she concealed the sword he wore through the war, by having it quilted within the lining of her cloak."³⁸ During the war and their time in the ranks, Lucy proved a morale booster for the soldiers, as her cheerfulness improved the spirits of the war-

³⁶ "Henry Knox / The Man / Miss Lucy Flucker," *The Knox Museum*, accessed February 21, 2016, <http://www.knoxmuseum.org/henry-knox/the-man/miss-lucyflucker/>.

³⁷ "Lucy Knox," *AmericanRevolution.org*, accessed February 21, 2016, <http://www.americanrevolution.org/women/women7.php>; and "Henry Knox / The Man / Miss Lucy Flucker," *The Knox Museum*, accessed February 21, 2016, <http://www.knoxmuseum.org/henry-knox/the-man/misslucyflucker/>.

³⁸ "Lucy Knox," *AmericanRevolution.org*, accessed February 21, 2016, <http://www.americanrevolution.org/women/women7.php>.

weary and homesick troops. She also served as a silencing agent for the griping soldiers, as it was said that the “soldiers could not murmur at privations which she endured without complaint.”³⁹ While there is little information available as to what specific roles Lucy played as a Camp Follower, one thing is common in most of the accounts, that the soldiers loved her and her presence in the camps.

Catherine Greene (1755-1814) was a young woman during the war. Her aunt and uncle raised her in a middle class household, and she married Nathanael Greene in 1774 at the age of nineteen – just one year before the Revolution began. Catherine was a part-time Camp Follower and an impromptu nurse. She resided in Rhode Island during the active campaigns, but she joined her husband at the winter quarters in the off-seasons. Catherine suffered during the winter at Valley Forge, and after 1781, she relocated to the South with her husband and endured the blistering heat and humidity for the remainder of the war.⁴⁰

Hardships, however, did not always halt for her while away from the camps. The attack on Rhode Island demonstrated how fearfully close the battle could reach, as she was present to witness the rumble of the cannon blasts. At one point, Catherine converted her home into a hospital to provide a location for medical staff to inoculate an army against smallpox, at which time she acted as a nurse and tended to the soldiers. At the war’s end, the state of Georgia presented her husband with a plantation in Mulberry, where she and her family remained for some time.⁴¹ Indeed, Catherine Greene truly represented a Camp Follower.

Mary Ludwig Hays McCauley (1754-1832), better known as “Molly Pitcher,”⁴² was born into a poor family of German ancestry in New Jersey. She worked as a servant throughout most of her childhood and adolescence to contribute to the family finances. Her patriotic father, undoubtedly, instilled in the young red-haired “Molly” her devotion to her country, as she demonstrated later in life on the battlefields of the Revolutionary

³⁹ Ellet, *The Women of the American Revolution*, 1:108.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:62-67.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Molly brought water to the soldiers and the cannons on the battlefields in a “pitcher,” rather than a pail, and hence the name “Molly Pitcher.” Bouvé, *American Heroines and Heroines*, 125.

War.⁴³ Prior to the war, Molly freed herself from servitude and married a barber by the name of John Casper Hays. Hays soon joined the army, and he served in the Patriots' First Pennsylvania Artillery with Molly by his side.⁴⁴

Despite Molly's contributions as a Camp Follower, and her previous acts of devotion and bravery, she is best known for her efforts at the Battle of Monmouth, which occurred in the heat of summer in June 1778.⁴⁵ In this battle, like most other battles, Molly's husband loaded the cannon alternatively with his partner who fired it. On June 28, 1778, however, her husband collapsed, and she began loading the cannon, which stood as the origins of the famous image of Molly Pitcher loading the cannon.⁴⁶ As the other gunner, Hays's partner firing the cannon, also fell wounded, Molly assumed firing and loading the cannon herself for the remainder of the battle.⁴⁷

Molly's bravery at the Battle of Monmouth received recognition in the pension given to her by the General Assembly of Pennsylvania, and in the many monuments, establishments, artwork, and plaques in Molly's name. Molly, nicknamed "Sergeant Molly" after the battle, worked as a nurse, and later, she opened and kept a small store.⁴⁸ Molly, indeed, left her mark on history. Interestingly, Molly is known as a Camp Follower and a nurse to historians, but for the public, she is not remembered for her "Camp Following," her nursing, nor her business, she is remembered as an impromptu soldier.

⁴³ "Molly" was a common nickname for "Mary" during the Revolutionary period.

⁴⁴ Bouvé, *American Heroes and Heroines*, 120-123.

⁴⁵ Molly is also known for urgently retrieving a fallen match and lighting a cannon in a battle that occurred months before Monmouth. See Bouvé, *American Heroes and Heroines*, 122-123.

⁴⁶ Interestingly, in Bouvé's account, as well as the majority of other accounts, Molly's husband fell due to a mortal wound, yet in the calendar published by the U.S. Library of Congress, John Casper Hays apparently "collapsed from the heat." See Bouvé, *American Heroes and Heroines*, 125; and United States, Library of Congress, *Women in Military Service*, 20.

⁴⁷ Bouvé, *American Heroes and Heroines*, 125-128; and United States, Library of Congress, *Women in Military Service*, 20.

⁴⁸ Bouvé, *American Heroes and Heroines*, 127.

Female Soldiers

Female soldiers, as they are currently thought of, occurred rarely, as most women were discovered upon their attempted entrance into the ranks, but some slipped through undetected for some time. A few women served in the army disguised as men for several years, such as Deborah Sampson or Sally St. Clair, who served in the army for years and whose gender was not discovered until her death.⁴⁹ Some women had less success; these women still disguised themselves as men, like Anne Smith attempting to enlist in the Continental ranks under the name Samuel Smith, and Ann Bailey, who tried to join under the alias Samuel Gay to collect the enlistee's bounty, but the army discovered their gender and denied their entrance.⁵⁰ Mostly, however, the female soldiers during the Revolutionary War served more as incidental soldiers; that is, women acting as soldiers when circumstances necessitated their involvement. Some women initially participated as Camp Followers, but joined their husbands on the battlefields to lend their assistance. These women worked for their rations, "held regular support positions," and "were subject to military law."⁵¹ Due to this informal service, it is not clear how many women actually served in the army, nor is it clear how many women acted as incidental soldiers throughout the war. Of all of these brave women, however, some narratives have surfaced.

Prudence Cummings Wright's recognition as a soldier was not due to formally joining the military, but because she organized a militia of women. Prudence organized a militia of thirty to forty wives, called "Mrs. David Wright's Guard" at the time but later acquired the name "Leonard Whiting's Guard," to defend their home of Pepperell, Massachusetts while their husbands were away fighting at the Battles of Concord and Lexington.⁵² These women

⁴⁹ Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers*, Loc. 1051.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, Loc. 1041; and Kowalski, "Women Warriors," 24-27.

⁵¹ Gundersen, *To Be Useful to the World*, 165.

⁵² "Prudence Cummings Wright, Patriot Militia Commander, Captures 2 Spies," *New England Historical Society*, accessed February 21, 2016, <http://www.newenglandhistoricalsociety.com/prudence-cummings-wright-patriot-militia-commander-captures-2-spies/>; Gundersen, *To Be Useful to the World*, 164; and Rebecca Beatrice Brooks, "Prudence Cummings Wright & Leonard Whiting's Guard," *History of Massachusetts*, May 13, 2013, accessed March 2, 2016, <http://historyofmassachusetts.org/prudence-cummings-wright-leonard-whittings-guard/>.

guarded the Jewett's Bridge as soldiers, as they donned their husbands' clothing. The women, "armed with muskets, pitchforks, and such other weapons as they could find," captured two men they thought were spies for the British.⁵³ Supposedly, one of the men captured happen to be Leonard Whiting, a Tory Officer who was trying to carry intelligence to the British Army. There is even an 1899 poem celebrating her endeavors:

The women over field and farm
Kept faithful watch and ward;
Shielded the town from ev'ry harm,
Nor thought their duty hard.
They guarded bridge and forest wood –
These women fair and slight;
And for the right they ever stood,
At morning, noon and night.
The story of their gallant feat
Flew swift o'er hill and dell;
And "Reg'lars" then, cared not to meet
Prudence of Pepperell.
Their country's honor, in an hour
Most serious and grave,
Was thus upheld with grace and power,
By women true and brave.
And on the scroll where heroes' names
Appear in shining light;
With names our country proudly claims,
Gleams that of Prudence Wright.⁵⁴

This poem, written only a few years after the World's Colombian Exposition in Chicago (1893), illustrates the rise in nationalism at the turn of the century and how that generation remembered the "Revolutionary Heroines." Certainly, Prudence Wright and her guard deserve the same recognition as any other woman that took on a "man's work" and stood to defend their homes.

Sisters Grace and Rachel Martin were also incidental soldiers in their husbands' absence. While there is little

⁵³ Butler, *History of the Town of Groton*, 336.

⁵⁴ Susan H. Wixon, "Prudence Wright," *The American Monthly Magazine*, November 1899, 547-549. This quote is just a few stanzas of the three-page poem.

information available about these sisters, one story pervades in the memory of their service. Much like that of Prudence Wright, they donned their husbands clothing and became incidental soldiers in an operation to intercept valuable information traveling to the British lines. While they did not form a women's militia, Grace and Rachel set out on their own, pistols in hand, and posted at an intersection as soldiers to capture British intelligence. As the messenger and his guards approached the women, the Martins seized their papers and fled on horseback through the woods to an American post to deliver the information. Oddly enough, this is partly an account provided by the British messengers the sisters intercepted.⁵⁵

Martha Bratton, the wife of Patriot Colonel William Bratton, precisely fits the category of the incidental soldier. Little of Martha's early life before the war is readily available, but her heroism when faced with the British army proved notable. Martha was tasked to look after a secret American gunpowder supply at their home in North Carolina while her husband fought in General Sumter's army away from home, and when she heard that the British were approaching to seize the supply, she acted as a soldier would. Rather than allowing the Loyalists to seize the ammunition, Martha blew up the supply by leaving a trail of gunpowder from the supplies to where she stood some distance away; as the Loyalist troops approached, Martha lit the gunpowder trail.⁵⁶ Martha's most notable phrase in historical memory was her reply to the Loyalist officer who irately inquired who destroyed the supply. Martha said "It was I who did it...Let the consequence be what it will, I glory in having prevented the mischief contemplated by the cruel enemies of my country."⁵⁷

Later in 1780, she had another experience as an incidental soldier, but this time Martha did not blow up a gunpowder supply. Instead, she nobly refused to give away her husband's position to the Loyalist Captain Christian Huck. Martha is known for yet another phrase; as the captain suggested that her husband join the

⁵⁵ Kowalski, "Women Warrior," 24-27; and "Elizabeth, Grace, and Rachel Martin," *AmericanRevolution.org*, accessed February 21, 2016, <http://www.americanrevolution.org/women/women24.php>.

⁵⁶ Ellet, *The Women of the American Revolution*, 1:247.

⁵⁷ "Martha Bratton (? – 1816)," *National Women's History Museum*, accessed February 21, 2016, <https://www.nwhm.org/education-resources/biography/biographies/martha-bratton/>; Ellet, *The Women of the American Revolution*, 1:247; and Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers*, Loc. 2302.

Loyalist ranks, she said that she “would rather see him remain true to his duty to his country, even if he perished in Sumter’s army.”⁵⁸ Martha stayed silent even as a soldier held a reaping hook to her throat, threatening her life and that of her son. At which time, a kind soldier pleaded with the Captain to spare her life. The Brattons’ lives were spared, but the captain then ordered Martha to feed his troops. She did so without protest. Later, when the British left her home, she sent word of the enemy’s presence to her husband, who was nearby. The Patriot troops surprised the Loyalists and achieved victory, as the Patriots sent the British running. Martha then converted her home into a makeshift hospital to care for both the wounded Americans and the British prisoners. One of these prisoners was the kind soldier that saved Martha’s life earlier. To demonstrate her gratitude for the soldier’s deeds, she pleaded with her husband and his troops not to execute the soldier, but to keep him alive and exchange him as a prisoner.⁵⁹ Ultimately, this conflict with Captain Huck encouraged other Americans to join the Patriot ranks. Consequently, South Carolina named a city, Brattonsville, in honor of the brave Bratton family.⁶⁰ Martha Bratton conducted herself as a soldier as circumstances necessitated—in sacrificing supplies to keep them out of enemy hands, in refusing to divulge any information of the Patriots considered useful to the Loyalists, and in upholding the honor of a soldier by repaying the soldier that had saved her life.

Margaret Corbin (1751-1800), like Molly Pitcher, was a Camp Follower. Margaret cooked and did laundry for the ranks, and when her husband and the troops needed her assistance, she acted as a soldier. As a child, Margaret lost both of her parents to an attack by Native Americans; her father was killed and her mother was taken captive, never to be seen again. Her uncle adopted and raised her, and at the age of twenty-one, Margaret married John Corbin, and both joined the Patriot militia three years later.⁶¹

⁵⁸ “Martha Bratton (? – 1816),” *National Women’s History Museum*, accessed February 21, 2016, <https://www.nwhm.org/education-resources/biography/biographies/martha-bratton/>.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ “Brattonsville, South Carolina 221,” *Revolutionary Day*, accessed February 21, 2016, <http://revolutionaryday.com/usroute221/brattonsville/default.htm>.

⁶¹ “Margaret Cochran Corbin (1751-1800),” *National Women’s History Museum*, accessed February 21, 2016, <https://www.nwhm.org/education-resources/>

In November of 1776, at the Battle of Fort Washington, Margaret replaced her husband loading the cannon, as his partner fell from his wounds and John assumed firing. After John too fell fatally wounded, Margaret continued firing for the duration of the battle. In fact, Margaret's cannon was the last to cease firing despite the wounds she received during the battle. When the battle ended, the soldiers discovered the physical representations of her sacrifice. Margaret's wounds consisted of four gunshots—three times with musket balls and once with “grapeshot.”⁶² She nearly lost her left arm, and she suffered extensive injury to her jaw and chest. Her arm was so badly damaged that it remained unusable for the remainder of her life.⁶³

After the battle, on June 26, 1776, the state of Pennsylvania awarded Margaret with thirty dollars for her bravery and her sacrifice. Three years later, the Continental Congress granted Margaret half of a soldier's lifelong pension. At one point, Margaret joined the Invalid Regiment of the Continental Army. Despite all of her heroic endeavors and sacrifices, Margaret has only three plaques near the Fort Washington battlefield, she has no monument, and she was not properly buried with military honors until 1926 after she was exhumed and identified by her wounds. Moreover, according to America's National Women's History Museum, Margaret was the “first woman to receive a pension,” and she was the only “Revolutionary War veteran” granted a reburial with West Point's full military honors.⁶⁴ Certainly, Margaret Corbin deserves recognition and celebration in the memory of the Revolutionary War, as her patriotism, her dauntless participation and her physical sacrifices were that of a soldier.

biography/biographies/margaret-cochran-corbin/; and Gundersen, *To Be Useful to the World*, 165.

⁶² The “Grapeshot” of the Revolutionary period was much like the average ammunition of the modern shotgun—not a solid, one-piece bullet, but a bag of small metal fragments resembling a bunch of grapes, which sprayed these fragments at the target when fired.

⁶³ “Margaret Cochran Corbin (1751-1800),” *National Women's History Museum*, accessed February 21, 2016, <https://www.nwhm.org/education-resources/biography/biographies/margaret-cochran-corbin/>; and Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers*, Loc. 2217.

⁶⁴ “Margaret Cochran Corbin (1751-1800),” *National Women's History Museum*, accessed February 21, 2016, <https://www.nwhm.org/education-resources/biography/biographies/margaret-cochran-corbin/>.

Indeed, it seems the federal government has honored her, but the public remains unaware of her courage.

Deborah Gannett Sampson's (1760-1827) narrative is one of the most famous and the most unambiguous story of all of the women in combat zones during the Revolution, namely because Deborah Sampson wrote her own biography after her military service.⁶⁵ Still, only select portions of her life and her time in service are mentioned sparingly, as she is mostly mentioned in passing as the woman who joined and fought in the army as a man. Deborah has rightfully secured her place in the history books as a prominent woman in the American Revolution, and hence, it is necessary to tell her story here.

A twenty-one-year-old Deborah Gannett Sampson wanted to join the army to fight in the defense of her country. When the army denied her, Deborah dressed in men's attire, groomed herself to look as a man, and in 1781, she joined the Fourth Massachusetts Regiment under her brother's name, Robert Shurtleff.⁶⁶ Deborah served in many battles, including the engagement at Yorktown, and she essentially experienced everything a male soldier did for the years she was in the military's service, including being wounded in battle.⁶⁷

Deborah experienced two wounds and an illness in her time of active service. Deborah's wounds would not lead to her discovery, as she cared for her own leg after being shot with a musket ball, and somehow, the medics treated a gunshot wound to her shoulder, but she stayed undetected. Not until her illness did her gender come to light. Deborah once fell ill with a fever and was taken to the hospital. During her treatment, the doctors discovered she was a woman. The army honorably discharged

⁶⁵ Gundersen, *To Be Useful to the World*, 165.

⁶⁶ The exact spelling of the last name of Deborah's alias is not clear, as it has been spelled differently by various authors: "Shurtlef" by Gundersen, *To Be Useful to the World*, 165; "Shurtleff" by Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers*, Loc. 1051, and Kowalski, "Women Warriors," 24-27; "Shurtlieff" by "An American Joan of Arc," *Cincinnati Daily Press* (Cincinnati, OH), March 23, 1860; "Shutleff" and "Shirtliff" by Cynthia J. Davis and Kathryn West, *Women Writers in the United States: A Timeline of Literary, Cultural, and Social History* (Cary: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1996), ProQuest ebrary, 28-29; and "Shirtliffe" by "A Female in the Revolutionary Army," *The Smoke Hill and Republican Union* (Junction City, KS), July 3, 1862.

⁶⁷ Gundersen, *To Be Useful to the World*, 165; and "An American Joan of Arc," *Cincinnati Daily Press* (Cincinnati, OH), March 23, 1860.

Deborah in 1783, and the state of Massachusetts paid her a soldier's pension. Some of Deborah's fame as a female soldier undoubtedly stemmed from the honor bestowed upon her from the state, but some of her fame resulted from her biography as well. Nonetheless, the memory of Deborah Sampson is one of the most widespread among the women of the American Revolution.⁶⁸

Female Spies

Women spies were often not labeled as spies, nor were they typically contracted as such. Instead, women frequently found themselves acting as impromptu spies when needed. Similar to Anna Strong's signal to the Patriots in the *Turn: Washington's Spies* series, many of these women have comparable narratives. Often, these female spies risked their lives and their livelihoods to demonstrate their patriotism by acquiring information from behind the British lines to aid the rebels. Like Anna Strong, many of these women remain absent in the popular memory of the women vital to the Continental army's intelligence.

Patience Lovell Wright (1725-1786), not to be confused with Prudence Wright, is probably best known for her work as a sculptor. While pregnant with her fifth child, Patience's husband died, leaving her no way to take care of herself, nor their children. Consequently, Patience began selling her sculptures to provide for her family, and due to her remarkable talent, she quickly became a notable sculptor. Her sculpting also provided her a means to aid the Patriots as a spy.⁶⁹

While Patience resided in England, she sculpted portraits of her clients and other individuals. Sculptures require an extensive amount of time, so Patience conversed with her prominent British clients as she worked. As she completed the sculptures, Patience would hide the notes of the information she had acquired within the sculptures' cores. Therefore, these wax sculptures served as vessels containing valuable information about the British, which

⁶⁸ Kowalski, "Women Warriors," 24-27; Gundersen, *To Be Useful to the World*, 165; and Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers*, Loc. 1051.

⁶⁹ "Patience Lovel Wright," *Bordentown Historical Society*, accessed February 21, 2016, http://bordentownhistory.org/Current_Exhibits/PatienceWright/index.html.

Patience sent to America.⁷⁰ Perhaps, Patience Wright risked more than the women residing in America, as they simply had the colonizers to answer to, whereas Patience lived in the mother country, surrounded solely by the enemy. Thus, it is a mystery as to why she is often neglected in the memory of the Revolutionary War.

Laodicea “Dicey” Langston (1766-1837) at a young age proved herself valuable to the Patriots as a spy. Dicey lived in Laurens District, South Carolina surrounded by loyalists. Dicey easily mingled with loyalists, some of which were even members of her own family, to get information she could deliver to the American lines. Her fluidity may have been due to her youth, as she was a child when the war began and a teenager at the war’s end, and therefore, the loyalists may not have felt as threatened by a child, and even less by a *female* child. Dicey, ultimately, divulged the information she acquired across the Ennoree River to the Whigs.⁷¹

While little detail as to the specifics of the information she transferred remains, as military journals did not record these details, Dicey was a pivotal part of the Patriot’s intelligence network. She proved herself a staunch patriot and she never betrayed the Patriots despite Tory threats. In one account, as a Tory officer held a pistol to her chest, she still refused to betray her country and relinquish information about the Americans. Young Dicey’s loyalty to the American cause was astounding, and many Patriots were “indebted [to her] for important information.”⁷² Therefore, despite most writings not including her story in the memory of the war, young Dicey Langston served her country in the only way she could, as a spy.

Emily Geiger (1765-1825), just one year older than Dicey Langston, was yet another young woman that risked her life to alert the Patriots of British movement and plans, as she served as an American courier for General Nathanael Greene, Catherine Greene’s husband. In 1781, General Greene needed a courier to deliver a message to General Thomas Sumter some distance away. As young Emily volunteered, General Greene reluctantly agreed to send her. She mounted her horse, rode like a *lady*, side-saddled, part of the way there and decided to seek shelter for the night at a

⁷⁰ Graf, “From Eavesdroppers to Secret Agents,” 29-30.

⁷¹ Ellet, *The Women of the American Revolution*, 1:284-285.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 1:285, 284-291.

farmer's house. Upon realizing the farmer's loyalties to the British, and their disclosure of her presence to some Tory soldiers, Emily fled once more on her horse only to be detained by Tory scouts en route to General Sumter. To destroy the evidence of the message, Emily ripped the note into tiny pieces and ate them – luckily, General Greene had also given her the order verbally in case of such a circumstance.⁷³ Emily told the scouts' commanding officer that she was traveling to her Uncle's house, and when the officers found no trace of foul play, they apologized, released her, and even provided an escort to her destination. Upon reaching her Uncle's house, and the Tory escort's departure, Emily once more mounted her horse and rode to General Sumter where she delivered the message to join General Greene in an attack on the British. To Emily's satisfaction, she promptly witnessed General Sumter and his army riding to meet General Greene for the attack. Emily was an impromptu spy for the Patriots, but her courage and her patriotism knew no bounds for this mission. While Emily is included more than most in the memory of the women in the war, her story is still not as prevalent as say that of Lydia Darragh.⁷⁴

Lydia Darragh⁷⁵ (1729-1789) was a Quaker living in Pennsylvania during the war. Because the Darraghs were Quakers, the British made the mistake of assuming that they remained neutral in the war. On the contrary, Lydia had a son who served in General George Washington's Army. Having a son in the Patriot army would generally be reason enough to spy on the enemy, but Lydia had one more advantage—her location. Lydia resided on Second Street in Philadelphia, and across the street from her large home stood a building that served as the headquarters for the British army in Pennsylvania. Due to her location, the British

⁷³ Interestingly, Carol Berkin and Kathleen Maher's accounts state that General Greene had given Emily Geiger the message both as a physical note and a verbal message *before* she left on her travels, but Christine Graf's account does not mention a verbal order, and instead, states that Emily memorized the note before destroying it and eating it. Berkin and Maher imply Emily was illiterate like most colonists, but Graf specifically tells of Emily's literacy. It is not clear which story is true, but it is interesting nonetheless. Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers*, Loc. 2317; Maher, *Constitution Daily* (blog), April 1, 2011; and Graf, "From Eavesdroppers to Secret Agents," 29-30.

⁷⁴ Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers*, Loc. 2298-2317.

⁷⁵ The spelling of "Darragh" varies significantly, and without pattern in regards to eras, authors, or accounts. The typical spellings of Lydia's last name are Darragh, Darrah, and Darracht.

officers frequently held meetings at Lydia's house, forcing her to cook for and host the British officers and soldiers. During these meetings and other discussions, Lydia gained information. This information was written in shorthand by her husband, placed into "wooden button molds," covered with cloth, and sewn into the coat of the Darragh's younger son.⁷⁶ The teenage boy would then pass through the British and American lines to provide his older brother, Lieutenant Charles Darragh, with the message, as he could decode his father's shorthand and relay the message to Washington. This intricate system of passing information was undoubtedly noteworthy, but this system was just half of the story for which Lydia remains known.⁷⁷

Lydia was also known for her own endeavor in passing through the British lines. In December of 1777, Lydia gathered information from another Tory meeting in her home of a planned surprise attack on Washington's army at White Marsh – the same location as her son's post at the time. Lydia, then, told her husband she would go into town for flour in Frankford, at which time she made contact with a Patriot "feeler," or a member of the spy network who waits and *feels* around town for information regarding the enemy.⁷⁸ Upon informing this "feeler," most likely Captain Charles Craig, of the sensitive information, the captain immediately served Washington with this information. Ultimately, the Tory's *surprise* attack failed, as Washington reinforced his army in preparation. Lydia's actions in both relaying secret messages in buttons and risking her life to protect the thousands of soldiers at White Marsh, including her own son, equate to that of an impromptu spy.⁷⁹

Tory Women

The Tory women that participated in the war as Camp Followers, nurses, soldiers, and spies were strikingly similar to their Patriot

⁷⁶ Bakeless, *Spies of the Revolution*, 152.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 150-152; and Halverson, "Dangerous Patriots," 143.

⁷⁸ Bakeless, *Spies of the Revolution*, 156; and Ellet, *The Women of the American Revolution*, 1:174-175.

⁷⁹ Bakeless, *Spies of the Revolution*, 152-162; Graf, "From Eavesdroppers to Secret Agents," 29-30; and Ellet, *The Women of the American Revolution*, 1:171-177.

counterparts. As Camp Followers, Loyalist women washed clothes, cooked meals, crafted and gathered supplies, tended to the sick and wounded, worked for their rations, and experienced the adversities of military camp life. Tory women also acted as impromptu nurses and spies like Patriot women.

As far as soldiers are concerned, however, British women rarely joined, or attempted to join, the ranks themselves. As British women were not fighting for their *homes* – America was more like a temporary residence than their *homes* in England, these women had little desire or ability to challenge eighteenth century gender roles. Consequently, there were fewer female Tory soldiers, if any, than there were Patriots.

Another difference between Patriot and Loyalist women in combat zones was the greater numbers of Tory Camp Followers. Loyalist Camp Followers greatly outnumbered their American counterparts, as the American attitude towards Camp Followers was far more negative than with the British. Therefore, American women were not always *allowed* to travel with the camps, which equated to greater numbers of Tory Camp Followers.⁸⁰

Lady Harriet Ackland (1750-1815), also spelled “Acland,” the wife of Major Ackland who served in Burgoyne’s army, was a woman of devotion and bravery. Harriet was a Camp Follower, as she traveled to the camps and hospitals whenever her husband fell ill or wounded, but when he was wounded at Hubbardton, she followed the camps consistently thereafter. Though she experienced more luxury than most, as an officer’s wife, she suffered under harsh conditions at certain points during the war. For instance, as the wounded Major Ackland became a prisoner of war, Harriet traveled to the American Camp to suffer the privations of a prisoner alongside her husband. Due to her devotion to her husband, and her courage to endure the adversities of imprisonment, Lady Harriet Ackland’s story captured the hearts of Americans.⁸¹

Regarding female Tory spies, Ann (Anne) Bates (1748-?) is probably the most famous. Ann served as one of General Henry Clinton’s most valuable spies, as she collected the details and the quantities of the weapons and the men of the Patriot army by posing as a peddler under the name “Mrs. Barnes” in the camps. While most Revolutionary era women would not have held a great

⁸⁰ Blumenthal, *Women Camp Followers of the American Revolution*, 60, 64-65.

⁸¹ Ellet, *The Women of the American Revolution*, 1:147-154.

knowledge of weaponry, Ann's husband repaired weaponry before the war, so she was knowledgeable in the subject. Ann's knowledge, and the data she collected, proved so valuable that Major Duncan Drummond, her contact, "stated that her information was 'far superior to every other intelligence.'"⁸² As valuable a spy as Ann Bates was, there is no wonder why her story remains one of the most prominent narratives of Tory spies.⁸³

Conclusion

Ultimately, the question that remains is why are there three prominent women – Molly Pitcher, Lydia Darragh, and Deborah Sampson, remembered by historians, states, the public, and the press, that consistently overshadow others in the American historical memory of the Revolutionary War? Ironically, Molly Pitcher is mostly regarded as a soldier in the public's memory, not a Camp Follower. It seems that the populace remembers Molly Pitcher as the woman manning the cannon, as so many images and stories depict, but historians classify her with Camp Followers and nurses. Interestingly, the stories of Margaret Corbin and Molly Pitcher are practically identical, yet Margaret Corbin is remembered as a soldier and Molly Pitcher is remembered as a Camp Follower or a nurse. Moreover, Margaret Corbin was the "first woman to receive a pension" from the Continental Congress, and she served as the only "Revolutionary War veteran" granted a reburial with West Point's full military honors.⁸⁴ Margaret Corbin, like Molly Pitcher, operated the cannon as her husband fell wounded, and in fact, Margaret suffered worse, and permanent, wounds from her service, which should equate to a greater distinction in commemoration. Unfortunately, it may have been because of Margaret's permanent wounds, and according to many accounts, her consequent drunkenness after, that caused Molly Pitcher's narrative to ultimately overshadow hers.

⁸² Sally Smith Booth, *The Women of '76* (New York: Hastings House, 1973), 253, in Halverson, "Dangerous Patriots," 144.

⁸³ Halverson, "Dangerous Patriots," 144; and Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers*, Loc. 2259.

⁸⁴ "Margaret Cochran Corbin (1751-1800)," *National Women's History Museum*, accessed February 21, 2016, <https://www.nwhm.org/education-resources/biography/biographies/margaret-cochran-corbin/>.

For Deborah Sampson, her narrative dominated the memory of female soldiers due to her financial hardship after her service. Needing a source of income, Deborah told of her experiences as a female soldier in her biography, and she held her book tour to generate revenue. Despite her financial motives, the book and her speeches propelled her story to the forefront, which eclipsed other women's narratives. Ironically, it was Deborah Sampson's patriotism, and not monetary gain like other women, which led to her enlistment in the war, and she suffered throughout the war to keep her story hidden, but financial necessity would make her story famous.

In contrast to Deborah Sampson and Molly Pitcher, in the case of Lydia Darragh, there is no definitive reason as to why her story grew to the fame that it has other than her daughter, Ann, documenting the story as it was told to her.⁸⁵ Truthfully, Lydia's excursion into Frankford was not overtly dangerous or unique; her sewing a message into a button patch was clearly unconventional, but many spies used unconventional methods to transport information; her becoming a spy due to her location was not an abnormal circumstance during the war; and finally, Washington received multiple alerts of the surprise attack, so Lydia did not save the White Marsh camp single-handedly.⁸⁶ Lydia's efforts in the war mirrored many of the women's participation and acts of contribution. Therefore, perhaps one of the only reasons Lydia stood out among the other female spies may have been due to the level of trust that the British had in the family. Because the Darraghs were Quakers, and the British assumed them neutral and expected them not to interfere, the family may have been trusted more than most, which may have equated to more significant information for the Continental Army. There is no definitive reason behind Lydia's fame, but nonetheless, her story overshadowed the rest of the female spies of the Revolutionary War.

Molly Pitcher, Lydia Darragh, and Deborah Sampson are the most prevalent in the memory of Revolutionary War women in combat zones. Ultimately, other women demonstrated equal if not greater acts of courage and contribution than these three. Thus, this compilation of narratives of "Revolutionary Heroines" contributes to the historiography of the brave, yet often ignored, women of the

⁸⁵ Bakeless, *Spies of the Revolution*, 161.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 150-162.

Revolutionary War. Each of the lesser known narratives presented are significant to historical context because they not only provide a broader understanding of the social roles and responsibilities common to the Revolutionary period, they also illustrate what it meant to be an American—man, woman, or child—at a time when the nation was searching for its own identity. These narratives reveal that women, like men, were willing to demonstrate their patriotism by contributing in unconventional ways – even as early as the nation’s founding.

Ultimately, these women suffered alongside their men, they risked their lives to sustain the cause, and some even fought *as* men to repel the enemy. Indeed, women have participated in every American war in some form or another. The calls for women’s participation, however, have not always been fulfilled in the exact parameters requested. Women often demonstrate that they are just as American as men, in that, Americans and women alike typically participate on their own terms, react in an emergency without caution, and when told that something cannot be done, they succeed in spite.

The historiography from the Revolutionary period to the twenty-first century reflects this persistence. Through the activism of the Civil Rights, Women’s Liberation, and New History Movements of the 1960s, authors began filling the void in historical memory with the experiences and the narratives of women and other minorities; prior to these movements, women largely remained absent and ignored. Since the 1960s, however, authors started to gradually incorporate women’s experiences into the broader historical context, and as of the early twenty-first century, the field of women’s studies has propelled to the forefront of historical discussions. Through the persistence of later generations, and the social movements that bolstered change, women have progressed from an almost forgotten peoples in history to one of the most studied topics of the twenty-first century.

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