

American Minute with Bill Federer

Women of the Revolutionary War: "As there were Fathers in our Republic so there were Mothers" - Coolidge

Courageous women have always played a vital role in **American history**.



Addressing the **Daughters of the American**

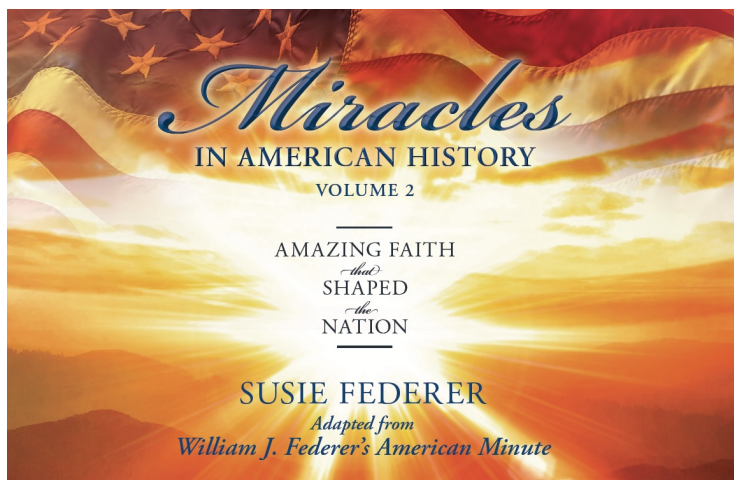
Revolution, April

19, 1926, **President Calvin Coolidge** stated:

"The importance of women in the working out the destiny of mankind ... As there were fathers in our Republic **so there were mothers** ...

By their abiding faith they inspired and encouraged the men; **by their sacrifice** they performed their part in the struggle out of which came our country ..."

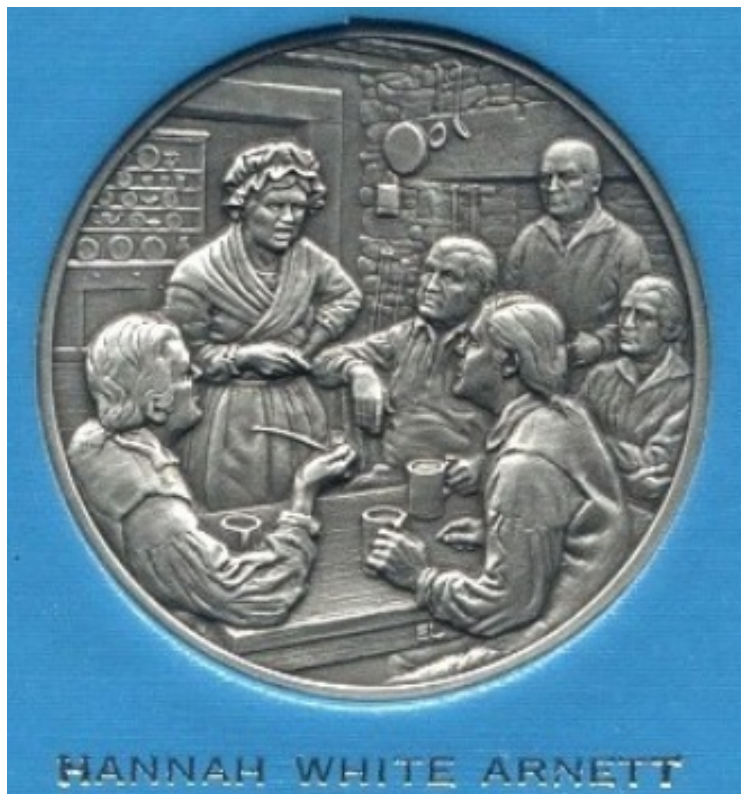
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Coolidge
continued:

"We read of the flaming plea of **Hanna Arnett**, which she made on a dreary day in December, 1776, when Lord Cornwallis, victorious at Fort Lee, held a strategic position in New Jersey.



A group of Revolutionists, weary and discouraged, were discussing the advisability of giving up the struggle ...

... Casting aside the proprieties which forbade a woman to interfere in the counsels of men, **Hannah Arnett** proclaimed her faith.

In eloquent words, which at once shamed and stung to action, she convinced her husband and his companions that **righteousness must win.**"



Women followed the American army to **Valley Forge**,



enduring the freezing 1777.

Over 2,500 soldiers perished from hunger, typhoid, jaundice, dysentery, and pneumonia, but also **an estimated 500 women died there.**

Coolidge continued:

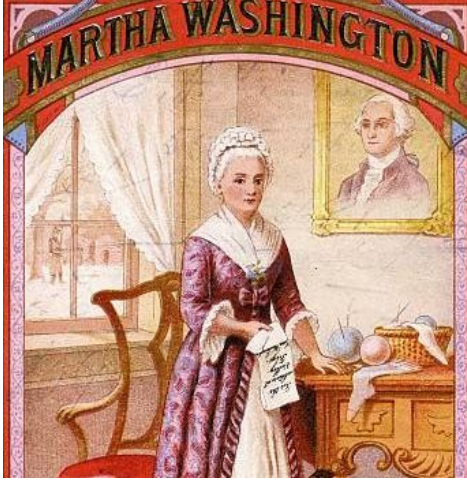
“We have been told of the unselfish devotion of the women who **gave their own warm garments to fashion clothing for the suffering Continental Army during that bitter winter at Valley Forge.** The burdens of the war were not all borne by the men.”

Referred to as "camp followers," these women were organized by **Martha Washington, Lucy Knox**, wife of Colonel Henry Knox, and **Caty Greene**, wife of General Nathanael Greene.



To help the Continental Army, they scavenged for supplies, cooked food, washed clothes, formed sewing circles to knit and mended ragged uniforms and blankets, and cared for sick and dying soldiers.

One of the ladies, Mrs. Westlake, described **Martha**



Washington:

"I never in my life knew a woman so busy from early morning until late at night as was **Lady Washington**, providing comforts for the sick soldiers."

Esther DeBerdt Reed, wife of officer Joseph Reed, and **Sarah Franklin Bache**, daughter of Benjamin Franklin, organized "**The Ladies of Philadelphia**" and raised \$300,000 for General Washington to buy warm clothes for American troops.



During the Revolution, many, like **Lucy Knox**, left their Loyalist British families who sailed for England, never to see them again, in order to join their patriotic American husbands on military assignments in shifting

encampments.

Lucy and Colonel Henry Knox did not have a permanent home till they were married 20 years.

President Calvin Coolidge continued:

"Who has not heard of **Molly Pitcher**, whose heroic services at the **Battle of Monmouth** helped the sorely tried army of **George Washington!**"



Molly Pitcher is generally believed to be **Mary Ludwig Hays**. When her husband enlisted, she became one of the "camp followers."

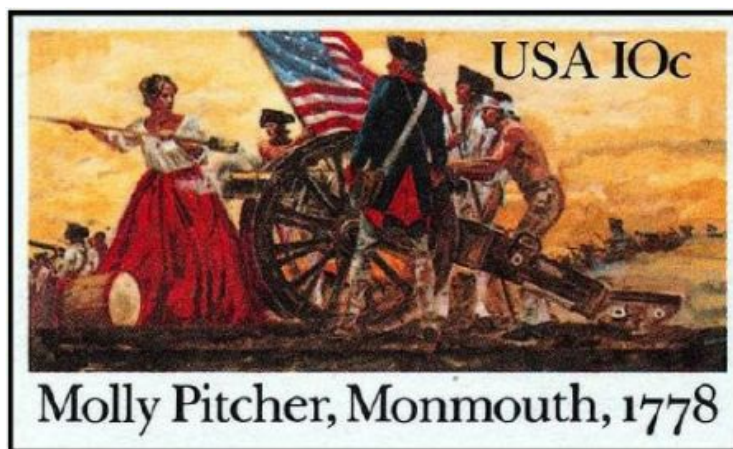
During the intense heat of the battles, these women would go from trench to trench, carrying pitchers of water to the parched soldiers.

Women also carried a continuous supply of water to those loading the cannons.

Water was needed to cool and clean the hot barrels of the cannons between shots, using a soaked end of a long ramrod.



If this was not done, the cannons would soon overheat and become useless.



At the **Battle of Monmouth**, June 28, 1778, **Molly Pitcher** was bringing water to soldiers, while her husband manned one of the cannons.

When her husband collapsed from heat stroke, **Molly** took his place swabbing and loading the cannon for the rest of the battle.

A British cannonball flew between her legs, tearing off part of her skirt. **Molly** straightened up and uttered, "Well, that could have been worse," and

resumed loading the cannon.



Soldier Joseph Plumb Martin described:

"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.

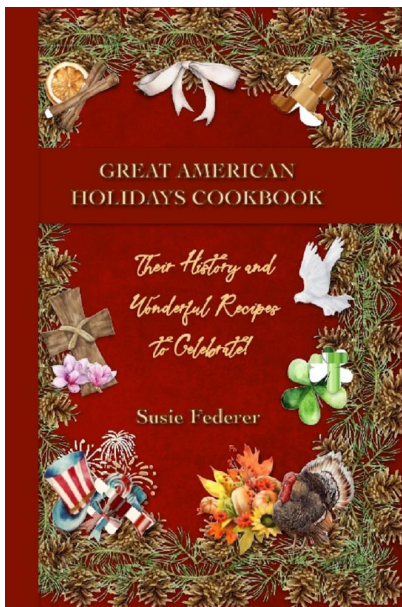
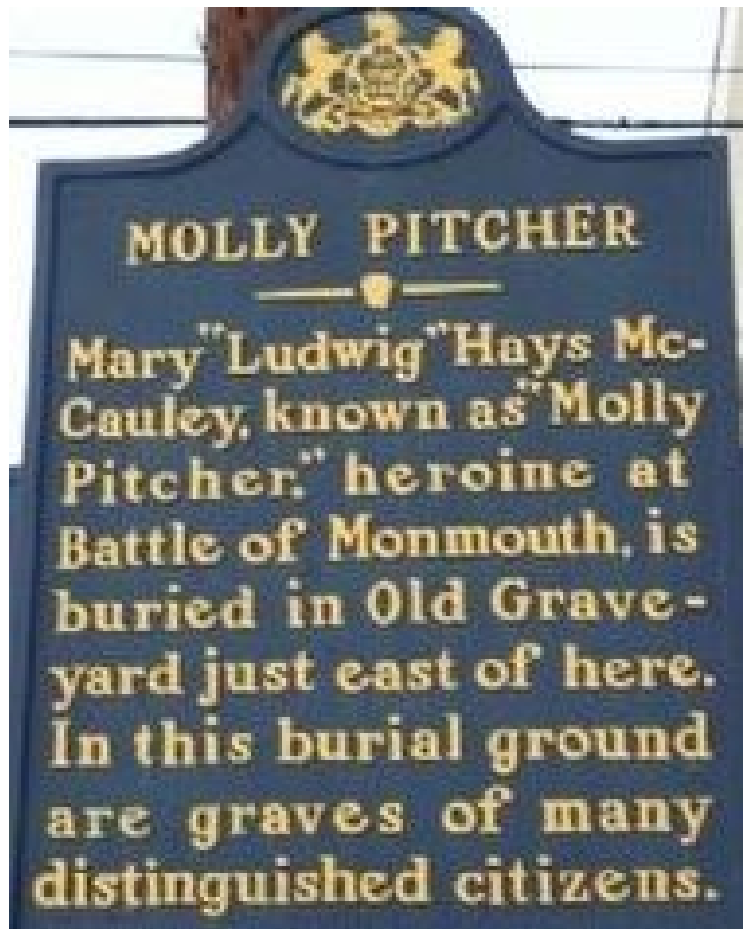


While in the act of reaching a cartridge and having one of her feet as far before the other as she could step, a cannon shot from the enemy passed directly between her legs without doing any other damage than carrying away all the lower part of her petticoat.

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."

Hearing of her courage, **General George Washington** commended "**Molly Pitcher**" - **Mary Ludwig Hays** - issuing her a warrant as a non-commissioned officer. She was known as "**Sergeant Molly.**"



[Great American Holiday Cookbook - Their History and Wonderful Recipes to Celebrate - by Susie Federer](#)

A similar story is that of **Margaret Cochran Corbin**, wife of artilleryman John Corbin.

On November 16,

1776, John Corbin, along with 2,800 Continental soldiers, defended Manhattan's Fort Washington, which was being attacked by 9,000 Hessian mercenary troops.



Margaret Corbin was bringing water to swab the cannon, when her husband was killed.

She immediately took his place at the cannon, and helped return fire.



Seriously wounded in her arm, **Margaret Corbin**, or "**Captain Molly**," was the first woman in U.S. history to be awarded a military pension.

When the men of Pepperell,

Massachusetts,
went off to war,
**Prudence
Cummings
Wright** and **Sarah
Shattuck** formed
their own militia of
women to protect
the remaining
townspeople -
**"Mrs. David
Wright's Guard."**

Their weapons
were everything
from muskets to
farm tools.



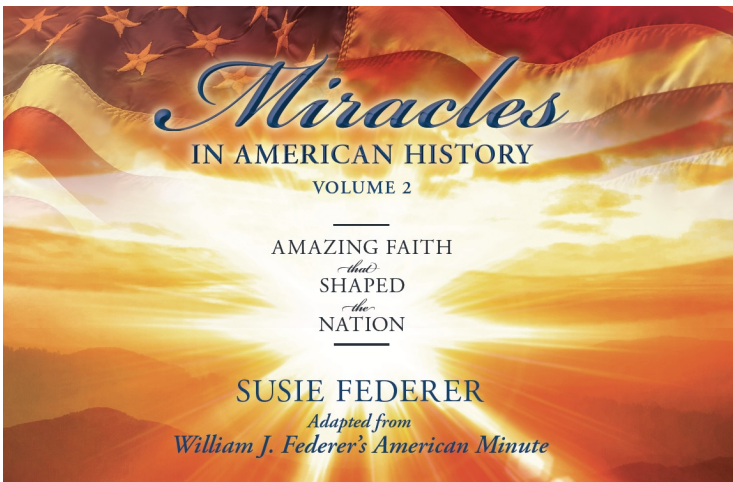
**Women managed
homesteads** while
their husbands
fought.

They **worked the
farms, raised
families, and
defended against
Indians** stirred up
by the British to
attack.



**Women raised
money** for
suffering soldiers,
**organized
resistance
protests,
boycotted
British-made
products,** which

meant going back to using their old spinning wheels.



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Women engaged in the riskier roles as messengers, scouts, saboteurs, or spies, the punishment for which, if caught, was hanging.

In addition to well-known names, such as **Abigail**



Adams, Mercy Otis Warren, Dolley Madison, and Deborah Read Franklin, there were:

Catherine "Kate" Moore Barry, the "**Heroine of the Battle of Cowpens**," rode through the back trails of South Carolina to warn of approaching British troops and round up militia, including her husband, to join General Daniel Morgan for the Battle of Cowpens, January 17, 1781.

16-year-old Sybil Ludington, on night of April 26, 1777, rode 40 miles through Putnam and Dutchess Counties waking up patriots to join the militia, led by her father,



Colonel Henry Ludington. **Sybil** delivered the urgent warning that the British had burned Danbury, Connecticut, and were fast approaching.

Lydia Darragh, a Quaker, had her home commandeered by British officers for weeks. During their meetings, **Lydia** would hide in a closet under the stairs and listened through the walls.

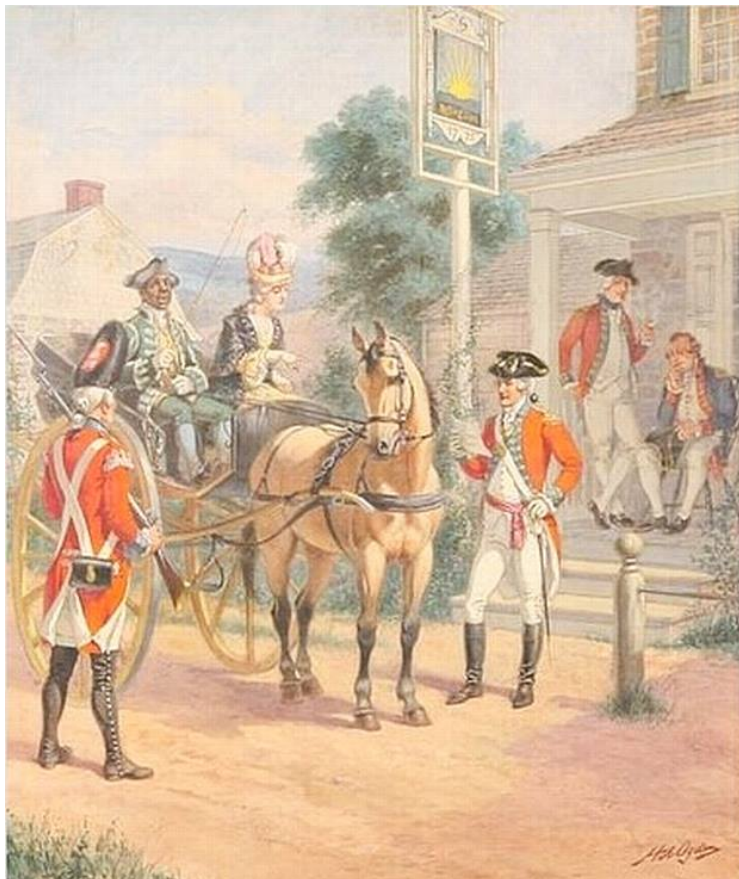
Hearing their plans, **Lydia** made notes on small pieces of paper and sewed them into button covers on her son's coat, instructing

him to go to General Washington's camp at Whitemarsh.

Her intelligence saved the Americans from a surprise British attack.

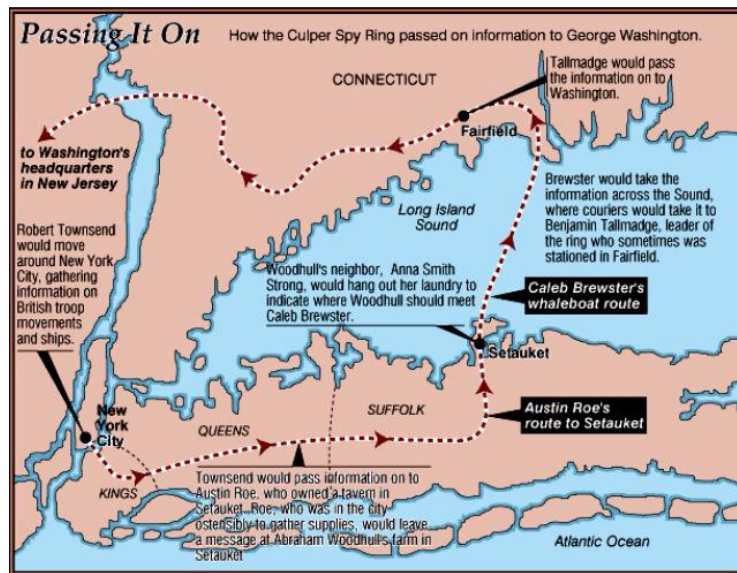


22-year-old Deborah Champion, in September 1775, **disguised as an old woman** wearing a silk hood and an oversized bonnet, and risked her life to ride from New London, Connecticut, to Boston, passing several British checkpoints.



Deborah was delivering an urgent message from her father, Henry Champion - the Continental Army's commissary general, to General George Washington, hiding the important papers under the bodice of her linsey-woolsey dress.

Anna Smith Strong was an integral part of the **Culper Spy Ring**, which gathered information for **General Washington**, 1778-1781.



Robert Townsend, pretending to be a loyalist, learned of British troops movements around New York and told tavern owner Austin Roe, who got it to Abraham Woodhull.

Woodhull was signaled by **Anna Smith Strong**, when she **hung her laundry outside to dry on a clothesline in pre-arranged configurations**, that Caleb Brewster was waiting in a cove to take the information across Long Island Sound to Major Ben Tallmadge and General Washington.



Hot tempered **Nancy Hart** had her cabin searched by six British soldiers. They shot her

prized turkey and ordered her to cook it.

While serving the soldiers wine, she discreetly passed their stacked muskets through a crack in the wall to her daughter outside.



When the soldiers finally noticed what she was doing, she pointed one of the guns at them saying that **she would shoot the first one who moved, which she promptly did.**



Nancy held the rest at gun point till her husband arrived. She insisted they be hung. In 1912, railroad construction worker grading land near the **old Hart cabin** found a **neat row of six skeletons.**

Deborah Samson (or Sampson) Gannett, after being freed from being an indentured servant on a farm, bound her chest, dressed as a man, and enlisted in the Continental Army under the name Robert Shurtliff.

Deborah served three years, being injured several times, but refused medical attention for fear of being found out. It was not until she became deathly ill of fever that the doctor discovered her identity. She was honorably discharged.

In 1792, **Deborah** received back pay, and in 1805, Congress granted her **a pension as a war veteran.**



Martha Bratton, wife of Colonel William Bratton, blew up a cache of gunpowder to keep it from the British. When questioned, she proclaimed, "It was I who did it!"



A British officer held a reaping hook to her throat, demanding she confess where her husband was, but Martha refused to tell.

When a battle was taking place right outside her home, **Martha** extinguished the fire in the fireplace and put her

little son up the chimney to keep him from being hit by stray gunfire.

Nancy "Nanyehi"

Ward was a Cherokee in eastern Tennessee. Cherokee had sided with the British during the French and Indian War, and again during the Revolution.

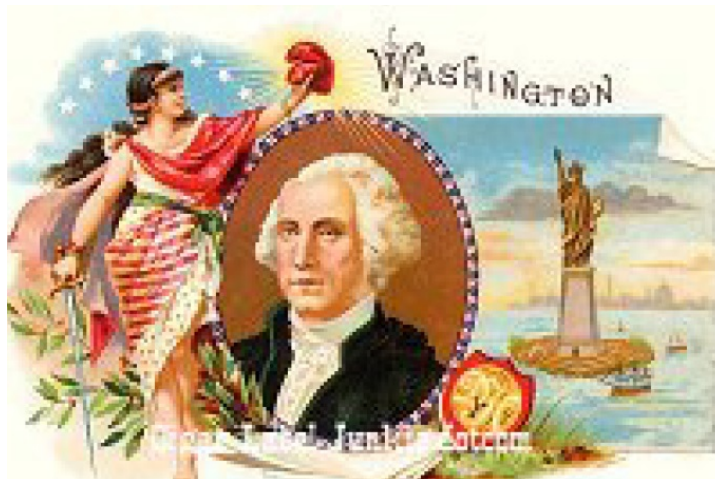


Nanye'hi learned that the British had incited her tribe to attack a nearby American settlement.

She took the risk of freeing American prisoners so they could warn their village, one of whom, **Lydia Bean**, was expecting to be burned to death the next day.

While a captive, **Lydia Bean** and **Nanye'hi** reportedly traded cooking advice, such as making butter.

The Ladies of Havana, Cuba, donated their own gold and jewelry, estimated at several million dollars, and sent it to help General Washington defeat the British at Yorktown.



The message that the “**Ladies of Havana**” sent with their contribution was: “So the American mothers’ sons are not born as slaves.”

Washington reportedly threw his hat in the air when he heard news of their gift.

General Jean Baptiste de Rochambeau wrote in his "Daily Memoirs" (Library of Congress):



"The joy was enormous when it was received, **the money from Havana:** The contribution of 800,000 silver pounds which helped **stop the financial bankruptcy (of the Revolutionary Army)** and raised up the moral spirit of the Army that had began to dissolve."

Historian Stephen Bonsal wrote in *When the French Were Here* (Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1945):

"The million that was supplied ... by **the ladies of Havana**, may, with truth, be regarded as the 'bottom dollars' upon which the edifice of American independence was erected."

Abigail Adams
wrote to her
husband, John,
from their home in
Braintree,
Massachusetts,
October 16, 1774,

regarding increased tensions with Great Britain:

“I dare not express to you, at three hundred miles distance, how ardently I long for your return ... And whether the end will be tragical, Heaven only knows.

You cannot be, I know, nor do I wish to see you, an inactive spectator;



but if the sword be drawn, I bid adieu to all domestic felicity, and look forward to that country where there are neither wars nor rumors of war, in a firm belief that through the mercy of its King we shall both rejoice there together ...

Your most affectionate, **Abigail Adams.**”

In a letter dated June 25, 1775, **Abigail Adams** wrote again to her husband regarding the battle at Charlestown, Massachusetts:

“We live in continual Expectation of

Hostilities.

Scarcely a day that does not produce some, but like Good Nehemiah having made our prayer with God, and set the people with their Swords, their Spears and their bows we will say unto them,

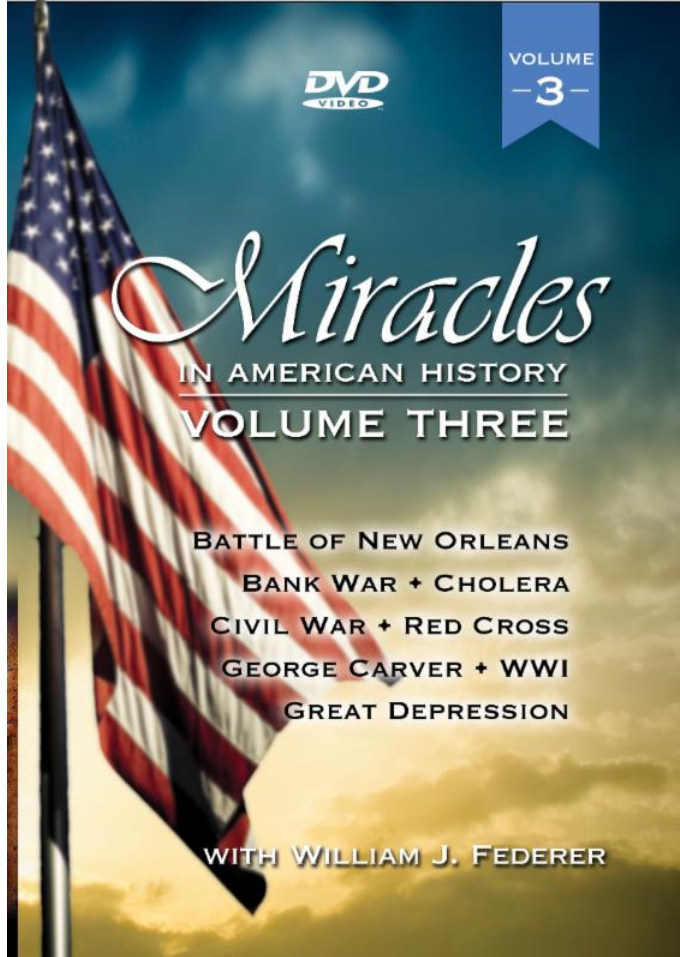


Be not afraid of them. Remember the Lord who is great and terrible, and fight for your Brethren, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your houses ...

They (British) delight on molesting us on the Sabbath. Two Sabbaths we have been in such Alarms that we have had no meetings.

This day we have set under our own vine in quietness, have heard Mr. Taft, from Psalms. The Lord is good to all and his tender mercies are over all his works.”

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On January 2, 1952, the U.S. Postal Service issued a 3-cent stamp in Philadelphia to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the birth of **Betsy Ross**.



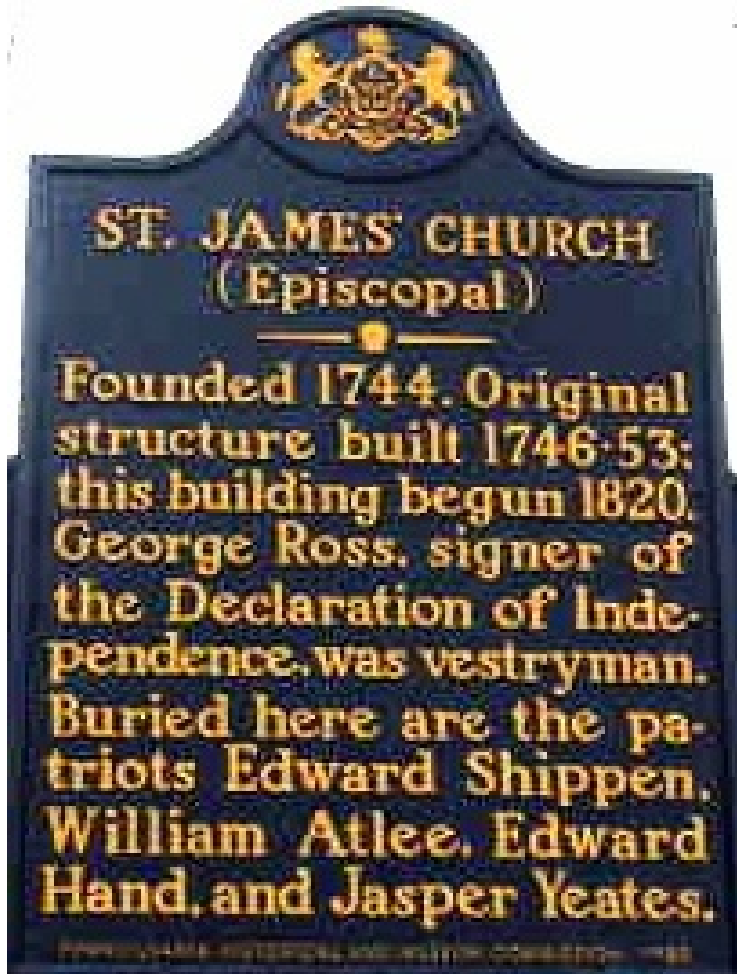
Born a day earlier, January 1, 1752, to a Quaker family in Philadelphia, **Betsy** was the 8th of 17 children.



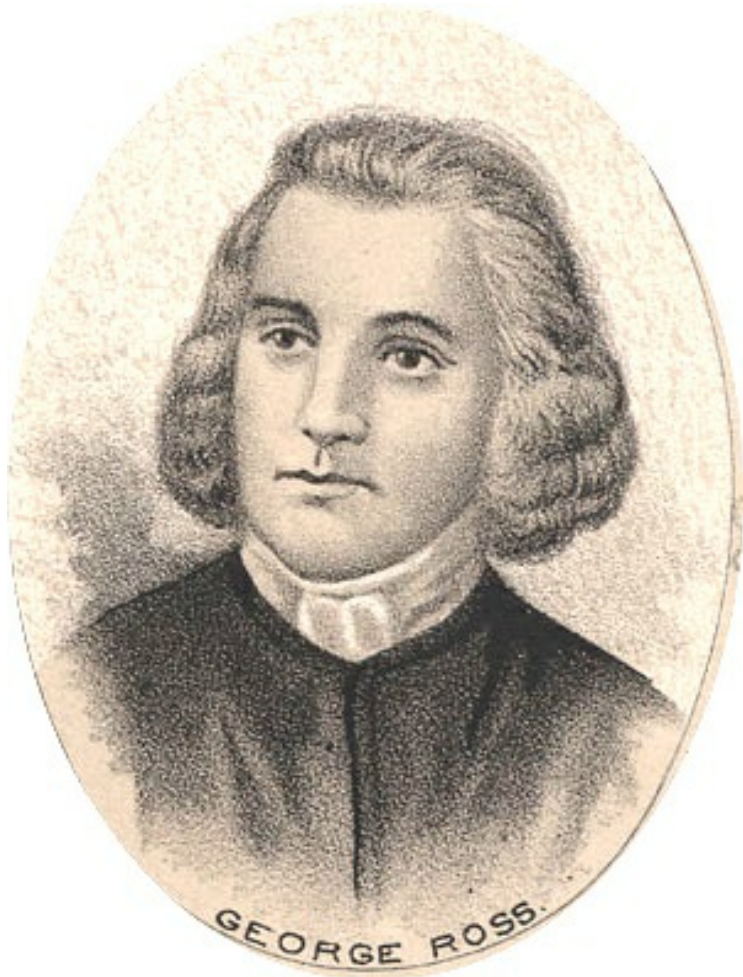
Betsy apprenticed as a seamstress and fell in love with upholsterer **John Ross**, son of an Episcopal rector at Christ Church and nephew of Declaration signer, **George Ross**.



George Ross, the son of an Anglican clergyman, was a delegate from Pennsylvania to the Constitutional Convention, being elected its first vice-president.



George Ross was a colonel in the Continental Army and later an admiralty judge in Pennsylvania where he refused to acknowledge the authority of the Federal court over State decisions.



George Ross'



sister married **George Read**, another signer of the Declaration.

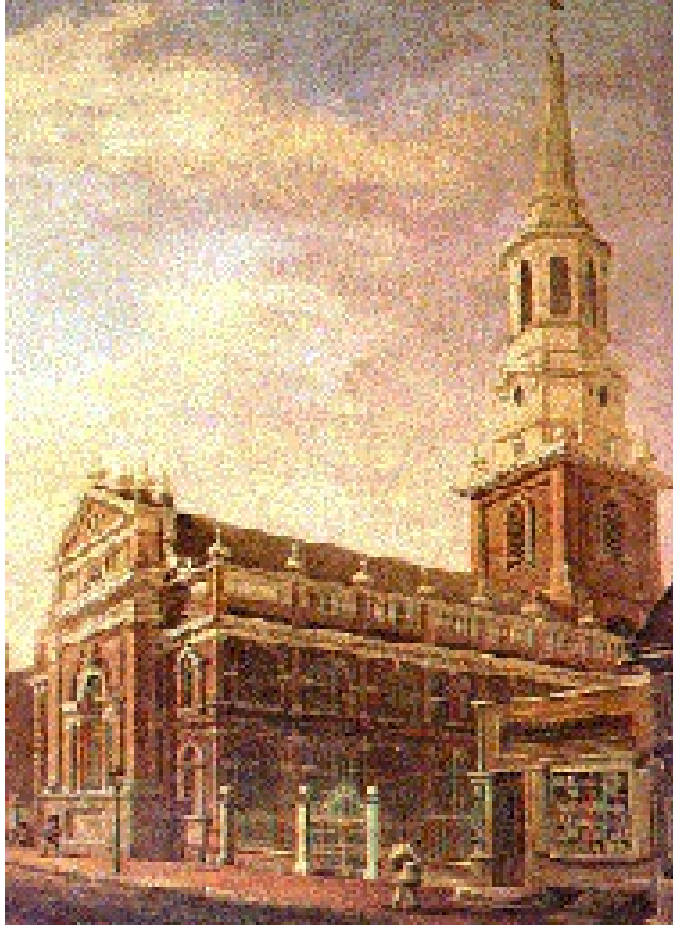
John and Betsy eloped, as Quakers forbade interdenominational marriage. They were married by the last colonial Governor of New Jersey **William Franklin**, the son of **Ben Franklin**.



John and Betsy Ross attended Christ's Church with:

- George Washington,
- Robert Morris,

- Francis Hopkins,
- Alexander Hamilton,
- Thomas Jefferson, and
- Benjamin Franklin.



The Ross' pew, number 12, was next to a column adjoining **George Washington's pew** number 56 and not far from **Ben Franklin's pew** number 70.



During the Revolution, **John**



Ross died when a munitions depot he was guarding blew up.

Shortly after, in June 1776, General Washington reportedly asked **Betsy Ross** to sew an American Flag.



She most likely used a **design** created by the Chairman of the Navy Board, **Francis Hopkinson** of New Jersey, who as a Signer of the Declaration of Independence.

The design looked similar to the **flag** of the **British East India Company**.

Hopkinson also helped design **The Great Seal of the United States**.

With the Continental Congress meeting in Pennsylvania, **Betsy**



Ross also made a flag for the Pennsylvania navy ensign, which had 7 red stripes and 6 white stripes, as well as a commissioning pennant with 13 red-and-white stripes.

Betsy Ross and her family continued to make **U.S. flags** for 50 years.

Another woman who made the **Grand Union Flag** of 1775 was **Rebecca Flower Young**, whose daughter **Mary Young Pickersgill** made the famous "**Star Spangled Banner**" which flew over **Fort McHenry** during the **War of 1812**.



A widow, **Betsy Ross** married sea captain **Joseph Ashburn** at the Old Swedes Church in 1777.

That winter the British forcibly quartered in the home of **Betsy and Joseph Ashburn**.

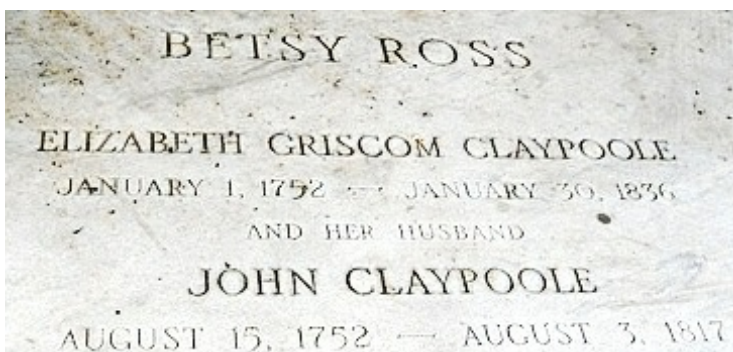
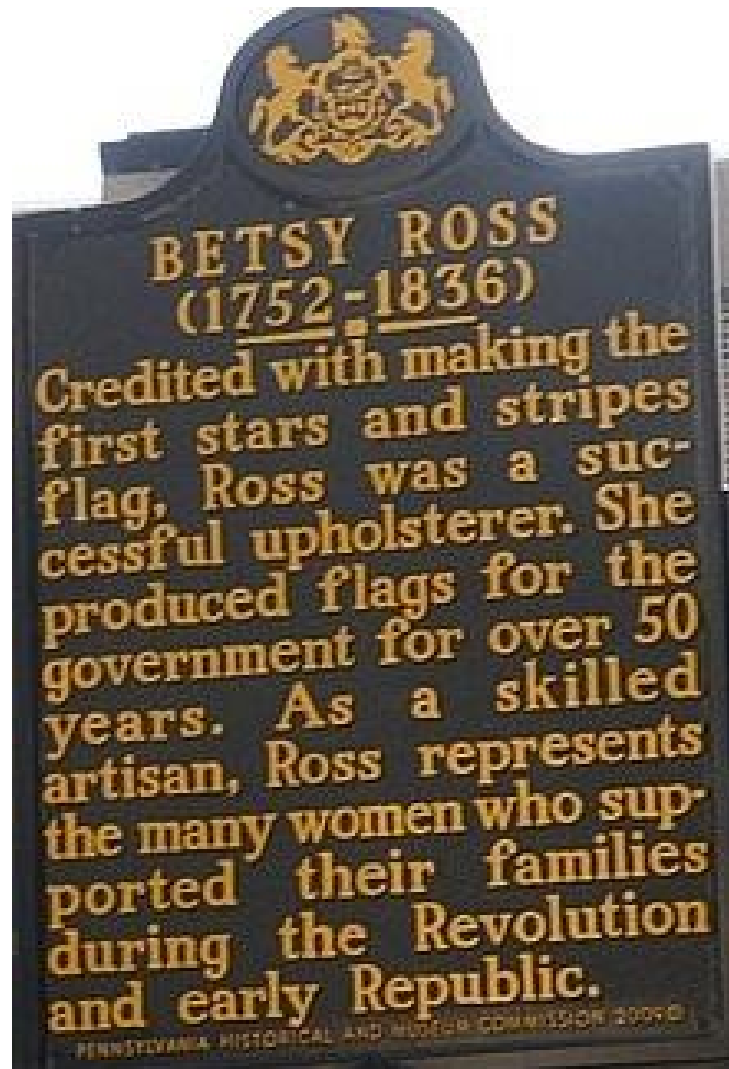




Interior of the old Army Prison Ship, in the Revolutionary War.

Joseph Ashburn later sailed to the West Indies for war supplies, but was captured and sent to Old Mill Prison, where he died in 1782.

Fellow prisoner **John Claypoole** later brought the news of Joseph's death to **Betsy**, only to fall in love with her himself.



Betsy married **John Claypoole** at Christ Church, May 8, 1783, and together they had 5 children.

The Betsy Ross Bridge across the Delaware River connecting Philadelphia with Pennsauken, New Jersey, is named in her honor.



To continue the heroic legacy, the **Daughters of the American Revolution** was founded in 1890, and incorporated by an Act of Congress in 1896. Its motto is: "God, Home, and Country."

Voicing the sentiment of the courageous, patriotic women of the Revolution, **Abigail Adams** wrote to her husband, September 16, 1775:



“And unto Him who mounts the whirlwind and directs the storm, I will cheerfully leave the ordering of my lot and whether adverse or prosperous days should be my future portion, **I will trust in His right Hand to lead me safely through**, and after a short rotation of events, fix me in a

state immutable and happy ...

Adieu! I need not say how sincerely I am your affectionate, **Abigail Adams.**”

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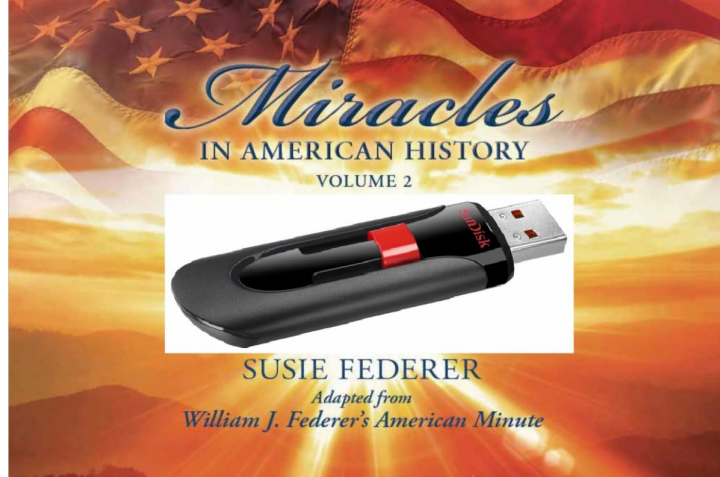
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