WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP IN AMERICAN HISTORY

WOMEN OF THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR

Duration: 4-5 class periods

NEW YORK STATE SOCIAL STUDIES CORE CURRICULUM, GRADES 7/8:
UNITED STATES AND NEW YORK STATE HISTORY

UNIT 7  A Nation is Created
Chapter IV Military and Political Aspects of the Revolution
http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/socst/pub/sscore1.pdf (p. 49)

These questions and documents can be used in conjunction with the New York State Education Department core curriculum for grades 7/8 Social Studies: United States and New York State History. Students will be able to discuss the changing roles of women during the American Revolution.

FOCUS QUESTIONS

1. What did some women do to try to aid in the fight for American independence from England?
2. What were some of the issues that women thought were important during the Revolution?
3. What were some Americans’ reactions to women’s involvement in the war of ideas during the American Revolution?
4. What were some British reactions to women’s involvement in the American Revolution?
WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP IN AMERICAN HISTORY

WOMEN OF THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR — PART I, DAY I
Farewell Tea, Hello Independence

AIM
To understand the issues that Colonial women felt they could influence in the fight for independence.

DOCUMENTS
A Statement of North Carolina Citizens, August 22, 1774 and “For the Publick Good,”
The Edenton Resolves

VOCABULARY
Boycott; colony; patriotic; loyalist; resolve; scoffed; welfare; adherence

DO NOW
On the board, draw two “brainstorm” charts; one that says “Man things” and one that says “Woman things.” Tell students to think of traditional gender roles and “things that men do vs. things that women do.” Tell them to think of as many as possible; the group that gets the most wins (teachers may attach a prize to this if they wish).

Identify with the groups the traditional roles of men and women and write them on the brainstorm chart on the board. Tell the students that the focus of today will be the Colonial role of the women “taking care of the home” (many of the students responses will probably include the subcategories, i.e. minding children, making food, cleaning, etc.)

Then ask, “what kind of protests do you think the women could have organized if their power was restricted to the home?” Take student responses.

MINI LESSON
Tea was a major part of colonial culture. The colonists not only drank it when they were thirsty and before and after meals, but they drank it when they socialized with each other. The better tea set that you had, the “cooler” you were. Tea was something that defined people and influenced their lives.

But there was a problem: the tea came from England. What do you do when you want to protest something that comes from another country? Boycott. If women serve the tea, the women can STOP serving the tea, and thereby help the American cause.

ACTIVITY: ANALYZING THE DOCUMENT
Distribute to each student a copy of the document, “A Statement of North Carolina Citizens, August 22, 1774” and “For the Publick Good.” Read the documents aloud and have the students follow along.
WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP IN AMERICAN HISTORY

QUESTIONS
1. Why was tea taken so seriously by the Colonists?
2. What did the British do concerning the tea that made Colonists angry?
3. What did the Colonists think was the reason behind the tax on tea?

ACTIVITY
Direct the students to look at the brainstorm results on the board. Divide the class into groups and have each group write a 30-second skit that displays ANOTHER way women could help the movement for independence.

The students will perform the skits in front of the other members of the class, and the class must guess the other ways in which women could help the independence movement given the traditional roles they played.

CLOSE
Do you think it was easy for women to help the movement in this way? (This question should serve as a segue into the next day’s lesson about the reactions from men and the British in seeing women join the independence movement).

DISCOVERING HISTORY IN TODAY’S NEW YORK TIMES

1. Draw a line down the center of a piece of poster board. On one side of the line, paste three photographs from The New York Times of women in “traditional roles” as they would be perceived in Colonial times. On the other side of the line, create a collage of three photographs that show women doing “non-traditional” things. Then look carefully at your choices and select one woman from each side of the line to be “pen pals.” Write a letter from each of these women to the other, sharing their thoughts about their roles as women and their influence on men. Repeat this exercise using photographs of men.

2. Clip two articles from The New York Times that discuss protests. (Some protests are between two people, and some are between large groups; some are peaceful, and some are violent.) For each article, create a “5 W’s and H” chart, explaining who is protesting, what they are protesting, when and where the protests are taking place, why they feel the protest will get their point across, and how they are going about protesting (boycotting, marching, etc.).
WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP IN AMERICAN HISTORY

WOMEN OF THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR — PART 1
Farewell, Tea; Hello, Independence

A Statement of North Carolina Citizens, August 22, 1774

Resolved, That we will not directly or indirectly after the first PART of January 1775, import from Great Britain any East India goods, nor any merchandise whatever, medicines excepted nor will we after that PART import from the West Indies, or elsewhere, any East India or British goods or manufactures, nor will we purchase any such articles so imported of any person or persons whatsoever, except such as are now in the country, or may arrive on or before the first PART of January, 1775.

...Resolved, That we will not use, nor suffer East India tea to be used in our families, after the tenth PART of September next, and that we will consider all persons in this Province, not complying with this resolve, to be enemies to their country.

“For The Publick Good”


As we cannot be indifferent on any occasion that appears to affect the peace and happiness of our country, and as it has been thought necessary for the publick good to enter into several particular resolves, by meeting of Members of Deputies from the whole Province, it is a duty that we owe not only to our near and dear relations and connections, but to ourselves who are essentially interested in their welfare, to do everything as far as lies in our power to testify to our sincere adherence to the same; and we do therefore accordingly subscribe this paper as a witness of our fixed intention and solemn determination to do so.

Signed by fifty-one Ladies
[Anonymous]
WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP IN AMERICAN HISTORY

WOMEN OF THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR — PART 1, DAY 2
Farewell Tea, Hello Independence

AIM
What were some of the reactions of American men and the British toward American women’s involvement in the movement for Independence?

DOCUMENT
“A Society of Patriotic Ladies at Edenton in North Carolina”

DO NOW
Write on the board or say to students, “Yesterday we talked about ‘traditional’ roles that are commonly associated with a gender. We also talked about how women were getting involved in the Revolution. This gave them power. How do you think the men felt about this? How do you think the British felt about this?”

Take responses from the students. There are no “right” answers here, but the answers that refer to the men “not liking it”, or “laughing at it,” etc., should be highlighted or circled by the teacher.

MINI LESSON
Say: “Many of you commented on how the men would have not taken it seriously or would not have liked the women involving themselves in the Revolution. You are correct. But why? Around the time of the Revolution, men had all the political power. Not only were women not involved in politics (they couldn’t vote, couldn’t be in the government, etc.) but it was considered ‘wrong’ for a woman to be involved.”

ACTIVITY: ANALYZING THE DOCUMENT
Every student should receive a copy of the document, “A Society of Patriotic Ladies at Edenton in North Carolina.” The document should also be placed on the overhead. The students should be given five minutes to write down as many observations as they can about the document. Since there is a lot in this document, the teacher can feel free to give students extra time if they seem engaged and working hard.

The teacher should then take responses from the students, noting the observations (making a list on the overhead, circling what they see, etc. — whatever the teacher thinks would be the most appropriate and helpful).

Student responses may vary, but the following SHOULD be noted:
• the ugliness of the woman with the gavel
• the woman flirting with the man
• the presence of the jugs of alcohol
• the child with the spilled food under the table being licked by the urinating dog
• the drinking going on in the background
• the general disorderly nature of the “meeting” – people seem distracted.
• the black woman in the background
WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP IN AMERICAN HISTORY

With all of these observations, the following questions should be answered:

- What is this picture showing?
- What is the author’s attitude toward the women?
- What would the author say about these women in general? Is he/she personally attacking them? How?
- What is the gender of the author of the cartoon? Do you think that’s important?
- Where do you think the author is from? (it should be revealed that the author is from England)

ACTIVITY

The author portrays the women of Edenton’s efforts in an extremely negative way. How do you think a woman author from America would portray the same meeting?

Students should draw a cartoon portraying the meeting in Edenton that is more “accurate.”

Students should be sure to show:

- The goal of the meeting
- How the meeting “actually” looked
- A more reasonable representation of the participants in the meeting

CLOSE

Several students will be invited to share their cartoons with the rest of the class and explain them. The class will then comment on the “accuracy” of the drawing. The drawings should be hung for display around the room

DISCOVERING HISTORY IN TODAY’S NEW YORK TIMES

1. Find a photograph in The New York Times of a woman or women involved in politics in some way, and read the related article. Then, draw your own editorial cartoon modeled on the photograph to illustrate your opinion of the topic of the article.

2. The New York Times publishes editorials, which convey the newspaper’s view about a topic. The Times also prints Op-Ed articles (opposite the Editorial page), which provide the opinions of regular columnists and guest writers. Find an editorial or Op-Ed piece in The Times about a current event that interests you, and then draw an editorial cartoon about the same topic to express your opinion about the topic.
WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP IN AMERICAN HISTORY

WOMEN OF THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR — PART I
Farewell, Tea; Hello, Independence

“A Society of Patriotic Ladies at Edenton in North Carolina,” March 25, 1775
WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP IN AMERICAN HISTORY

WOMEN OF THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR — PART 2
Slavery and Luxury, or Liberty and Sufficiency?

AIM
How did some American women feel about independence from England?

DOCUMENT
Excerpt of a letter by Charity Clarke, June 16, 1769

VOCABULARY
Abound; Amazons (spelled amozones); sower; liberty; swains; Arcadia; banish; arbitrary; sufficiency

DO NOW
“Deal or No Deal” – Ask students to choose one of the following options and say why they chose it.

Option #1: You live a rich life style. Mostly anything you want you can get, there is very little that your money cannot buy. However, you must listen to someone tell you what to do; you are allowed to make only minor decisions for yourself.

Option #2: You have mostly everything that you need, but you are not living in luxury. You have plenty of food, comfortable shelter, etc. but the things that you want, the nice things, you are unable to have. However, you have a large degree of “autonomy,” meaning that you get to make your own decisions about your life and don’t have to listen to anyone telling you what to do.

Take a poll of answers and write the results on the board. The teacher should make the statement that many Colonists were beginning to agree with option #2. This “Do Now” will provide a segue into the thinking that Charity Clarke expressed in her letter.

MINI LESSON
Ask students how “Option #2” could apply to the Revolutionary War and the situation in American preceding it. Emphasize British control, abundance of British-supplied goods, Colonial unrest over political control and the willingness of the Colonists to start sacrificing British luxuries for freedom.

ACTIVITY: ANALYZING THE DOCUMENT
Distribute a copy of Charity Clarke’s letter to each student. Read the letter to the students, and ask students:

• How does Charity Clarke feels about England and America?
• How does this relate to Option B of the “Do-Now”?
• Do you think she has a right to complain about her situation? Why?
WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP IN AMERICAN HISTORY

ACTIVITY
Students will write their own letter from the perspective of a Colonist to someone they “know” in England. They can either side with Charity Clarke or disagree with her (patriot vs. loyalist).

In either case, students must:

• give reasons for their argument
• discuss emotions, feelings toward other Americans and the British

CLOSE
Several students can volunteer to read their letters out loud, and the class can critique them based on knowledge gained from the lesson. Does the letter make sense given the historical context? Why or why not?

DISCOVERING HISTORY IN TODAY’S NEW YORK TIMES

1. Find an article in The New York Times about a person or group who does not have the kind of freedoms in their country that you feel Americans now enjoy. Write a letter to Charity Clarke from a real or fictional person in the article, discussing views that you have about what it is like to have limited freedom.

2. Find a photograph or advertisement in The New York Times that seems to illustrate “autonomy” — being able to make decisions about one’s own life. Paste it to the top of a sheet of paper. Beneath it, write a paragraph about why you think it represents autonomy.

3. Find an article in The New York Times that discusses a luxury item (things like jewelry, video game players, MP3 players and designer clothes). Then, write an autobiography from that luxury item’s perspective. Where was it “born”? What does it do? How has it changed over time? How does it feel to be a luxury? Who wants it, and why?
WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP IN AMERICAN HISTORY

WOMEN OF THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR — PART 2
Slavery and Luxury, or Liberty and Sufficiency?

An excerpt of a letter by Charity Clarke.

June 16, 1769.

...don’t think for all this that I prefer England to America; I would not quit my woods & rivers, for all the gay amusements you abound with; you need not talk of sower grapes; I assure you the way of life that would be to me the most agreeable is downright Indian; and if you English folks won’t give us the liberty we ask; instead of a Thalestris, at the head of a fighting army of amazons, I will try to gather a number of ladies armed with spining wheels, & attended by dying swains who shall all learn to weave, keep sheep, and will retire beyond the reach of arbitrary power; cloathed with the work of our hands, feeding on what the country affords, without any of the cares, Luxuries or oppression of an long inhabited country, in short we will found a new arcadia; you imagine we cannot live without your assistance, but I know we can; banish every thing but the necessaries of life; & we will want nothing but what our country will afford; we shall then be happy; no more slaves to fashion & ceremony: freedom ease content & peace shall be our constant companions, each Father shall be king of his family & no other power shall be admitted; the first who shews any marks of ambition shall with the joint consent of the community, be sent back to dwell with those who prefer slavery & luxury; to liberty & a sufficiency . . .

*Thalestris has been written of as a queen of the Amazons, warrior women of Greek mythology.
WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP IN AMERICAN HISTORY

WOMEN OF THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR — PART 3
Remember the Ladies

AIM
How did women seek to gain power within the newly forming government in the United States?

DOCUMENT
“Remember the Ladies,” excerpt of a letter from Abigail Adams to her husband, John Adams, March 31, 1776

VOCABULARY
Tyrants; foment

DO NOW
When you want something to change in the classroom, whom do you go to? When you want something to change in your house, whom do you go to? Why?

Take answers from students. The goal is for students identify the authority figure in every situation. In the classroom, authority rests with the teacher. In the home, authority rests with the parents (or guardian) of the household.

ASK THE QUESTION: What did the face of authority look like in Pre-Revolutionary and Revolutionary America? Who had power?

MINI LESSON
Mostly all of those who had power in America were men who were wealthy and white. Women could not vote, they could not be part of the government, and therefore they were rendered quite powerless. Or were they?

Where could a woman go to influence the government? Where could a woman go to have a say in what she wanted?

If her husband were in power, she could go to him.

ACTIVITY: ANALYZING THE DOCUMENT
Distribute the document “Remember the Ladies,” an excerpt of a letter from Abigail Adams to her husband, John Adams, March 31, 1776.

Read the letter to your students. Use the document to answer the following questions:

1. What does Abigail Adams “hope to hear” about?
2. What does Abigail Adams want for America?
3. What does she want for women?
4. What does she think of men?
WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP IN AMERICAN HISTORY

ACTIVITY

Situation: A group of women living in the American Colonies are fed up with men having all the power. They have decided to get together and protest. Each groups’ task will be to make a “protest poster” listing the reasons why women are upset with their present state in the Colonies.

Each poster should identify:

1. the group being represented
2. the issues women have with the present state of the Colonial government
3. proposed solutions

CLOSE

Have students present their posters to the class, and invite students to ask questions about the issues. Ensure that the students can master the AIM question.

DISCOVERING HISTORY IN TODAY’S NEW YORK TIMES

1. Create a “trading card” featuring the accomplishments of a female politician. First, find an article in The New York Times about a woman in government, either in the United States or elsewhere. Find in the article – and through other research, if necessary – the following information: her political position, how and when she was elected, whom she ran against, her past political positions, any other relevant past jobs, information about her education, her birth date, and basic family information (including spouse and children, if any). Include this information on a piece of construction paper, along with the politician’s name across the top and at least one recent photograph from The Times. Paste the Times article about her on the back of the paper.

2. Read the Letters to the Editor in today’s New York Times to get an understanding of their length, format and persuasive language. Imagine that you are Abigail Adams and write a Letter to the Editor of an imaginary newspaper, “The Colonial New York Times,” sharing your views about how women can help advance the Colonies.
WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP IN AMERICAN HISTORY

WOMEN OF THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR — PART 3
Remember the Ladies

“Remember the Ladies,” excerpt of a letter from Abigail Adams to her husband, John Adams.

Braintree [Massachusetts] March 31, 1776

...I long to hear that you have declared an independence — and by the way in the new Code of Laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make I desire you would Remember the Ladies & be more generous and favourable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the Husbands. Remember all Men would be tyrants if they could. If particular care & attention is not paid to the Ladies we are determined to foment a Rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in which we have no voice, or Representation.

That your Sex are Naturally Tyrannical is a Truth so thoroughly established as to admit of no dispute, but such of you as wish to be happy willingly give up the harsh title of Master for the more tender and endearing one of Friend. Why then, not put it out of the power of the vicious and the Lawless to use us with cruelty & indignity with impunity. Men of Sense in all Ages abhor those customs which treat us only as the vassals of your Sex regardless of us as Beings placed by Providence under your protection & in imitation of the Supreme Being make use of that power only for our happiness.
WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP IN AMERICAN HISTORY

WOMEN OF THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR — PART 4
Deborah Sampson: Breaking Social Convention

AIM
Students will work with primary and secondary sources to create historical skits about certain women who fought in the Revolutionary War.

VOCABULARY
Petition; pension; portray; register; vilify; demonize; consolation; virtuous; zealous; legislature; augment; maneuver; musket; swerved; abolitionists; feminists; deviants; illegitimate; chastity; manufacturing; inquire (spelled old English way: enquire); discoursed; effeminate; esteem; humble; intervention; retroactive; indigent; inventory; assets; net worth; stipend; impoverished; charity; affidavit; fidelity; deplorable; artillery

DOCUMENTS
Deborah Sampson: Living Down the War, (article)
Paul Revere’s letter on behalf of Deborah Sampson
Deborah Sampson and Benjamin Gannett Sampson: Petitioning for Pensions, (article)
Margaret Corbin Cochrane’s Pension

MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY (20 minutes)
Divide the class into two large groups and one small group. Each of the large groups will participate in the debate; the small group will act as judges.

RESOLVED: Women should be allowed to serve in the armed forces in the same capacity as men, including combat.

1. Assign group, topic and position.
2. Give the groups five minutes to generate a one-minute presentation.
3. After the presentations, give each group another two minutes to organize a one-minute rebuttal.

CLOSING: Who won the debate?

• Why is this still something people discuss and disagree about?
• Is this the first time anyone had this argument?
WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP IN AMERICAN HISTORY

WRITING AND PERFORMING (40 minutes)

Introduce the writing history activity:

• Tell students they will be writing a series of skits about women who fought in the American Revolution.
• Ask students what they think they need to write accurately about these experiences; the list should include primary sources, secondary sources and imagination.

Students work in groups to write historical scenes

Each group is responsible for using one document to create a historical skit that tells the story of the experiences of the women (and men) in the Revolutionary War.

Group A: Deborah Sampson: Living Down the War, (article)
Group B: A letter from Paul Revere to Congressman William Eustis in favor of transferring the pension of Deborah Sampson Gannet upon her death to her widower, Benjamin Gannett
Group C: Deborah Sampson and Benjamin Gannett: Petitioning for Pensions, (article)
Group D: Margaret Corbin Cochrane’s Pension

It would be helpful to assign the following roles within the group:

• Researchers (more than one)
• Lead scriptwriter
• Drama director
• Facilitator/Producer

PERFORMANCES

Have the students rehearse and perform their skits for the rest of the class.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

ART: Create a memorial for women who fought and died in combat for the United States, for display somewhere in your school.

CURRENT EVENTS: Read about the current incarnation of the debate on women in combat: “In the Line of Fire” by Juliet Macur, November 20, 2005, The New York Times for example. Have the students interview women currently serving in the armed forces.

HISTORY: Research the current policy of United States regarding women in the armed forces in general and in combat situations in particular. Have women served as combatants in United States history?

HISTORY: Examine the role of conscientious objectors in the history of the United States of America, both male and female.
WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP IN AMERICAN HISTORY

DISCOVERING HISTORY IN TODAY’S NEW YORK TIMES

1. Women who fought in the Revolutionary War were considered to be breaking rules of society by doing something that only men were supposed to do. Make a list of three to five “rules” that these women were breaking. Think of what women were supposed to do at home, how they were supposed to look and what they were supposed to think; the historic documents read in class can help you. Then, for each item on your list, find an example in an article or photograph in The New York Times of women today breaking those old rules. Create a poster showing these connections.

2. Find a photograph in The New York Times of a woman, man or child experiencing a current war somewhere in the world, as a soldier or a civilian. To understand the situation, read the article that accompanies the photograph. Cut out the photograph and paste it at the top of a sheet of paper. Underneath it, write a journal entry from this person’s perspective. What might he or she have been seeing, hearing, feeling and otherwise experiencing when this photograph is taken?

3. The New York Times often publishes maps of places where armed combat is taking place. Look through the International section over the course of two or three days, cut out as many of these maps as you can find, and paste them on a sheet of poster board. Next to each map, write the location illustrated in the map (such as downtown Baghdad or northern Sudan), who are the opposing sides in the conflict, and what is the cause of the conflict. (You will likely find this information in the first few paragraphs of the article in which you found the map.) Then, identify these locations on a world map.
WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP IN AMERICAN HISTORY

WOMEN OF THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR — PART 4
Deborah Sampson: Breaking Social Convention

Deborah Sampson: Living Down the War

In 1792, Deborah petitioned the state of Massachusetts for her back pay. Her petition was approved by the legislature and signed by Governor John Hancock that same year. She is also very likely the first American woman to appear on the theatrical stage. In an effort to augment her income, Deborah Gannett performed in Boston and New York theaters, charging seven dollars an appearance. In 1802 the Mercury and New England Palladium, a Boston newspaper, advertised that “Mrs. Gannett equipt in complete uniform will go through the Manual Exercise. The whole to conclude with the Song and Chorus of ‘God Save the Sixteen States.’” It was later reported that she had marched through twenty-seven maneuvers, wearing her blue and white uniform, armed with a musket, followed by a speech that was largely an apology for having “swerved from the flowery path of female delicacy.” Breaking social convention in more ways than one, Deborah Sampson’s stage appearances, which predate those of early female abolitionists and feminists, are notable for making her the first American woman to give public lectures to mixed audiences of men and women.

It is significant that Deborah felt it necessary to apologize on stage for having swerved from the path of femininity. By disguising herself as a man, running away from home alone, and joining the army, Deborah had broken all the rules of social convention. Until the twentieth century, a young lady had only two legitimate reasons for leaving home—her marriage or the death of her parents. It was unthinkable for a single woman to be on her own without risking damage to her reputation. Popular literature abounded with horror tales of female deviants who had suffered the consequences of leaving home and living on their own. They met with the resulting moral deterioration of illegitimate childbirth, prostitution, or even death. Taken from this cultural perspective, Deborah’s biography can best be understood not as an exaggerated account of her military exploits but as an apology to her community. Her biographer Herman Mann emphasized repeatedly that throughout all of Deborah’s wartime escapades, she had maintained her chastity.

Excerpts from: “Will the Real Molly Pitcher Please Stand Up?” ©1999 by Emily J. Teipe.
Summer 1999, Vol. 31, No. 2
WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP IN AMERICAN HISTORY

WOMEN OF THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR — PART 4
Deborah Sampson: Breaking Social Convention

A letter from Paul Revere to Congressman William Eustis

[Image of the letter from Paul Revere to Congressman William Eustis]
WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP IN AMERICAN HISTORY

WOMEN OF THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR — PART 4
Deborah Sampson: Breaking Social Convention

Transcript of a letter from Paul Revere to Congressman William Eustis

Canton, Feby 20 1804

William Eustis, Esq
Member of Congress
Washington

Sir

Mrs. Deborah Gannett of Sharon informs me, that she has inclosed to your Care a petition to Congress in favour of Her. My works for manufacturing of Copper, being a Canton, but a short distance from the Neighbourhood where She lives; I have been induced to enquire her situation, and Character, since she quitted the Male habit, and Soldiers uniform; for the more decent apparel of her own Sex; & Since she has been married and become a Mother. – Humanity, & Justice obliges me to say, that every person with whom I have conversed about Her, and it is not a few, speak of Her as a woman of handsome talents, good Morals, dutifull Wife and an affectionate parent. – She is now much out of health; She has several Children; her Husband is a good sort of a man, ‘tho of small force in business; they have a few acres of poor land which they cultivate, but they are really poor.

She told me, she had no doubt that her ill health is in consequence of her being exposed when She did a Soldiers duty; and that while in the Army, She was wounded.

We commonly form our Idea of the person whom we hear spoken off, whom we have never seen; according as their actions are described, when I heard her spoken off as a Soldier, I formed the Idea of a tall, Masculine female, who had a small share of understandg, without education, & one of the meanest of her Sex. – When I saw and discoursed with I was agreeably surprised to find a small, effeminate, and converseable Woman, whose education entitled her to a better situation in life.

I have no doubt your humanity will prompt you to do all in Your power to git her some releif; I think her case much more deserving than hundreds to whom Congress have been generous. I am sir with esteem & respect your humble servant

Paul Revere
WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP IN AMERICAN HISTORY

WOMEN OF THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR — PART 4
Deborah Sampson: Breaking Social Convention

Deborah Sampson and Benjamin Gannett: Petitioning for Pensions

In 1809, after twenty years of petitioning the federal government, Deborah received a disability pension of four dollars a month. (Male veterans claiming disability received five dollars a month.) In large part due to Revere’s intervention, the pension amount was made retroactive to 1803. With this money, the Gannetts were able to build a clapboard home on their acreage and plant a few trees. However, the pensions Deborah received never relieved their poverty or debt. Shortly after receiving the pension, Deborah wrote to thank Paul Revere and asked to borrow ten dollars. When the 1818 pension bill was passed by the Monroe administration, she applied again. The 1818 pension, designed specifically to help indigent veterans, promised government relief to those still struggling thirty-five years after the war. It required applicants to submit a personal inventory of their assets and net worth including real estate and household goods. (The government did not require that the value of clothing and bedding be estimated in the inventory.) In the application, Deborah Gannett, fifty-eight years old and mother of three children, claimed total assets of twenty dollars, which included her clothing. In order to qualify for the new pension, she had to relinquish the former disability pension of forty-eight dollars per annum as well as a state pension of four dollars a month. Deborah received the seventy-six-dollar stipend for about seven years.

After her death in 1827, her husband (believed to be the only widower to file for a pension) could not qualify for benefits since they had not been married until 1784. In 1831 Gannett, aged eighty-three, was sick and impoverished. He depended upon local charity for survival and decided to petition the government for a pension. Gannett’s pension affidavit describes Deborah’s life after the war. He stated that she had been honorably discharged and rendered an accurate account of her military service. He also believed that her discharge papers were lost. According to Mr. Gannett, her war wound, a musket ball lodged in her thigh for forty-six years, “followed her through life and hastened her death.” Another witness, Mr. P. Parsons, testified that Deborah had been unable to perform any labor due to her wound. Consequently, Benjamin had been subjected to heavy medical expenses for more than twenty years before Deborah started receiving a pension. In 1831 Gannett still owed physicians six hundred dollars for her treatment. On March 4, 1831, a special act of Congress awarded Benjamin Gannett a more generous pension than Deborah had ever received. This stipend of eighty dollars a year was to continue “for and during his natural life.” Four years after Deborah Samson Gannett’s death, Congress stated in the pension granted to Benjamin, “the whole history of the American Revolution records no other similar example of female heroism, fidelity and courage.”

Excerpts from: “Will the Real Molly Pitcher Please Stand Up?” ©1999 by Emily J. Tepe
Summer 1999, Vol. 31, No. 2
WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP IN AMERICAN HISTORY

WOMEN OF THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR — PART 4
Deborah Sampson: Breaking Social Convention

Margaret Cochran Corbin’s Pension
Background information on Margaret Cochran Corbin

Margaret Cochran was born in 1751 in Franklin, Pennsylvania. In 1772 she married John Corbin, who four years later joined the First Company of Pennsylvania Artillery and became a cannoneer. Margaret, like thousands of other women, became a camp follower.

On November 16, 1776, Fort Washington on Manhattan Island was attacked by Hessian mercenaries fighting for the British. Margaret assisted handling ammunition and cleaning and loading the cannon. When John was fatally shot, Margaret took over firing the cannon until she herself was shot, seriously wounded in the chest, jaw and left arm (which was almost severed) and captured. She was disabled the remainder of her life due to her wounds. She lived and worked near the U.S. Military Academy at West Point until she died in 1800. In 1926 the Daughters of the American Revolution had her remains exhumed and reburied in West Point Cemetery.

From Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789
TUESDAY, JULY 6, 1779

A letter from the Board of War, was read; Whereupon,

[Note 3: This letter is in the Papers of the Continental Congress, No. 147, III, folio 501.]

Resolved, That Margaret Corbin, who was wounded and disabled in the attack on Fort Washington, whilst she heroically filled the post of her husband who was killed by her side serving a piece of artillery, do receive, during her natural life, or the continuance of the said disability, the one-half of the monthly pay drawn by a soldier in the service of these states; and that she now receive out of the public stores, one complete suit of cloaths, or the value thereof in money.

Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789
TUESDAY, JULY 25, 1780

A report from the Board of War was read; Whereupon,

At a Board of War, July 24, 1780

Present Col. Pickering, Mr. Peters, Col. Grayson, Genl. Scott, Genl. Ward
The board having received information that Margaret Corbin (for whom Congress made provision in their act of July 6, 1779 for her gallant conduct in serving a piece of artillery when her husband was killed by her side) still remains in a deplorable situation in consequence of her wound, by which she is deprived
of the use of one arm, and is in other respects much disabled and probably will continue a cripple during her life, Beg leave to report
Resolved, That Margaret Corbin receive annually, during her natural life, one compleat suit of cloaths out of the public stores, or the value thereof in money, in addition to the provision made for her by the act of Congress of July 6, 1779.

[Note 2: 2 This report is in the Papers of the Continental Congress, No. 147, IV, folio 460.]

Sources:
“Margaret Corbin Circle,” Your Park, New York City Department of Parks & Recreation, http://www.nycgovparks.org/sub_your_park/historical_signs/hs_historical_sign.php?id=11275
