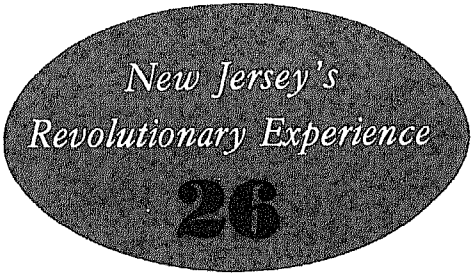

Fortunes of War: New Jersey Women and the American Revolution

LINDA GRANT DePAUW

New Jersey Historical Commission

NEW JERSEY'S REVOLUTIONARY EXPERIENCE

Larry R. Gerlach, *Editor*

This series of publications is dedicated to the memory of Alfred E. Driscoll, governor of New Jersey from 1947 to 1954, in grateful tribute to his lifelong support of the study and teaching of the history of New Jersey and the United States. He was a member of the New Jersey Historical Commission from 1970 until his death on March 9, 1975.

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Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
De Pauw, Linda Grant.
Fortunes of war: New Jersey women and the American Revolution.
(New Jersey's Revolutionary experience; no. 26)
Bibliography: p.
SUMMARY: Discusses the circumstances of New Jersey women in Revolutionary times, particularly the extent to which their lives were affected by the men's enlistment in the army and the presence of British troops.
1. United States—History—Revolution, 1775-1783—women. 2. Women—New Jersey. 3. New Jersey—History—Revolution, 1775-1783. [1. United States—History—Revolution, 1775-1783—women. 2. Women—New Jersey.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
3. New Jersey—History—Revolution, 1775-1783] I. New Jersey Historical Commission. II. Title. III. Series.
E263.N5N78 no. 26 [E276] 973.3'15'042 76-8930

Price: $.50

Designed by Peggy Lewis and Lee R. Parks
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PUBLISHED WITH A GRANT FROM

THE NEW JERSEY AMERICAN REVOLUTION BICENTENNIAL CELEBRATION COMMISSION

Foreword

New Jersey's Revolutionary Experience is a Bicentennial pamphlet series published by the New Jersey Historical Commission with a grant from the New Jersey Bicentennial Commission. The twenty-six numbers and two teachers' guides are intended to acquaint secondary school students and the general public with the state's history during the era of the American Revolution. Some titles treat aspects of the Revolution in New Jersey, while others show how important themes of the colonial period developed during the revolutionary years; some bring together the results of existing scholarship, while others present the findings of original research; some are written by professional historians, and others by laymen whose investigations of Jersey history exceed avocation. Because the series is directed to a general audience, the pamphlets have no footnotes but contain bibliographical essays which offer suggestions for further reading.

New Jersey's Revolutionary Experience is the product of a cooperative venture by numerous individuals and agencies. On my behalf and that of the pamphlets' readers, I accord recognition and appreciation to the individual authors for their contributions to New Jersey history, to the New Jersey American Revolution Bicentennial Celebration Commission and the New Jersey Historical Commission for their support of the project, to Hank Simon, president, Trentypo, Inc., for his invaluable suggestions and cooperation in producing the series, and to the staff of the Historical Commission: Richard Waldron, Public Programs Coordinator, who as project director supervised the series from commencement to completion; Peggy Lewis, Chief of Publications and Information, and Lee R. Parks, Assistant Editor, who edited and designed each number; and William C. Wright, Associate Director, who contributed valuable suggestions at every stage of production.

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Cartoon published in England in 1775 expressing some of the difficulties encountered by soldiers' wives during the American Revolution. Courtesy Chicago Historical Society.

"Patriotism in the female Sex," wrote Abigail Adams "is the most disinterested of all virtues." When compared to their daughters, grandaughters, and great-grandaughters, the women of eighteenth century America enjoyed a good deal of social, economic, and even political freedom. Nevertheless, the customs and laws that supported the patriarchal family placed firm limits on what women could achieve in American society. Married women had no legal control over their property. Unmarried women—"old maids"—oftentimes were subject to ridicule or pity, and rarely achieved economic success without the help of a husband, father or brother. They could hold only the meanest public offices—sexton, jailkeeper or, at best, public printer. Under such circumstances why should women care who ruled the country? In the colony of New Jersey from 1775 on, women cared very much. They cared because they experienced the war directly, and because they cared they participated fully in the struggle for independence.

At the time of the Revolution, New Jersey was overwhelmingly rural. The largest town, Elizabethtown (modern Elizabeth), had only twelve hundred inhabitants in 1775. Consequently New Jersey women were free from many social restrictions imposed by an urban environment. No one expected them to be "ladies" in the sense of adhering to social rituals. Unless a woman was making a trip to New York or Philadelphia she dressed comfortably rather than fashionably. The informality of clothing worn by prosperous and respectable farm women suprised visitors to the colony. In Bergen County, which was settled largely by the Dutch, women followed the Dutch fashion and wore skirts that reached only to mid-calf and frequently revealed brightly colored stockings. They wore quilted petticoats and heavy shoes in the winter but dispensed with

both in warm weather. Women also displayed petticoats in a pile in the parlor, for they could not resist showing off their needlework.

A missionary who traveled in New Jersey before the Revolution was surprised to find the women of Perth Amboy busy sewing and spinning while clothed only in their shifts. Having settled themselves in a cool entry hall, mothers and daughters sat at their work "like Minerva and her nymphs, without headdress, gowns, shoes, or stockings." In Salem and Gloucester counties, a Swedish clergyman was astonished at the total absence of artificiality in the behaviour of women from families of "wealth and reputation." Not only did he often find "the mistress and the young ladies barefooted at the coffee table," but when he was ready to ride away one of the women was often "courteous enough to bridle my horse and hold the stirrup."

Women did not know merely how to bridle horses, they also rode. Europeans were amazed by the freedom with which women traveled without a male escort. If they acquired an escort it was for the pleasure of his company rather than a need for protection. Two young girls who lived in the Raritan Valley described a pleasure jaunt between Perth Amboy and Lebanon, through Somerville and Quibbletown (modern New Market). They set out on one horse, apparently not the youngest on the farm. He found it "most agreeable" to be ridden at a "slow gate" and the girls had to give him a half hour to rest at the foot of every hill. At lunchtime they stopped at a tavern where they ordered some oats for the horse and some milk punch for themselves. On their return at the end of the day, they met a "courteous Knight Errant" outside Quibbletown who rode with them back to Amboy.

Women felt equally free making long journeys by stage without male companions. A young Quaker girl named Hannah Callender traveled across New Jersey in 1759 with another woman, Anna Pole. The fifty-mile journey from Burlington to Amboy took one day, from four in the morning to six in the evening. Hannah declared that she and her companion were only "slightly tired" by the trip but noted that the noise and carousing in the lodging house at Amboy did not keep them awake. Even during the war when travel could be extremely hazardous, women traveled by themselves even through enemy lines. Mrs. Margaret Morris of Burlington and her friend Nancy boldly traveled to British-occupied Philadelphia and back in a small cart pulled by one horse. They called for male

assistance only once when the cart's "swingletree" broke. (A swingletree is the crossbar to which the traces of a horse's harness are fastened.) A man from a nearby farmhouse, Mrs. Morris reported was able to use "Nancy's ribbons and my garters" to repair their vehicle.

Although married women could not hold legal title to property in revolutionary America, women were deeply involved in all productive activities of the time. With their husbands' permission, wives could engage in any kind of business activity, and widows commonly took charge of the family business when their husbands died. Eighteenth century newspapers carried advertisements from women who ran shops or taverns or owned mills or iron forges. The overwhelming majority of New Jersey women, however, like the overwhelming majority of New Jersey men, made their living on small farms. The most widespread industrial activity in colonial New Jersey involved household production of cloth, the customary occupation of farm women. By the middle of the eighteenth century New Jersey women were making all the cloth their families needed and trading the surplus with traveling peddlers or at country stores. Despite the modern tendency to romanticize the spinning wheel and the loom, the production of wool and linen cloth was not pleasure but necessity for colonial women. The work was physically hard and enormously tedious. Constant work at the large variety of household chores necessary in a preindustrial age gave the farm women of early New Jersey the muscular strength to deal with any task. They could relieve the tedium of their work by doing it in company.

The operations involved in the production of cloth were not the only unpleasant and boring ones on a colonial farm. The work at hand might vary with the season, but it was almost always repititious and physically exhausting. Farm families in all parts of New Jersey soon discovered that many chores could become the excuse for a party, and "frolics" of various sorts were popular from an early date. Men's work in the fields provided an excuse for harvest frolics, apple-butter bees, butchering frolics, and even "dung frolics" to clean out a barnyard. Women's work provided an excuse for spinning bees, quilting bees, and fulling frolics. (Fulling is the process of shrinking the cloth after it is woven but before it is cut to make a garment.) The participants in a fulling frolic took off their shoes and stockings and passed a length of cloth around in a large

tub between their bare feet. A frolic required the presence of both sexes. Carrying the yarn at a spinning frolic earned young men the right to a good supper and all the hard cider they could drink. Young women justified dancing away an evening at a harvest frolic by preparing food for the workers and, occasionally, by participating in the team reaping competitions in the field. A ninety-seven year old Hunterdon County woman who was interviewed in 1869 was asked whether young men attended quilting and spinning bees when she was a girl. She replied decisively that "there could be no frolic where there were no men."

In addition to frolics, however, women held group meetings which excluded men. Neighborhood women formed what was called a "circle" and met regularly, each woman bringing her spinning wheel, knitting, or sewing and enjoying the company and conversation of the others as they worked. Because women's letters to each other, where such matters are most likely to be mentioned, have not been preserved with the same care as their husbands' papers, it is difficult to learn what was discussed in women's circles. Furthermore, since paper and ink were expensive, many women who could read and spell could not manage a quill pen well enough to write even their names. And since there were no newspapers published in New Jersey until the end of 1777, reports of women's activities in the state must be searched for in Philadelphia or New York City papers. Nevertheless, available evidence indicates that New Jersey women took their circles seriously. They were not devoted to frivolous gossip but often concerned with such practical matters as diagnosis and treatment of illnesses, for women normally served as doctors and midwives for their families and to neighbors. Women's circles also functioned as political organizations which could exert some influence in public affairs even though their members were disqualified from voting and running for elective office.

The first women's organization known to have held regular business meetings was meeting in Burlington, New Jersey, in 1681. There is, however, no record of just what their "business" was. The spinning that usually accompanied a meeting of women was itself recognized as potentially political activity. Since cloth was Great Britain's most important export in the colonial era, the work of women directed to making their country self-sufficient put economic pressure on the mother country. During the

prerevolutionary period women in all parts of America viewed spinning as an expression of patriotism. In 1768 a traveler in New Jersey noted that "at another gentleman's house where I was, his lady was spinning fast, and had five clever girls spinning along with her ever since they heard that the Boston Parliament was dissolved." In the same decade women's associations in Salem County called on "patriotic females throughout the union to enter immediately upon the business of domestic manufactures by plying the spinning wheel and the loom."

New York and Philadelphia newspapers publicized support of nonimportation movements. It was a type of political activity in which the women's circles acted for the same goals as men's organizations. Yet it seems probable that women's organizations often spent time discussing political issues of unique importance to their sex. The editor of the *New-York Gazette* considered a glimpse at what appears to be the action of a women's circle in Elizabethtown sufficiently amusing to bear reporting. He had heard reports of "an odd Sect of People" who wore women's clothing, blackened their faces as a disguise and operated under the name of Regulars in the vicinity of Elizabethtown. This group went "in the Evening to the houses of such as are reported to beat their Wives; where one of them entering in first seizes the Delinquent, while the rest follow, strip him, turn up his Posteriors, and flog him with Rods most severely, crying out all the Time, Wo to the Men that beat their Wives." The editor assumes the members of this group must have been men in women's clothing. If so, they could hardly have identified those requiring discipline without the cooperation of women. Women's mobs, however, were not uncommon in other colonies, and it seems probable that a female mob made wife-beaters in New Jersey its target. The New York editor believed the actions of the Regulars effective in preventing husbands from physically assaulting their wives: "It seems that several Persons . . . (and tis said some very deservedly) have undergone the Discipline, to no small Terror of others, who are any Way conscious of deserving the same Punishment."

Although women who were abused by their husbands in colonial New Jersey may occasionally have found some aid or, at least, psychological comfort from the members of their "circle," the use of such groups for feminist political purposes was rare. Women in eighteenth century America accepted male superiority as

necessary for the preservation of human civilization. The egalitarian and even, occasionally, matriarchal practices of African slaves or Indians were seen as signs of barbarism. White women were convinced that God had intended men to be masters over their wives and children as well as their servants and slaves. Such social arrangements were tolerable if the master loved and respected the members of his extended "family." But if he had a bad temper or a sadistic streak, wives —like servants and slaves—had no relief but to run away. For a woman in colonial New Jersey divorce was virtually impossible to obtain. The New York and Pennsylvania newspapers, as well as those of New Jersey, after some were founded there, carried many advertisements for runaway wives.

The ideology of the American Revolution would appear to imply an attack on all forms of human inequality. Before the end of the eighteenth century, however, few saw the relevance of the revolutionary principles to the status of women. One of the few was Tom Paine, an intellectual leader in both the American and the French Revolutions. Sensitive to all forms of human oppression, Tom Paine wrote in August 1775,

> even in countries where they may be esteemed the most happy, constrained in their desires in the disposal of their goods, robbed of freedom and will by the laws, the slaves of opinion, which rules them with absolute sway and construes the slightest appearances into guilt; surrounded on all sides by judges who are at once tyrants and their seducers ... Who does not feel for the tender sex?

New Jersey women, however, did not express such sentiments in public on the eve of the Revolution.

When violence broke out, the people of New Jersey had had no serious direct confrontations with English authority. The controversial trade regulations had no immediate impact in the colony since it lacked a major port. The literate population of New Jersey, both male and female, followed the developing tension in the newspapers of New York and Pennsylvania and generally supported the American views. Women's circles occasionally went on record in support of the boycott on tea or other British goods. Since New Jersey wives and daughters, however, had no personal property interests or individual liberties to protect, some felt little personal involvement in the issues discussed in the newspapers. Thus Jemima Condict, a teen-aged farm girl living northwest of

Newark wrote in her diary in 1774: "It seems we have troublesome times a coming, for there is great disturbance abroad in the earth and they say it is tea that caused it. So then if they will quarrel about such a trifling thing as that, what must we expect but war." Many of the inhabitants of New Jersey were Quakers and opposed the use of force in any dispute, no matter how just the cause. Quaker women might join religious conviction to political indifference and assume a moral superiority to both sides upon learning that the issues between America and the mother country were to be resolved by war. Margaret Morris always identified the Continental forces as "our" army. Nevertheless, she did not identify an American victory as her cause. Rather she looked forward to "the desirable period when the now contending parties shall shake hands, and all be friends once more; this is the height of my politics, and the wish of my heart."

If the armies had remained in Massachusetts, the majority of New Jersey's inhabitants would undoubtedly have remained uninvolved for the duration. But when the armies moved into New Jersey in 1776 it was impossible to avoid involvement. The inhabitants were forced to choose. They could support the patriots or the Loyalists or choose the most difficult position of all —pacifistic neutrality. As hostilities grew increasingly bitter, however, a display of friendship and support for both sides in the conflict could only arouse suspicion and resentment.

A considerable body of scholarship has been devoted to explaining why and how Americans chose their political postures during the revolutionary crisis. All of these studies, however, assume women's views to be either identical to those of their male relatives or else devoid of any influence or significance. Yet the events of the war did not operate on women exactly as they operated on men, and since females made up approximately half the population their reactions to the war can hardly be dismissed as unimportant.

The divisions that the Revolution introduced into families were recognized at the time as among the bitterest hardships Americans had to bear. Pastor Nicholas Collin wrote sorrowfully from Swedesboro, "everywhere distrust, fear, hatred and abominable selfishness were met with. Parents and children, brothers and sisters, wife and husband, were enemies to one another." The wife of patriot Captain William Howard urged her Loyalist views on him so vigorously that in an attempt to maintain political unity in the

family he had the motto, "No Tory talk here," painted over the fireplace. When a husband departed for military service, many women seized the opportunity to reverse their political allegience. Thus Mrs. Theodosia Bartow Prevost of Paramus, the wife of a British officer, cultivated patriot friends when her husband was away. She was so helpful to them during the British invasion of the state that Robert Morris, the chief justice of New Jersey, intervened to prevent confiscation of her property. Since her property legally belonged to her husband, and he was loyal, it might otherwise have been taken from her despite her own patriot allegience. Before the end of the war, at the age of thirty-six, Mrs. Prevost became a widow and promptly married a patriot officer ten years her junior: Aaron Burr. Less prominent women sometimes had difficulty establishing their own political posture and so were attacked in error by those on the same side. A woman near Trenton who was known as "a Strong Whig" had a husband who left home to join the Loyalist militia. She had good reason to hate the British since her own father had been so severely plundered by British troops that he was left without blankets to keep him warm "and so got cold, fell sick and dyed." Yet she herself was plundered by a party of Whig militia who decided to punish the wife for her husband's politics.

The women of revolutionary New Jersey were more vulnerable than the men. Especially when left alone on the farm with small children, they could not afford the luxury of taking a stand for some abstract principle or even for a concrete long-term advantage. They directed their political actions toward insuring their own day-to-day survival. In the catastrophic confusion of war it was difficult to judge the most prudent line of conduct. Women did the best they could.

The problems the Revolution posed for New Jersey women differed from those faced by the general officers of armies, royal officials in London, or members of the Continental Congress. No matter which side they favored in the war, women were generally reluctant to have their sons and husbands enlist. Both British and American officers blamed women for causing desertions. Women did not want their men engaged in military maneuvers many miles away. They wanted them plowing the fields, bringing in crops, and chopping firewood for the winter. The shortage of labor in preindustrial America made it impossible for women, already fully employed with farm chores, to take over men's work as well without

bringing real hardship on the family. If troops of any sort were in the neighborhood and demanded to be quartered or supplied with food and forage, the family might come close to actual starvation. Women writing to absent husbands constantly begged them to come home, and some even visited army camps to urge them to return. Widows would encourage soldiers quartered in the neighborhood to desert and become husbands. Some women went so far as to ransom Hessian soldiers from American prisons so that they might marry them. People living in New Jersey cared relatively little about military defeats and victories in such remote places as Saratoga and Yorktown, which touched them only indirectly and which they could not influence. They had more immediate worries. They cared about epidemics of smallpox, dysentery, and other unidentifiable diseases carried by sickly soldiers left quartered on the inhabitants when the armies passed through. They cared about the food, firewood, and forage consumed by large numbers of men demanding to purchase what was barely enough to fill the families' needs and often stealing what farmwives refused to sell. They worried about terrorist acts of burning, pilage, and murder that neither a strong political position or a studious disinterest in politics could insure against. Lastly, they worried about politically motivated rape. How to avoid these misfortunes or how to survive in spite of them were the strategic and tactical problems that the Revolution required New Jersey women to solve.

Unless they involve the rich and powerful, personal tragedies seem to be beneath the attention of serious historians. Military actions that involved only a few people, none of whom were "important," appear trivial or even comic. Since women's participation in the Revolution was usually in such small engagements, it has been difficult for historians to consider their activity as "real" history. Indeed, for a generation or more after the Revolution, the memory of women's activities was preserved only as oral tradition. Most of it was recorded by descendants of individual women in the nineteenth century. Since the nineteenth century women had adopted a role of gentility quite at variance with that of the physically strong and independent women of the colonial era, their admiration of a female ancestor who surprised a Hessian soldier and locked him in her ice house or who fired a musket to frighten off a militiaman who was trying to steal the chickens seems vastly disproportionate. The true significance of such actions

becomes apparent only when we consider each story of personal heroism or tragedy as typical of hundreds that occurred during the war in all parts of New Jersey. Then it becomes clear that most of the fighting and a good deal of the suffering and dying of the revolutionary war occurred in civilian farm houses, not on major battlefields.

"No other state," writes historian Richard P. McCormick, "so generally and continuously felt the impact of the struggle for independence [as New Jersey]." From the fall of 1776 when Washington's army fled across the state with British and Hessian troops in pursuit until the end of the war, violence was continual in New Jersey. Washington's army wintered in the state three times, each time sending foraging parties into the surrounding countryside to meet its needs and during the winter at Valley Forge, they scavenged neighboring counties in New Jersey and Pennsylvania for provisions. Although the state itself contained no important strategic center, its position between New York City and Philadelphia caused it to be crossed and recrossed constantly by the major armies as well as by countless small military parties on special missions.

Those unfortunate enough to live near one of the major roads between the two cities were constantly pressed to supply the needs of one party of soldiers or another. The little town of Middlebrook (modern Bound Brook) on the Raritan was sadly altered by being forced constantly to host the military. By 1779 the American Colonel Israel Shreve requested General Washington to allow his troops to halt somewhere else because Middlebrook had become "so very dirty" and had "Such a Number of Dram Shops." The constant coming and going of troops of both sides presented a considerable political challenge to the inhabitants of the town. Too much friendliness with those quartered in the house today might bring retaliation from their opposite numbers seeking quarters tomorrow. Baroness Friederike Charlotte Luise von Riedesel, wife of the chief Hessian officer in America, accompanied her husband throughout the war and passed through Middlebrook several times. She was horrified at the ease with which the pragmatic Van Horne family shifted its politics from day to day. The first night she stayed with them they announced their loyalty to the king and asked the baroness to give their regards to British General Charles Cornwallis. Three days later, when the baroness was back in Middlebrook, she

found a number of American officers, including one of George Washington's nephews, already lodging with the Van Hornes. The daughter of the house, aware she could not please both the American officers and the baroness, decided to continue friendly relations with the Americans. "She allowed [them] all sorts of liberties," the baroness observed, and even worse sat up most of the night with them singing "God save great Washington! God damn the King!" "It was difficult," said the baroness, "for me to conceal my annoyance about this when we departed next morning." But the next time she passed the Van Horne's home in her carriage, they came out to greet her smiling and asking her to give regards "to the King and assure him of their loyalty."

A number of well-known battles were fought in New Jersey, those, for example, of Trenton, Princeton, and Monmouth. But minor skirmishes, raids, and campaigns of terror by irregular military forces on both sides did greater damage. These actions reflected a civil war in the state, a constant escalation of retaliation between neighbors who based their hostility more on personal resentments than on abstract political conviction. Precisely because they were too minor to engage the attention of high ranking officers and because they involved neighbors and former friends, irregular actions were much more horrible for the civilian population than the formal engagements of regular armies. Both armies punished soldiers who abused innocent noncombatants, but military discipline could not be enforced on bands of irregulars. Furthermore, since individual grievances, not a large strategic plan, dictated the operations of the irregulars such raids ravaged even areas of negligible military significance. In March 1778 Israel Shreve wrote to George Washington from New Jersey, "This Country is in a miserable Situation the inhabitants afraid of every person they see."

When fighting in a neighborhood took the form of actions of personal revenge and retaliation there was little to choose between bands of rebels and Tories. Those who took part in the feud did so without reference to questions of international politics. Acts of terror, wanton destructiveness and cruelty, however, were not entirely confined to gangs of irregulars. Despite officer's attempts to prevent such actions, the British troops behaved so viciously toward civilians when they entered New Jersey in 1776 that most of the population that had been neutral or even favorable toward the king's cause turned patriot. Both patriot and Loyalist sources agree

on this point. Although it was never pleasant for civilians to have an army in the neighborhood, hardships imposed by American forces were less likely to be resented. Americans confiscated civilian property only in case of desperate need, and they tried to limit themselves as long as possible to the property of active Loyalists. Those who had hoped to avoid trouble by refusing to involve themselves with the rebellious patriots, however, discovered to their horror that the British plundered neutrals and Loyalists as well as active patriots. They seemed to be unable or unwilling to distinguish between one American and another. They waged a campaign of destruction, deliberately destroying food and other goods they did not want or could not use. They did not merely steal fruit; they cut down the trees. They killed farm animals and left the meat to rot. Their brutality toward women and conscientious pacifists who had tried to stay out of politics and had done nothing actively to aid the king's enemies, persuaded the majority of New Jersey's population that personal safety was possible only if the patriots prevailed. The British could not or would not protect them. While the Americans sometimes made mistakes, they generally avoided causing unnecessary hardship to their friends. Charles Stedman, who published a history of the Revolution in London in 1794, explained that a large part of the New Jersey population was "well affected" toward the British before the invasion of the state. "But when the people found that the promised protection was not afforded them; that their property was seized, and most wantonly destroyed; that, in many instances, their families were insulted, stripped of their beds—nay, even of their very wearing apparel; they then determined to try the other side." Stedman also added, "it is but justice to say that the Americans never took anything from their friends, but in cases of necessity; in which cases they uniformly gave receipts . . . always living, as long as they could, upon their enemies; and never suffering their troops to plunder their friends with impunity." It took the British more than a year, however, to realize that their indiscriminate pillaging and plundering was not frightening the rebels into loyalty but actually strengthening the patriot cause. By then it was too late.

The Americans, on the other hand, immediately recognized the political value of the excesses committed by British troops. Patriot newspapers and pamphlets publicized notorious cases, the Continental Congress undertook an investigation, and General

Washington arranged "to take the depositions of people in different parts of the Province of New Jersey, who have been plundered, after having taken protection and Subscribed the Declaration [of loyalty to the king]."

The experiences of a few individuals reflect those of hundreds. At the time of the battle of Trenton, in December 1776, a company of British regulars was quartered at the farmhouse of William Clark. They filled most of the house except one bedroom. One day, when Clark was away from home, a second company of regulars commanded by a captain of "an Overgrown Size and Terrifying Countenance and with Insolence equal if not Superior to the huge bulk of his body" appeared and demanded that Mrs. Clark provide him with a room. When she explained that they had only their own room left, the captain began to curse her. She was well advanced in pregnancy at the time, and the captain "Went on so Horribly with his Threats oaths and curses That he so Affrightened the poor Woman that she fell into a violent disorder and soon after Miscarryed." While she was still in bed recovering from this event, still another party of British regulars arrived at the farm. While one group called her husband out of the house "to ask him some Impertinent Questions," others forced their way into the house and took possession of the cloak the sick woman in bed wore to cover herself. When she protested "one of them swore that if the Dam'd Rebel Bitch said a word more he Would run his bayonet threw her heart." They went on to plunder everything of value in the house and then began to run their bayonets through the woman's feather bed declaring "that there was Rebels that was hid under it, but damn them they would fetch them out." This behaviour especially shocked those who heard of it because the Clarks were not active patriots. Indeed, their home had quartered British troops, and at the time of the incident a number of wounded regulars were bedded down on straw in the next room.

Reports of similar incidents continued to the last year of the war. One of the most shocking stories circulating among the patriots involved Mrs. Hannah Ogden Caldwell of Connecticut Farms, New Jersey (now the town of Union). Her husband, who was a clergyman in Elizabethtown's First Presbyterian Church, was also a chaplain for New Jersey troops. In June 1780 the Reverend Caldwell was away with the army when British and Hessian troops passed through Connecticut Farms, pillaging, burning homes, and firing on

civilians as they came. Mrs. Caldwell tried to hide some of the family's most valuable possessions in the well and filled her pockets with jewelry. Then she took her children into a back bedroom. She was sucling the youngest when the British passed by. It was said that one soldier broke from the ranks and deliberately fired through the bedroom window killing the mother and shattering glass against the face of one daughter. While the officers remained silent soldiers broke in the back door and looted the house before burning it. Although some claimed Mrs. Caldwell's death was wholly accidental, Rev. Caldwell was convinced that his wife had been deliberately murdered. She was killed, he believed, to punish him for his association with the American army. Before they left the little town, nine other homes had been burned as had the meetinghouse, the parsonage, the schoolhouse, a variety of barns, sheds, bee houses and shops. Soldiers had cut down four hundred apple trees belonging to widow Clark and terrified countless numbers of women and children whose men were off with the militia. An American officer who arrived shortly after the British withdrew came across a young girl who told him she had been raped by seven or eight different English officers. She could speak only "in broken accents of the most excessive grief" saying "that she was ruined and wished never again to be spoken to."

Of all the outrages committed by British troops, their practice of raping girls and women aroused the greatest resentment. In December 1776 Adam Stephen wrote to Thomas Jefferson, "the enemy like locusts sweep the Jerseys with the besom of destruction. They to the disgrace of a civilis'd nation ravish the fair sex from the age of ten to seventy." A month later Thomas Nelson wrote to the same correspondent, "They play the very devil with the girls and even old women to satisfy their libidinous appetites. There is scarcely a virgin to be found in the part of the country they have pass'd thro'." The vast number of charges of rape against British soldiers and the absence of such charges against Americans might make one suspect that most of it was mere wartime propaganda. Yet if most of the charges were untrue, one wonders why patriot newspapers had so many detailed stories to tell while newspapers controlled by Loyalists have none. It is the usual practice in wartime for newspapers to print atrocity stories on even the slimmest evidence in order to impress their readers with the righteousness of the conflict by exaggerating the evil of the enemy. Even more

persuasive is the absence of rape charges in the petitions to the crown submitted by Loyalist women after the war. They tell of having their clothing stolen and being turned out of doors naked, yet they do not claim to have been raped even though it would have advanced their petitions to have done so. On the other hand there exist numerous affadavits, made under oath, by women who claimed to have been raped by British soldiers.

On March 22, 1777, one justice of the peace in Hunterdon County took depositions from six such women for the use of a congressional investigating committee. The youngest woman was only thirteen. She swore "on the Holy Evangelists of Almighty God" to events that had taken place at her grandfather's house the prior December. "A great number of Soldiers Belonging to the British Army came there," she declared. One of them said,

> I want to speak with you in the next Room & She told him she wou'd not go with him, when he seiz'd hold of her & draged her into a back Room, and she Scream'd & beged of him to let her alone, but Some of Said Soldiers Said they would knock her Eyes out if She did not hold her Tongue, her GrandFather also, & Aunt, Intreated & plead for her telling them how Cruel & what a shame it was to Use a Girl of that Age after that manner, but they was Deaf to their Intreaties, finally three of Said Soldiers Ravished her and Likwise the next Day & so on for three Days succesively, Divers Soldiers wou'd come to the House, & Treat her in the Same manner . . .

Another woman who gave a deposition the same day had been raped by two soldiers before she could escape from the house and then found her ten-year old daughter in the barn with five or six others.

Great as the number of rapes reported was, it is almost certain that a still greater number went unreported. An old man who recorded some of the atrocities committed by British and Hessians in the vicinity of Trenton and Princeton in December 1776 withheld the names of rape victims. Although he admitted that it was "a Great Defect in Human Nature that is against both Justice and Reason" he noted as fact that "we Despise these poor Innocent Sufferers in this Brutal Crime Even as long as they live." As a consequence, he believed "many honest virtuous women have suffered in this Manner and kept it Secret for fear of making their lives misserable." Probably the same consideration motivated

Benjamin Franklin to intervene to prevent the distribution of the congressional committee report on British atrocities. The committee members noted that they had

> authentic information of many instances of the most indecent treatment, and actual ravishment of married and single women; but such is the nature of that most irreparable injury that the persons suffering it, though perfectly innocent, look upon it as a kind of reproach to have the facts related and their names known.

In contrast to the British armies, the women on New Jersey farms might find the American soldiers a nuisance, but they did not fear them. Note, for instance, the encounter of a party of American soldiers with a young woman they met on the road to Lawrenceville (which then bore the suggestive name of Maidenhead) in 1782. The corporal in charge, who recorded the incident,

> very innocently inquired of her how far it was to Maidenhead. She answered, "Five miles." One of my men who, though young, did not stand in very imminent danger of being hanged for his beauty, observed to the young lady, "that he thought the commodity scarce in the market, since he had to go so far to seek it." "Don't trouble yourself," she said, "about that, there is no danger of its being more scarce on your account".

The women of colonial New Jersey were not prudes. Indeed in the frontier areas of the state such as Salem, Gloucester, and Cumberland counties sexual relations were remarkably informal. As the incident just described indicates, however, women felt confident that they would not be "ruined" by an American soldier against their wills.

Most—perhaps 90 percent—of the American army consisted of teenaged boys. They had the appetites common in that age group and were almost always on short rations. In the winter, the main body of the army was usually in a camp. But when it was on the move or when small parties were on special expeditions it was expected that they would be quartered in civilian homes. Together with their large appetites, the American soldiers brought dirt, lice, and often some infectious disease. A woman who quartered a party of American soldiers near Connecticut Farms in 1782 embarassed both the soldiers and her own sons as she discoursed on the hardships of the military life. "She lamented

much that we had no mothers nor sisters to take care of us," reported one of the visitors. "She said she knew what it was, in a measure, to endure the fatigues and hardships of a camp, by the sufferings her sons had undergone in the drafted militia. They had told her how they had suffered hunger and cold, and, to cap all, said she, they came home ragged, dirty, and lousy as beggars."

Although American soldiers did not wantonly destroy property, they could not always be prevented from engaging in petty theft. When they were hungry and resentful at the failure of the civilians to pay or feed them, they did steal. Nathanael Greene explained the difficulty of maintaining discipline among his troops in Bergen County in an August 1780 letter to George Washington: "The soldiers will find occasions to pilfer, however watched by the officer. It is impossible to exclude every practice of this nature. All the officer can do in this case is to punish the offender when discovered and restore the goods. This was done in every instance; and one of the soldiers was hanged on the spot." Civilians could hardly have been pleased at thefts from their orchards and barnyards as lines of hungry young men passed through the neighborhood. But such thefts certainly did not arouse the same sort of resentment as the indiscriminate ravages of the British. A soldier from Connecticut described the attitude of some Mount Holly women as he provided himself with an unauthorized breakfast one morning in 1777:

> We arrived early in the morning at a pretty village called Milltown or Mount Holly . . . I was as near starved with hunger as ever I wish to be . . . I obtained a piece of an ear of Indian corn, and seating myself on a pile of boards, began throwing the corn to the fowl which soon drew a fine battalion of them about me. I might have taken as many as I pleased, but I took up one only, wrung off its head, dressed and washed it in the stream . . . and stalked into the first house that fell in my way, invited myself into the kitchen, took down the gridiron and put my fowl to cooking upon the coals. The women of the house were all the time going and coming to and from the room. They looked at me but said nothing. "They asked me no questions and I told them no lies." When my game was sufficiently broiled I took it by the *hind* leg and made my exit from the house with as little ceremony as I had made my entrance. When I got into the street I devoured it after a *very* short grace.

Although this particular soldier's meal was certainly obtained through irregular channels, civilians were expected to endure a certain amount of foraging by the American army. Foraging involved the confiscation of civilian property needed by the troops. The army rarely had money to pay and when it did the money was nearly worthless Continental currency. Farm families were often left with promises to pay after the war. Nevertheless, civilians understood the necessity of foraging. Especially when the army demanding food and fodder was the one they favored politically they were willing to endure its requisitions. A soldier assigned to a party foraging for the troops quartered at Valley Forge during the winter of 1777-1778 later recalled, "I do not remember that during the time I was employed in this business, which was from Christmas to the latter part of April, ever to have met with the least resistance from the inhabitants, take what we would from their barns, mills, corncribs, or stalls." There was, however, one exception. New Jersey women would go to great lengths to prevent the army from requisitioning their horses. "When we got to their stables, then look out for the women," the soldier remembered. "Take what horses you would, it was one or the other's 'pony' and they had no other to ride to church." The women cherished the freedom of movement that their horses provided and they were so confident that American soldiers need not be feared that they would boldly resist a party of armed men. The old soldier remembered that

> when we had got possession of a horse we were sure to have half a dozen or more women pressing upon us, until by some means or other, if possible, they would slip the bridle from the horse's head, and then we might catch him again if we could. They would take no more notice of a charged bayonet than a blind horse would of a cocked pistol. It would answer no purpose to threaten to kill them with the bayonet or musket; they knew as well as we did that we would not put our threats in execution.

Of course, a party of soldiers did not have to resort to bayonets and muskets in order to overpower half a dozen women and they usually managed to confiscate the animals needed by the army. One of the best known stories of revolutionary New Jersey, however, involves young Tempe Wick of Jockey Hollow near Morristown who managed to save her horse from confiscation by a foraging party. The Continental army spent two winters encamped

at Morristown and on one of these occasions foragers met Tempe Wick on the road and demanded that she surrender the horse she was riding. Rather than obey, she broke away and galloped home. Realizing that she could not hide the horse in his stable, where he would be discovered, she led him through the back door of the house, through the kitchen and parlor, into the first floor bedroom, which was usually kept for guests. There he stayed, some say for three days, others say for three weeks, until the foragers gave up looking for him. The Wick house still stands at Morristown National Historical Park and visitors may see the room where Tempe Wick hid her horse.

The movements of British and American armies and of militia units on both sides solidified political attitudes among New Jersey women. Although some women's circles had been supporting the patriot cause actively even before war began, most women remained uninvolved until the war came to their neighborhoods. Then self-interest forced them to make a political choice. For most, prudence dictated alliance with the patriots. Where we have records of political activity by women's circles in New Jersey during the war, the activity was on the patriot side.

In 1780 Trenton women organized to raise funds to support the Continental army. They coordinated their activities with women's groups in other parts of New Jersey and raised more than $15,000 within a few weeks. This organization coordinated its activities with those of women's groups in other states under the national leadership of Esther De Berdt Reed of Philadelphia. Women's organizations in Maryland and Virginia also participated in the activity of what was known simply as "The Association," making it the largest women's organization in America before the nineteenth century.

In addition to group activity, New Jersey women participated in support of the patriot cause as individuals. Such support could take many forms, and its true extent will not be known until the women's letters in collections of colonial manuscripts are more thorougly studied. At present genealogists have practically monopolized the study of revolutionary women. Despite their valuable and painstaking scholarship, their method makes it difficult to determine how typical the activity of any individual woman may have been. It seems clear, however, that gathering and passing on intelligence was an important activity among patriot women. Unless a woman

was known to be actively engaged in espionage, she could often pass through enemy lines and even into their camps. Women peddlers selling small items needed by the soldiers were welcomed by those with money to buy. The common acceptance of women as people skilled in medical arts also helped them pass back and forth on missions of mercy.

Although the majority of New Jersey women probably came to favor the patriot cause after 1776, at least passively, the peculiarities of local circumstances still gave New Jersey a high proportion of active Loyalists among whom women were well represented. Loyalists driven from their homes by their patriot neighbors or the actions of American soldiers were glad to do all they could to support the British. As the practice of quartering allowed officers on both sides to board in a woman's home without comment, women had opportunities to obtain useful military information which they could easily exploit if they had an inclination to do so. In April of 1779, for instance, New Jersey Governor William Livingston received a report from Elizabethtown complaining of one Mrs. Chandler. "In the way of giving intelligence to the Enemy," wrote an American military officer,

> I think her the first in the place. Thare [sic] is not a Tory that passes in or out of New York or any other way, that is of consequence but what waits on Mrs. Chandler, and mostly all the British Officers going in and out on Parole, or Exchange, waits on her—in short she Governs the whole of the Torys and many of the Whigs.

Mrs. Elizabeth Skinner, unlike Mrs. Chandler, appears to have engaged in her intelligence activities without arousing any suspicion from the Americans. We learn only from a pension claim filed in England after the war how Mrs. Skinner had "kept up a Secret correspondence with her husband," who was a general in the New Jersey Volunteers, (a Loyalist militia unit), supplying him with what was certified to be "the most material intelligence of the designs & conduct of the enemy, that was received." A soldier who deserted the American army at Tappan and was helped to gain British lines by Loyalist refugees named Hart told how Mrs. Hart had given him a mass of military information to memorize while she hid him at her house.

Those women who held their political principles most fiercely

were apt to be those who had been forced from their homes by the actions of soldiers, whether regulars or militia. Some, of course, welcomed the disorder introduced by the armies. Some wives doubtless welcomed the opportunity to escape from husbands. Similarly the indentured servants and black slaves, of whom there were a great many in New Jersey, ran away in record numbers during the war, preferring to take their chances in a war-ravaged country rather than remain with their masters. Most of the women, however, who fled with their children from burning homes, were filled with bitterness toward whichever side they blamed for their misfortune. Since most of New Jersey was hostile to Loyalists, the plight of Loyalist refugees was harder than that of patriots. There were fewer places for a Loyalist to go. If she were fortunate, a Loyalist woman might have family or friends somewhere who would take her in. But unless they were wealthy enough to afford the presence of extra mouths and brave enough to risk patriot retaliation she would not be very welcome. If she had managed to save gold or jewelry before fleeing or if her husband were a high-ranking officer whose credit was good, she might take her family to New York City, the only place in America securely behind British lines for most of the war. But New York was an extremely expensive place to live. It was relatively small—only about a mile square—and the number of houses was sharply reduced by two serious wartime fires. Rents rose 400 percent during the war, and even the wealthy lived in crowded quarters. Prices of food and fuel also rose so high that even the wealthy Baroness von Riedesel worried about paying bills. Consequently, thousands of women made homeless by the war were forced to follow the British army. Some of these women were joining husbands whose decision to fight for England had left their families open to patriot reprisals. Others were widows or teenaged girls who clung to the British army as their only source of support and safety.

In May 1777, the British commissary general in New York City reported to his superiors that the women and children with the army there were "numerous beyond any Idea of imagination." As was the custom in the eighteenth century, a limited number of soldiers' wives accompanied the English, Irish and Hessian troops that were brought to America. But Loyalist refugees rapidly swelled this number. The commissary general reported in May 1777 that he was providing rations for 23,101 men, 2,776 women, and 1,904

children attached to English regiments and for 11,192 men, 381 women and an indeterminate number of children attached to the Hessians. As the war went on the proportion of women and children attached to the British forces steadily increased and had approximately doubled by the time fighting ended. In 1781 the Loyalist New Jersey Volunteers reported 179 women for its 582 men.

The women and children who attached themselves to the British army could not afford to stay behind in New York City or in any other camp when the army that provided their rations left. Of necessity, they had to move with the troops. Marching with the army was a great hardship, expecially for women who were pregnant or had several little children. At the time General John Burgoyne's army was captured at Saratoga, it was said that he had two thousand women with him. In order to avoid impeding the movement of the troops the British officers strictly forbade women's riding on the baggage carts. They also set a policy limiting the number of women who might be rationed in each company. The enormous number of women, with their children, who sought to attach themselves to the army was too great for the commissaries to feed. Although women were allowed only half and children quarter rations, the expense became considerable. Excess women found food as best they could. They did the officers' laundry, acted as nurses, were fed by the charity of soldiers, husbands or otherwise, and many were forced into theft or prostitution.

When General Sir Henry Clinton's force stopped at Haddonfield, New Jersey, on June 18, 1780, he ordered a count made of the women "actually with each Corps." He further ordered that the women were "to march upon the flanks of the Baggage of their respective Corps." A woman who disobeyed the order was flogged and drummed out of the army two weeks later. When the count was made Clinton ordered that rations be provided for only two women in each company—far fewer than the number who joined the army in its passage through New Jersey. It was no wonder that when the army passed through the countryside, the "baggage column," where the women marched, was especially active in pillaging the homes of civilians. Since many of these women were of local origin a thirst for revenge as well as need encouraged them to plunder. A witness described the pillaging of Piscataway, New Jersey:

> The men of the village had retired on the approach of the enemy. Some women and children were left. I heard their lamentations as the soldiers carried off their furniture, scattered the feathers of beds to the winds, and piled up looking glasses, with frying pans in the same heap, by the roadside. The soldier would place a female camp follower as a guard upon the spoil, while he returned to add to the treasure.

Items such as silk bonnets, cambric aprons, shifts, bombazine gowns, and quilted petticoats reported as taken by the British army doubtless went to the women as their share.

One can only speculate on the amount of prostitution among women attached to the British army. Certainly occupied New York City had an active red-light district and the soldiers there, unlike those attached to the American armies, had the cash to pay for such services. Among the women reported to have been raped by British armies, a substantial number of victims were taken to camp. Given the disgrace attached to having been "ruined" by a soldier, many such women may have remained in camp rather than attempting to return home. The British had different patterns of sexual mores than the Americans. In particular, it was considered entirely acceptable for a gentleman to have one or more mistresses. British officers with wives at home in England could pay well for the favors of a camp wife, and many of the women forced to attach themselves to the army were desperate enough to consider such a position desirable.

Certainly the situation of the British camp followers was pitiable. With the exception of mistresses and the few officers' wives such as the baroness von Riedesel, who had made the dangerous and uncomfortable sea voyage to America, the camp followers endured great hardship. The officers, who were gentlemen, considered common soldiers' wives even less deserving of humane treatment than the soldiers themselves, who were commonly drawn from the dregs of European society. They were moved with the army only as an afterthought, and their loss was considered of slight consequence. The report of the capture of a military convoy off Gibralter in 1782 laconically noted that "the baggage and the soldiers' wives" were the only loss. An American woman could hardly believe her eyes when she saw the degradation of the camp followers with Burgoyne's army:

> I never had the least Idea that the Creation produced such a sordid set of creatures in human Figure . . . great numbers of women, who seemed to be the beasts of burthen, having a bushel basket on their back, by which they were bent double, the contents seemed to be Pots and Kettles, various sorts of Furniture, children peeping thro' gridirons and other utensils, some very young Infants who were born on the road, the women barefeet, cloathed in dirty rags . . .

When this army was sent as prisoners across New Jersey in the winter of 1778, General Washington ordered that wagons be provided for the women and children.

Throughout the war patriot forces brought with them far fewer women than the British. Although the movements of British armies might make patriot women refugees, they found asylum more easily than Loyalists. Most of New Jersey was at least passively patriot. Only the destitute were likely to join the army. Women left alone on farms they could not work without help or those whose property had been destroyed might seek out the husband who had enlisted and join him in camp. General Washington understood the necessity of accepting the families of soldiers into camp. If the men felt their families were not provided for they might well desert. Consequently, substantial numbers of women and children accompanied the American armies, even though there were fewer American women than British. In August 1777 Washington complained, "the multitude of women . . . especially those who are pregnant, or have children, are a clog upon every movement."

Because Washington continued to provide rations for women and children in excess of the number authorized by Congress, they were less tempted by theft or prostitution. Indeed, prostitution was strikingly absent in American armies. There were, of course, many common-law marriages, as was the custom in the eighteenth century. But there was no promiscuity for pay. Indeed, American officers and men had no money to pay for nursing or laundry, and colonial society frowned on the British practice of keeping mistresses. Most women in the American camps were soldiers wives' or local women whose services to the troops were not sexual. Colonel Ebenezer Huntington, for example, wrote to his brother from Morristown: "I am now endeavoring to hire some Woman to live in Camp and to do the Washing for myself and some of the Officers, th'o I am aware that many Persons will tell the Story to my

disadvantage. But be that as it may, I am determin'd on it." Unfortunately, even officers usually had too little money to meet laundry bills, and the camp women had to settle for rations and the hope of something on the account when the army was paid.

Not merely the troops but also their wives felt the failure of Congress or the states to pay the soldiers. Husbands who had not received their wages could send nothing to wives left on the farm to struggle with a labor shortage and wartime prices. Wives serving with the army like their husbands, found their clothing growing ragged and their shoes wearing out. Women and children as well as men suffered in the camps at Valley Forge and Morristown. Indeed, when the Pennsylvania Line at Morristown revolted in 1781, the president of the Executive Council of Philadelphia suggested that more attention to the needs of soldiers' wives than to those of the soldiers themselves would improve morale. He suggested that "a new gown, silk handkerchief, and a pair of shoes, etc., would be but little expense, and I think as a present from the State would have more effect than ten times the same laid out in articles for the men."

When troops were in camp, the women foraged, nursed, laundered and did the domestic chores for themselves and their children that time allowed. In a camp at Hackensack early in the war, the women even managed to keep a few chickens and pigs. During combat they tended the wounded and carried water to swab out the cannons. The last activity made the name "Molly Pitcher" a generic term. It was given to heroines of a variety of folk memories and oral traditions symbolizing the hundreds of women who followed American armies during the Revolution.

The "Molly Pitcher" famous in New Jersey legend was a woman present at the battle of Monmouth. A good many women were on the field that day, and at least two were observed who went beyond the usual role assigned to camp women and handled weapons. Neither was referred to at the time as "Molly Pitcher"—that term was never used in print until 1859. Both, in fact, were anomymous. One, whose husband was killed was observed firing a musket. Another, whose husband received no injury, apparently served in one of the stations of a gun crew which normally required three men. The man who observed her activity was less impressed by her presence on the field—for many women were present—than he was by her coolness under fire:

MOLL PITCHER AT MONMOUTH.

The "Moll Pitcher" of the battle of Monmouth. Courtesy Library of Congress.

> A woman whose husband belonging 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.

Oral traditions and pension records give us glimpses of other women who passed from carrying water to handling weapons during various engagements. It is fruitless, however, to attempt to identify the "real" Molly Pitcher. She is both as real and as legendary as G.I. Joe. Toward the end of the nineteenth century one Mary McCauly began to be identified as the woman at the cannon at Monmouth, but there is no reason to believe that she was, in fact, the woman observed in the description quoted above.

Mary McCauly was typical of the soldiers' wives who followed their husbands during New Jersey campaigns. She came to camp out of economic necessity, and she remained a poor woman all of her life. For the typical soldier's wife, joining the troops was an act of desperation. In this, however, as in many other matters, wives of high-ranking officers differed greatly from their lower-class sisters. Generally, they remained with their husbands only while the army was in winter camp. Mrs. Washington presided over their "circle" where they knitted stockings, mended uniforms, and prepared home remedies for the sick. They and their children had food and shelter superior to that of privates' wives, and they even managed to enjoy some of the pleasures of aristocratic society during the winters at camp. During the winters spent at Middletown there were sleigh rides, dances, and dinner parties.

The commander in chief, who Mrs. Washington commonly called her "Old Man," greatly enjoyed these entertainments. Martha Washington very seldom danced, but often among her husband's partners were Lucy Knox (wife of artillery commander General Henry Knox) and Kitty Greene (wife of General Nathanael Greene). At a dance given by General Greene in March 1779, the host noted that "His Excellency and Mrs. Greene danced upwards of three hours without once sitting down. Upon the whole we had a pretty

little frisk." At a ball given by General Knox and several other officers, the commander in chief led the dancing with Lucy Knox, whose pregnancy increased her usual plumpness. General Knox was obviously pleased with the entertainment. "Everybody allowed it to be the first of the kind ever exhibited in this State at least. We had above seventy ladies, all of the first *ton* in the State, and between three and four hundred gentlemen. We danced all night—an elegant room ..." Washington sometimes unbent considerably on such occasions. The wife of the Virginia Colonel Theodorick Bland, who joined the Morristown camp in 1777, wrote to her sister-in-law that General Washington "can be downright impudent sometimes—such impudence, Fanny, as you and I like." What suited southern ladies, however, was not always appreciated by those from farther north. At Morristown in 1781, the general became involved in a "scuffle" with the wife of George Olney of Rhode Island. The story went around that "Mrs. Olney, in a violent rage, told him, if he did not let go her hand, she would tear out his Eyes, or the hair from his Head; and that tho' he was a General, he was but a Man."

When they made camp in New Jersey, the officers' ladies found few of the local women worthy of admittance to their circle. In an age of strong class consciousness, the country women of New Jersey, who had few pretentions to ladylike refinement, appeared, in the words of Mrs. Bland, to be "the errantest rustics you ever beheld." Mrs. Washington's attempt to make her visitors feel at home when a party of these "rustics" called on her was not entirely successful. "We thought we would visit Lady Washington," wrote a Morristown matron in 1777,

> and as she was said to be so grand a lady, we thought we must put on our best bibs and bands. So we dressed ourselves in our most elegant ruffles and silks, and were introduced to her ladyship. And don't you think we found her *knitting and with a specked apron on*! She received us very graciously, but after the compliments were over, she resumed her knitting. There we were without a stitch of work, and sitting in state, but General Washington's lady with her own hands was knitting stockings for herself and husband.

The democratic manner that Mrs. Washington attempted to cultivate at Morristown was certainly implied by the principles enunciated in the Declaration of Independence. Yet pragmatism

rather than principle was uppermost in the minds of most women who chose sides in the revolutionary war. Although the long-range impact of the Revolution worked toward egalitarianism, distinctions of class, race, and sex were far from disappearing at the conclusion of the War for Independence. Nevertheless a unique situation developed in the state of New Jersey after the war which, for a time, extended the revolutionary doctrines of political equality to some New Jersey women.

The right to vote in colonial America was granted only to property holders. Since married women could not hold legal title to property only that small percentage of the female population composed of wealthy widows and spinsters was even theoretically entitled to the franchise. Furthermore, the habit of deference to the leading personages in the neighborhood kept most men who qualified from going to the polls. The same custom generally discouraged even those few women who qualified in colonial times from attempting to cast a ballot. The emphasis revolutionary ideology placed on representation and the right to consent to laws, resulted in greater attention to restrictions on the franchise in state constitutions written after independence. The New Jersey constitution of 1776 allowed "all inhabitants" of the state to vote so long as they were over twenty-one, had been residents of New Jersey for a year, and owned £ 50 proclamation money (colonial currency) in property. This wording would include women and free blacks—classes of people deliberately excluded in other states. In a revision of the election law made in 1790, voters were referred to explicitly by the words "he or she." A second revision of the law in 1797 employed the same wording. Beginning in that year and for the following decade, New Jersey women appeared at the polls in substantial numbers.

It is significant that the franchise had been clearly extended to women for more than two decades before it attracted the attention of the newspapers or of politicians. Apparently, the politicians discovered it first. New Jersey elections had been notoriously corrupt ever since the Revolution. No fewer than seven elections were appealed to the state legislature between 1782 and 1788. In the election for the First Federal Congress in 1789 James Madison of Virginia felt impelled to remark on the "very singular manner" in which it was conducted, while Walter Rutherfurd declared, "poor Jersey is made a laughing stock of." The heart of the difficulty lay in

the system of election inspectors who decided which of the individuals presenting themselves at the polling place should be allowed to vote. The inspectors often were concerned more with the politics of those wishing to vote than they were with their qualifications. In the 1788 Hunterdon election, for example, such clearly unqualified voters as slaves, apprentice boys, and residents of other states were permitted to cast ballots. Yet before 1797 women's names, whether of wives or of qualified widows and spinsters, rarely appear. Apparently it was the Federalist politicians of Elizabethtown who first discovered what use might be made of women's suffrage. Newspapers of October 1797 report the election in that town in which approximately seventy-five women voted, with sarcastic pieces by Democratic-Republican writers ridiculing the participation of females in government:

> Oh! what parade those widows made!
> Some marching cheek by jole, Sir;
> In stage or chair, some beat the air,
> And pressed into the Pole, Sir;
> While men of rank, who played this prank,
> Beat up the widow's quarters;
> Their hands they laid on every maid,
> and scarce spar'd wives, or daughters!

Democratic-Republican politicians, however, were quick to learn from the Federalists. After Thomas Jefferson's victory in the 1800 presidential election, men attending political meetings in many parts of the state drank toasts to their female supporters: at New Town (modern Newton): "may their patriotic conduct at the late elections add an irresistable zest to their charms"; at Liberty Corner: "the Fair daughters of America particularly those who stepped forward to show their patriotism in the cause of republicanism at the late election"; at Bloomfield: "the fair of New Jersey who gave their suffrage to the republican candidate. May they receive for their reward peace and happiness."

Conspicuously absent from discussions of women's suffrage are the voices of New Jersey women. No evidence exists of any individual woman or woman's circle asking for the franchise. No women candidates ran for office nor did anything but sarcasm suggest that they should. There were no women's issues—for instance, movements to reduce the husbands' common law authority over wives. Finally, when women voted in a bloc, they did

so only in the sense that they were herded to the polls. When the New Jersey legislature decided to reform the election law in 1807 by disfranchising women and blacks, women made no protest. The promise the revolutionary ideology held out to women was not fulfilled for the women of the revolutionary generation. The women who suffered the hardships of the war gained little from it. They would probably be surprised—and perhaps even pleased—to see how much it has done for their female descendants.

For Further Reading

Several surveys of colonial women's history are available. The most complete is Eugenie Andruss Leonard, *The Dear-Bought Heritage* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1965), but it contains many minor factual errors and must be used with caution. Carl Holliday, *Woman's Life in Colonial Days* (New York: F. Ungar Publishing Co., 1960) was originally published in 1922 but is readable and entertaining. An old but extremely valuable work recently reissued is Alice Morse Earle, *Home and Child Life in Colonial Days* (New York: MacMillan Co., 1969). It describes the work done by colonial women in the home and includes many line drawings of household tools. It is an abridged dual version of two works first published in 1898, and edited by Shirley Glubok. Selma R. Williams, *Demeter's Daughters: The Women Who Founded America, 1587-1787* (New York: Atheneum, 1976) is a recent survey covering both social and political history. Linda Grant De Pauw, *Founding Mothers: Women of America in the Revolutionary Era* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1975) is a popular study limited to the eighteenth century but including chapters on black and native American women. Elizabeth Evans, *Weathering the Storm: Women of the American Revolution* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975) is a collection of women's diaries and journals, including those of Jemima Condict Harrison and Margaret Hill Morris of New Jersey.

A brief, popular study of the neighboring state of New York is Linda Grant De Pauw, *Four Traditions: Women of New York During the American Revolution* (Albany: New York State American Revolution Bicentennial Commission, 1974). Much of it is applicable to women of New Jersey. The same may be said of one

of the classic works on women's history, Julia Cherry Spruill, *Women's Life and Work in the Southern Colonies* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1972; originally published in 1938).

At present, the only published study of campfollowers is Walter Hart Blumenthal, *Women Camp Followers of the American Revolution* (Philadelphia: G.S. MacManus, 1952: reprinted by Arno Press, New York, 1974), which is brief, badly organized, and reveals lack of empathy for the author's subjects. Nevertheless it contains interesting material not readily available elsewhere.

A brief but accurate sketch of the life of Mary McCauley can be found in Edward T. James, Janet Wilson James, Paul S. Boyer, *Notable American Women 1607-1950: A Biographical Dictionary* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971). While it would be misleading to study her as "the" Molly Pitcher, her life was typical of that of American campfollowers. The experiences of an upper-class Hessian campfollower who spent some time traveling in New Jersey are contained in the letters and journals of Baroness Von Riedesel. An eddition edited by Marvin L. Brown is available under the title *Baroness Von Riedesel and the American Revolution: Journal and Correspondence of a Tour of Duty* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture at Williamsburg, Va., at the University of North Carolina Press, 1965).

Women's suffrage in New Jersey at the end of the eighteenth century is discussed in Richard P. McCormick, *The History of Voting in New Jersey* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1953).

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