

## 3.5 The Revolution in American Society

What roles did different groups of Americans play in the Revolutionary War?

### Explore

## Female Patriots in the War Effort

How did women participate in the Patriot cause?

Women were actively involved in many aspects of the war for independence. Many men went off to war, leaving wives and daughters at home to do their former work, such as managing farms and shops.

During the war, [Abigail Adams](#), whose husband John spent time away from home as a delegate to the Continental Congress, managed the Adams' farm, ran the family business, and raised the children.

Because supplies were needed for the army, women on the "home front" learned to adjust to shortages of everyday goods. For instance, when salt was scarce, women learned to use walnut ash to preserve meat.

When their survival at home was threatened by dwindling supplies or enemy advances, women had no choice but to follow the army. Gathering up children, pets, and valuables, they traveled on foot to winter encampments. Women at Valley Forge gathered wood, cooked, washed clothes, and nursed sick and wounded soldiers. Some were there for pay, but the majority were ordinary women who came for survival and protection.

Other women raised money for Washington's army. Sarah Bache, Benjamin Franklin's daughter, and Esther DeBerdt Reed organized Philadelphia women into teams to divide the city into wards and solicit donations door-to-door. They raised more than \$300,000.

Many young women and girls were spies and messengers for American generals. They risked being caught and executed as they traveled through enemy lines to bring reports of British troop movements and other important messages. Lydia Darragh, a Quaker woman from Philadelphia, saved Washington's men from an ambush in 1776. When Sybil Luddington's father was unable to muster his militia, the teenager took over for him. She galloped through New York rousing the troops to gather to defend Connecticut.

Women were an important part of the Continental army, and many wives were carried "on the rations." They served as cooks, seamstresses, nurses, and scavengers of battlefield equipment. They also helped to bury the dead. During battles, women nicknamed "Molly Pitcher" would bring water to swab out the guns and hand powder or shot to the men as they loaded and fired. Women such as Molly Ludwig Hays even filled in for soldiers who were wounded or killed.

Some prominent women hoped the [Revolution](#) would improve women's status in American society. In a letter to her husband, written in March of 1776, Abigail Adams encouraged the Continental Congress "remember the ladies and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors." Although

women's contributions to the war effort led to few changes in their legal or political status, leaders such as [John Adams](#) and Benjamin Rush declared it women's duty to educate the next generation in patriotism and civic virtue. This caused an increase in academies for the education of women in the 1780s and 1790s. While the purpose of these schools was to enable women to educate their sons, the result was the beginning of a revolution for women in the field of education.