

Women in the American Revolution QuickTime Slide Presentation—Teacher Notes

Slide One: Title Slide

Slide Two: Women often were not welcome in military camps

During the American Revolution, war was considered no place for a female. Besides the danger, social traditions strictly kept females in the domestic roles of maid, cook, wife, and mother.

Many women stayed at home to run farms, businesses, or plantations while their husbands were at war. They were responsible for the tending crops, ordering supplies, managing businesses, and protecting their possessions.

General George Washington strongly discouraged women from coming to the military camps, but he did permit them.

Slide Three: Women served in key roles in the military

Though most often confined to domestic roles, many women performed duties important to the operation of a military unit. As laundresses, they kept clothes and belongings clean. Some served as cooks, mostly for the officers, fixing meals on the move from whatever supplies they could get. Many worked in care facilities and battlefield hospitals to tend to the sick and injured or brought water and supplies to men on the front lines enduring long hours, hard work, and dangerous conditions.

Slide Four: Reasons women went to war

The most common reason women went to war during the Revolution was to be with their husbands, fathers, or brothers. Some women went to the battle camps out of a sense of patriotic duty believing their service would help win the war. Most came because there was no way they could support their family by themselves while their husbands were at war.

Many women came to the camps with their children to find food, shelter, and work. War could bankrupt local economies as battles raged through communities and farms. Food and supplies became scarce and many families were left homeless. If women could find work in the military camps, they were entitled to receive some rations for themselves and their children.

A few women enlisted in the army disguised as men and served in battle.

Slide Five: “Molly Pitcher,” the story of several women

The fabled battlefield legend “Molly Pitcher” was not a real person. Historians believe she was most likely a composite of several women—specifically Margaret Corbin and Mary Ludwig Hayes McCauley. Both women were with their husbands as they served in the Continental Army. They both took their husbands place after they had fallen in battle. Margaret Corbin was wounded in the chest and arm and as a result, disabled for life. She was granted a life-long pension of half a soldier’s pay making her the first American woman to receive a disabled veteran’s pension.

Slide Six: Female soldiers—Deborah Sampson and Anna Maria Lane

Two other women actually enlisted and served in the army. Disguised as men, Deborah Sampson and Anna Maria Lane served in combat during the American Revolution. Deborah, who enlisted in the 4th Massachusetts Regiment in 1782 as Robert Shurtleff, served with distinction and achieved the rank of corporal. She was wounded in the battle of White Plains, was treated and returned to duty undetected. She later came down with a fever and almost died. During treatment, her gender was discovered and after recuperating, she was honorably discharged from the Army. After her military service, she married and received a small pension from the Massachusetts legislature. Financial demands pushed her to go on a public speaking tour where she recounted her military experiences. The social traditions of the time required she reject her involvement in the military, though she did explain her service was driven by a desire to avenge the deaths of colonists by British soldiers.

Anna Maria Lane married her husband John Lane when he enlisted in the Connecticut infantry and soon accompanied him to war. It is believed she disguised herself as a man in order to fight in battle. In 1777, she was wounded in the Battle of Germantown in Pennsylvania, which left her lame for life. After the war, she moved with her husband to Virginia where he was a member of the Virginia state guard. In 1808, she petitioned the Virginia government and it granted her a pension for service during the Revolutionary War. She died two years later.

Slide Seven: Women performed important roles during the Revolutionary War

Whether they participated in a supporting role or as soldiers, women served with distinction in the American Revolution. Many raised money and supplies, kept the economy going, and protected the homefront. Others traveled with the armies, served in hospitals and at times engaged in combat. These women faced hard work and danger in military camps and on the battlefield. They performed important services to military personnel as washerwomen, cooks, nurses and soldiers. They faced the same weather conditions, poor food, and long hard marches as the men. Their efforts in supporting male soldiers helped them be better soldiers.