

# **Women of the American Revolution**

**by Dr. Roger Smith**

# Laws of Coverture

From the French meaning for “cover,”  
“embrace,” “protect”

Men will protect you from:

- Inheritance
- Voting
- Religious Convictions

Women get to:

- Run the home
- Raise the kids

Example of Kitty Greene

- Kitty Greene refused to re-marry after the death of her husband, Gen. Nathaniel Greene. Instead, she moved her beau into one of her homes. Congress withheld her pension temporarily because of her “scandalous lifestyle”



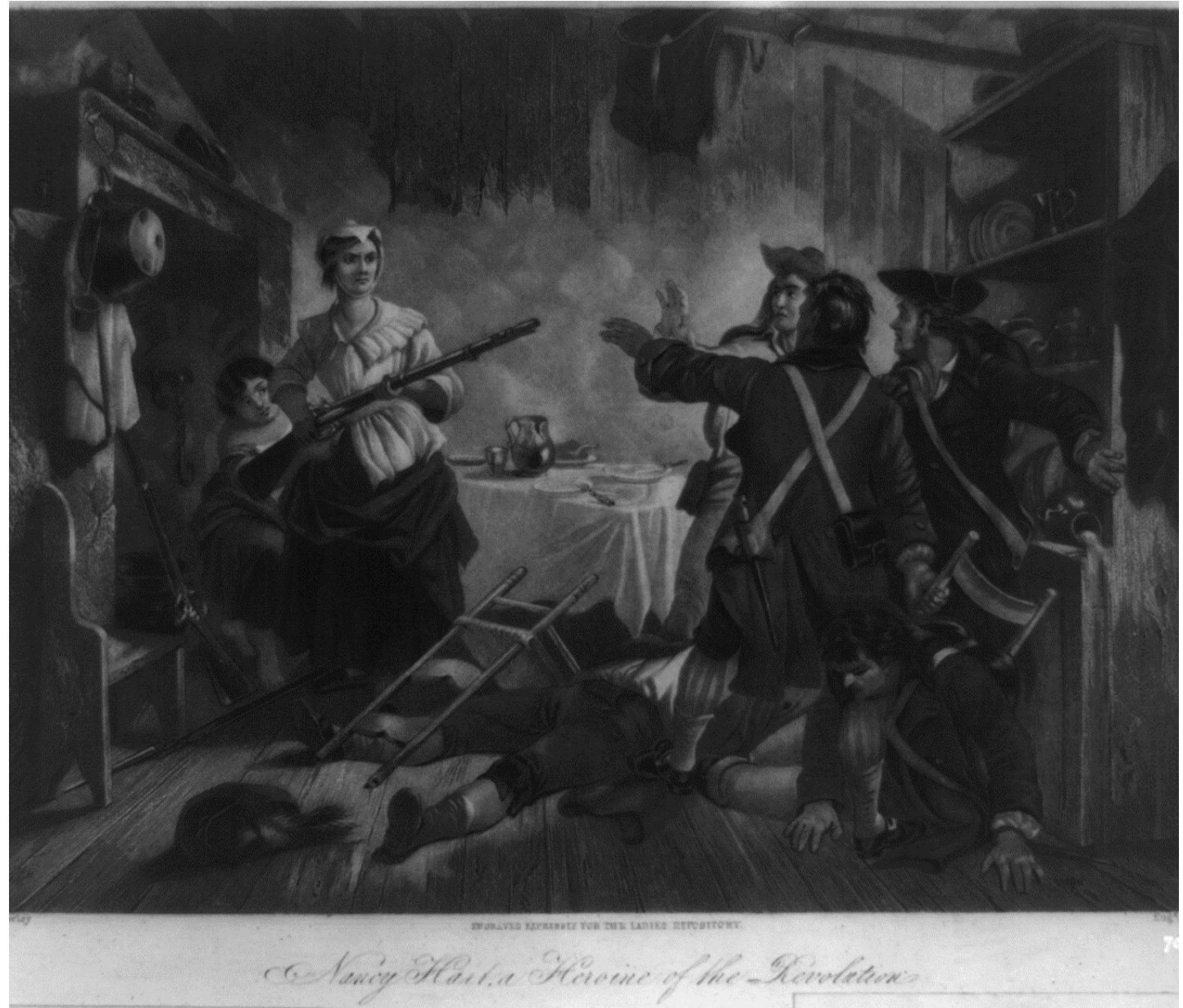
# **Nancy Hart: Women under fire!**

**Lived in the Georgia backcountry. Her husband was in the American militia. British soldiers came while to arrest him while he was away.**

**Look up a “Nancy Hart Dinner Party”**

**Nicknamed “War Woman” for her courage and daring in the vicious fighting in the southern backcountry.**

**Only woman in Georgia history to have a county named for her.**



# Elizabeth Mott:

## Elite women were not immune

At one time owned several plantations and a home on the Cooper River in Charleston.

By 1781, she had lost all but the last of her homes.

British under Lord Rawdon set up a fort at her home: Fort Mott.

American army under Col. Lighthorse Harry Lee surround her home.

She and her family were allowed to leave for the safety of the American camp. She carried with her an Indian bow and old, dirty arrows.

Col. Lee tells her that he must burn down her home in order to get the British out.

She provided the bow and arrows (arrows were not dirty – they were smeared with tar and gun powder) to burn down her last house, if that's what it took for the cause of independence!





# Sybil Ludington

**Her father was the colonel of militia  
in Danbury, CT**

**Put her on a midnight ride from  
Danbury into New York**

**Brought back 400 men**

**They successfully held off the British  
army**

**She was 16**

**Over 90% of the Continental  
courier service were teenage girls**





# Mary Almy: ALL women were affected

Mary was a Loyalist, even though her husband was an Artillery Sgt. for the rebel Rhode Island militia

Battle of Newport, R.I.: his artillery crew fire cannon balls into the city where his wife and children still live!

She writes of the trauma in Newport and how she prayed for his safety

They found each other after the war and lived happily.

In spite of it all, the heart wants what the heart wants.





# Molly Pitcher: Women on the front line

More than one Molly Pitcher: Battle of Long Island, 1776; Battle of Monmouth Courthouse, 1778

## We all know the story

Provided water to their husbands' cannon crew when he was wounded

She took his place on the line

## Here's the big question:

**Why were women (and their children) in the army camps?**



# They Had No Place Else to Go!

**Known as Camp Followers, women and children of all ages followed their fathers, brothers, husbands, uncles, etc., into camps in order to survive.**

**They served in many roles:**

- **Cooks, nurses, water bearers, and musket-loaders**
- **Children loaded paper cartridges with ball and powder the night before battles, if they could**
- **Older women babysat the children of younger women engaged in the war effort**

**There is one role women played that we are just now learning about...**

**Camp Followers during the Revolutionary War**





# Spies!

**There were often more women and children in camps than men due to their culture's dependence on men for shelter and safety**

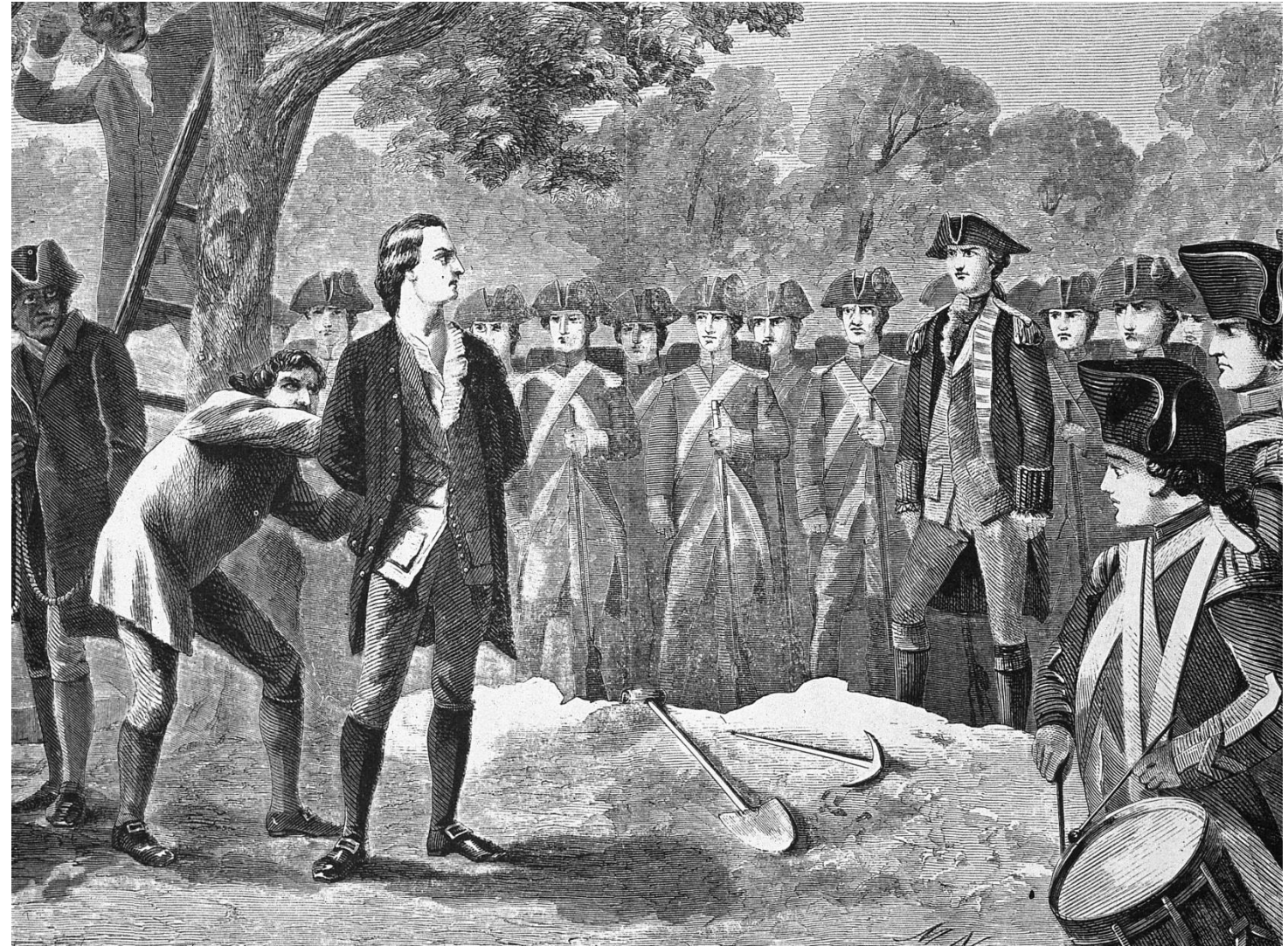
**Women performed many camp duties to put men back on the line**

**Trained in the art of espionage**

**Age of Enlightenment thinking led men to believe that women did not have the mental or emotional capacities to keep secrets/tell lies**

**No disguises needed – just look like you are where you are supposed to be**

**There were four classifications of women that made the best spies...**



# 1. Working Girl

- **“She’s just a girl!”**
- **Minding her own business**
- **Just doing her job**
- **Listening to every word spoken around her**





## 2. Enslaved Women

- **Easy access to come and go to the marketplace**
- **If asked why they were where they were, could just answer, “I’m where I was told to go.”**
- **If asked what business they had being where they were, could simply say, “I’m about my master’s business.”**





### 3. Elite Girls

- **Free to attend parties, dinners, and galas**
- **Able to ask questions to steer a conversation**
- **Talk openly to young officers who were eager to brag about their past conquests in the field and where they might be fighting next**





## 4. Older Women

- Hence the term “harmless old woman”:
- Mom Rinker: family owned large tavern and boarding house in Philadelphia
- British general staff often held meetings at Rinker’s Tavern. Only Mom was allowed to stay.
- She always liked to knit the following day where she passed on her messages in balls of yarn that had “fallen” from her basket.



**Some disguises were  
absolutely awful!!**

**(just makint sure that you're awake!)**





# Elizabeth Bergin

**Cared for sick men on a prison ship in Long Island**

**Helped to rescue prisoners using a sleeping powder in the guards' drinks**

**While she was only able to rescue 6 or 7 men a night, she went back enough times to eventually rescue over 200 men!**

**British placed a bounty on her head worth an enlisted man's pay for 20 years!**





# Mama Kate

**Owned by Governor Stephen Heard of Georgia**

**Heard became a militia leader once Georgia fell in 1778**

**He was captured in 1779 and sentenced to immediate execution**

**She brought him clean linens and clothing while her husband, Daddy Jack, waited with fresh horses**

**Carried the governor out of the prison in a laundry basket**

**Why? What was in it for her??? She risked her life to save the man who enslaved her...because she believed that it was simply the right thing to do.**





# Deborah Sampson

**She didn't want to be a nurse or a cook or a helper of some kind!**

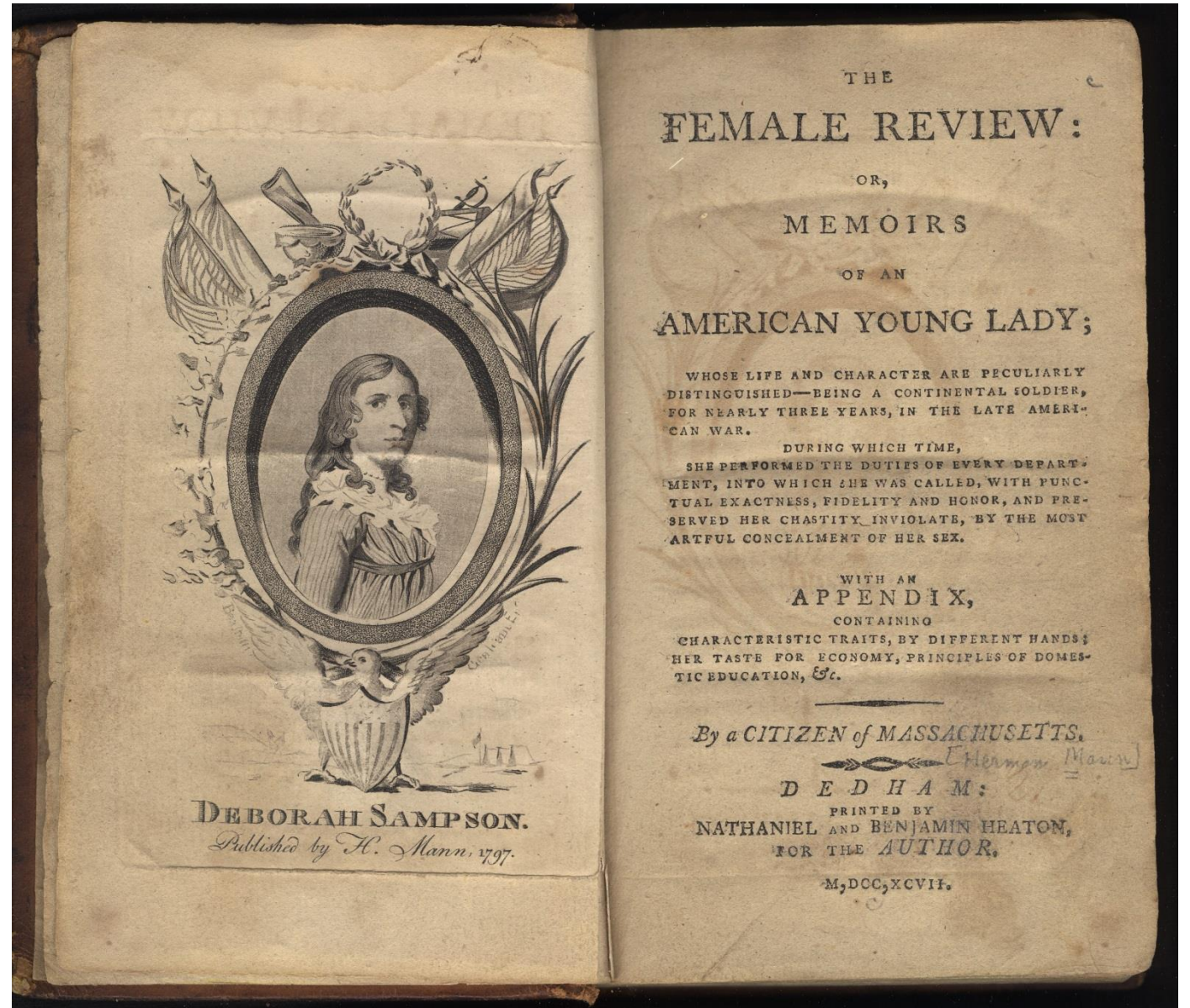
**What she really didn't want to do was marry the man her mother had selected for her!**

**Disguised herself as a man and joined a Massachusetts regiment of the Continental army**

**Fought in hand-to-hand combat**

**Only woman to receive a military pension for battlefield service!**

**Look her up for the full story!**



# **Nanye-hi’ “Beloved Woman”**

**Leader of the Cherokee, a very  
matriarchal society**

**The Cherokee always had a  
woman on councils for war and  
for peace**

**Cherokee had no concept of  
American ways in peace  
negotiations**

**After meeting with an all-male  
treaty council from Georgia, she  
basically told them to go home  
and tell their decision makers –  
women – her words.**





# **Judith Sargent Murray**

**She was from a wealthy family,  
but was not allowed a formal,  
classical education**

**It wasn't until the family made  
a life-changing religious  
decision that she was able to  
receive a proper education**

**Spent the rest of her life writing  
treatises on the need to  
educate young girls**



# Abigail Adams

**Wife of John Adams – their letters to each other have been well documented**

**Challenged her husband to “Remember the Ladies” in 1776, when he left to attend Congress in Philadelphia**

**After the war – after it was more than apparent that the Congress did NOT remember the ladies - Abigail Adams became the primary voice for equal education for girls**





**For more information on these and many, many other great stories about some of the most amazing women in American history, visit: [www.colonialra.com](http://www.colonialra.com)**

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