HUDSON VALLEY WOMEN

COLONIAL & REVOLUTIONARY ERAS
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The following profiles of remarkable Hudson Valley women from the colonial and revolutionary eras are part of a larger publication.

**Women in the Hudson Valley: A Teaching Resource** introduces more than 50 extraordinary women with ties to our region -- artists and athletes, lawyers and legislators, mapmakers and mathematicians. Whether you’re a teacher or a site educator, you’ll find a story to help students you work with see women.

Our aim is to stir interest, not to tell the women’s full stories or portray the complexity of their lives. We hope these mini-bios prompt you to dig more deeply. You can learn more about the other sections or [download them here](#).

**COLONIAL AND REVOLUTIONARY ERAS**

- Maria Van Rensselaer
- Elizabeth Freeman, “Mumbet,”
- Janet Livingston Montgomery
- Margaret “Captain Molly” Corbin
- Deborah Sampson Gannett
- Sybil Ludington

**Resources**

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Image on previous page: 1961 statue of Sybil Ludington by Anna Hyatt Huntington, Carmel, NY. Photo by don8215, 2009, Creative Commons Attribution-No Derivative Works 3.0 License.
Maria Van Cortlandt was born to a wealthy family in New Amsterdam, now Manhattan. In 1662, she married Jeremias Van Rensselaer and moved with him to Rensselaerswijck, 160 miles north. They lived in the settlement’s best home -- two cellars, two rooms, and an attic.

The next year Maria had a son. Following the birth, one of her legs was paralyzed for a time. That marked the beginning of lifelong weakness and pain that sometimes limited her movement.

In 1674, Jeremias van Rensselaer died leaving Maria with six children and an estate that included most of today’s Albany and Rensselaer counties along with parts of Columbia and Greene. She leased, bought, and sold land, wheat, and cattle. She supervised the maintenance of houses, barns, mills, and fences. Maria also entertained distinguished visitors, such as the governor.

Directing such a large estate was difficult, but Maria Van Rensselaer had help from servants and enslaved people. Still, she was as well-prepared as any woman of her time. Dutch women were among the most independent in Europe, and she was raised in that tradition. Like Maria, many 17th-century Dutch women were literate and trained to manage household accounts and family businesses.

A note about the land deed shown here: over time the Van Rensselaers and others “bought” most of the land where the Mohawks and other native peoples had lived for thousands of years. American Indians did not share European ideas about land and it is likely that the deeds had different meanings for each party. In addition, it is hard to determine how much coercion was involved in these land deals.
Mumbet, born in Claverack, Columbia County, was enslaved in New York and Massachusetts. By 1781 she was living in the Berkshires, and she and a friend initiated a court case that directly challenged the existence of slavery.

They won the case, known as Brom & Bett v. Ashley, and became the first enslaved people freed under the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780. The Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court used the case as precedent when it eventually abolished slavery in the state.

After the ruling, Mumbet took the name Elizabeth Freeman. For the rest of her life she worked as a healer, midwife, and nurse, as well as in the home of the attorney who won her case.

Civil rights leader and historian W. E. B. Du Bois claimed Freeman as a relative. Anecdotal evidence suggests she may have been his step-great-great-grandmother.

**DEFINE**

Abolition

The action or act of dismantling or terminating a system, practice, or institution.
Janet Livingston Montgomery
Columbia and Dutchess Counties

Janet Livingston was born into a prominent Hudson Valley family -- one of her brothers signed the Declaration of Independence -- and spent her childhood at Clermont in Columbia County.

In 1773, she married Richard Montgomery and moved to Rhinebeck, Dutchess County, where they bought land. They fenced, plowed, built a grain mill, and laid the foundation for a large home. Two years later, Montgomery joined the Continental Army and was soon killed in battle.

After her husband's death, Janet Livingston Montgomery took over the management of the property. She and her family accumulated and rented out land to tenant farmers to cultivate wheat on a commercial scale.

In 1802, she and her nephew bought another 434 acres, creating orchards and a nursery business; the orchards are still a thriving business today. They also built a large field stone house known as Montgomery Place.
Margaret Corbin was the first woman combatant in the Revolutionary War and the first woman to receive a U.S. military pension.

Like many women, Molly accompanied her husband, John, when he went to war. In Nov. 1776, dressed as a man, she joined him on the battlefield. When John was fatally wounded, she took over firing the canons.

After recovering from an injury sustained in the same battle, Corbin joined the Invalid Regiment at West Point. Until her discharge in 1783, she nursed the wounded.
Deborah Sampson disguised herself as a man, using the name Robert Shurtleff, and joined the Fourth Massachusetts Regiment. Arriving at West Point, in Orange County, she was assigned to scout neutral territory in what is now Westchester. Sampson was able to hide her sex for more than two years.

At one point, she was shot in the leg and removed the bullet herself to avoid detection. Her secret was finally discovered when she fell ill from an epidemic. She was honorably discharged in 1783, married, and lived a farming life in Massachusetts.

In January 1792, Sampson petitioned the Massachusetts State Legislature for pay which the army had withheld from her because she was a woman. The legislature granted her petition and Governor John Hancock signed it. The legislature awarded her 34 pounds plus interest back to her discharge in 1783. In 1802, she began a year-long lecture tour -- the first women to do so -- describing her military life.

On April 26, 1777, Sybil Ludington, age 16, rode more than 40 miles to alert rebel militias of approaching British forces. She rode in the rain from Putnam County, NY, to Danbury, CT, twice the distance ridden by Paul Revere. In 1935, New York State erected a number of historic markers along her route.

Sybil was born in Putnam, but her family soon moved to Dutchess County where they had a large farm. In 1784, she married Edmond Ogden and they moved to Catskill, Greene County where they farmed and ran a successful tavern near Catskill Creek.

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LISTEN OR WATCH

Elizabeth Freeman (Mumbet): She Inspires, WMHT, Nov. 2017, one-minute video.


READ


VISIT

Bevier House Museum, Marbletown, Ulster. The home began as one room in the 1680s. In 1715 Louis Bevier and Maria Hasbrouck became the owners and it remained in the Bevier Family for the next 223 years as an income-producing farm.

Clermont State Historic Site and Friends of Clermont, Germantown, Columbia: student programs include History Comics Club and Harvesting History, a gardening experience. Trails, gardens, and grounds, open year-round; guided house tours, April-Dec.; events, exhibits, and activities, year-round. (Margaret Beekman Livingston.)
Constitution Island, Philipstown, Putnam, is on the east side of the Hudson facing West Point. It was the site of the Valley’s earliest Revolutionary War fortifications. Open: April-Oct. Guided tours may be available.

Historic Huguenot Street, New Paltz, Ulster: school programs for all ages, e.g., Colonial Kids (K-2); Learning & Leisure in the 18th Century (3-6); Life & Death in the 1700s (7-12).

John Jay Homestead State Historic Site and Friends of John Jay Homestead, Katonah, Westchester: a variety of school programs, including--by request--a house tour focused on six generations of Jay women. Tour sheds light on life in upper class homes in the 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries. Transportation grants available.

Knox’s Headquarters and New Windsor Cantonment State Historic Sites, Orange. Both Guided tours, educational services, views, gardens, special activities, and more.

Montgomery Place, Red Hook, Dutchess: grounds open daily dawn to dusk, free; house tours by appointment. Younger children may enjoy this free to download Montgomery Place Scavenger Hunt. (Janet Livingston Montgomery.)

Philipsburg and Van Cortlandt Manors, Sleepy Hollow and Croton, Westchester: programs available for K-12 school groups, e.g., Millers and Merchants and Crafts & Tasks. Also: materials for teaching and learning, online exhibits, and more.

St. Paul’s Church National Historic Site, Mount Vernon, Westchester: American Revolution Learning Station Program free for schools and youth groups. Also available: traveling trunks, ES workbook, and teachers’ guide, Coming of Age in America: Westchester from Colonial Settlement to President Washington.

Schuyler Mansion State Historic Site and Friends of Schuyler Mansion, Albany: tours highlight the lives of Albany’s wealthiest and most influential 18th century families. Multiple onsite and in-school programs are also available.

Sybil Ludington Statue: Lake Gleneida, Carmel, Putnam. Each April since 1979, on a hilly course approximating the route of Ludington’s historic ride and ending near the statue, the Taconic Road Runners have organized Sybil Ludington Races.

U. S. Military Academy and West Point Museum, Orange: Corbin and Sampson both spent time here, and there is a memorial to Corbin. Visitor’s center (guided bus tours leave here regularly) and museum are open free to the public. For more wide-ranging school and other group tours contact West Point Tours.

Van Wyck Homestead Museum, Fishkill, Dutchess: guided tours weekend afternoons, June-Oct.; self-guided tours daily; school groups may be arranged.

Washington’s Headquarters State Historic Site, Newburgh, Orange: guided tours, museum, school programs, scenic views, special activities/events, and more. In 1782 and 1783, Martha Washington lived here with General Washington and his staff.
**LESSON PLANS & OTHER TEACHER RESOURCES**

**The American Revolution in the Hudson River Valley**, lesson plans available from the Hudson River Valley Institute, Marist College, including

- Declaration of Independence (5)
- Economics of the Revolution (7-11)
- Geography of the Revolution (11)
- Loyalists in the Revolution (7-8)

- Sybil Ludington (4)
- Timeline of the Revolution (4)
- Van Cortlandt Manor (4)
- Women Rioters of the Revolution (HS)

**Montgomery Place**, lesson plan and PowerPoint (12 slides), grades 3-5; Jason Dubois, L. Hunker, M. Lillis, L. Mills, and S. Pettinicchi, Marist College. Bibliography.

**From Teaching the Hudson Valley’s free online library**

- **Colonial Albany: Everyday Evidence**, grade 7, Stephen Linehan, Albany City Schools, and Erika Sanger, Albany Institute of History & Art: newspaper analysis, web searches, site visits with pre- and post-trip projects, and more.

- **Colonial Life in the Hudson Valley**, grades 3-5, Andrea Boccio-Doran and Cindy Slayton, Krieger ES, Poughkeepsie CSD: four lessons and activities explore several sites listed above.

- **Diversity and Tolerance in the American Colonies**, grades 7-11, Laura Dull and Maryann Fallek, SUNY New Paltz: 15 lessons and activities with group work, intro, etc.

Think Like an Historian: **Westchester in the American Revolution**, grade 4, Noel MacCary, Pequenakonck ES, North Salem: seven lessons and activities plus a visit to St. Paul’s Church (see above), which was a hospital during the Revolution.

**BACKGROUND READING**

