

RS#15: Letter from Deborah Champion to Patience (Transcript)

Deborah Champion (1753 – ?) was the daughter of the Continental army's commissary general, Henry Champion. From Westchester, Connecticut, she rode to Boston carrying messages from her father to General George Washington. This is her recounting of that adventure to a friend.

Westchester, Conn.

Oct. 2nd, 1775.

My dear Patience,

It happened last month, and I have only been home ten days, hardly long enough to get over the excitement. Before you suffer too much with curiosity and amazement I will hasten (hurry up) to tell you about it.

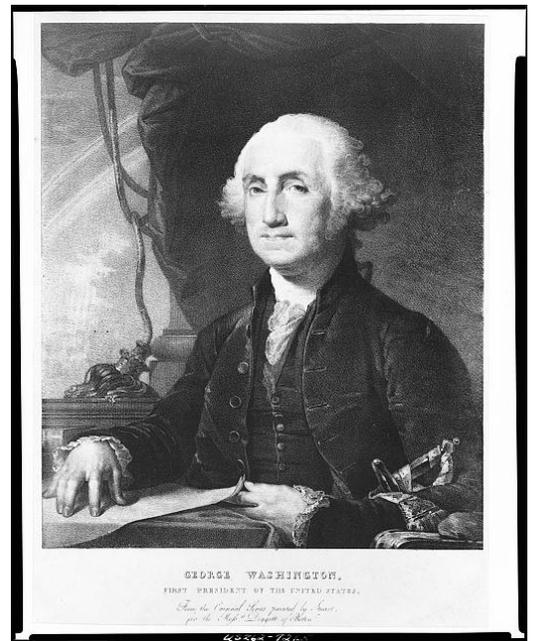
Just as the tall clock in the hall was striking eight, the horses were at the door. I mounted putting on my camlet cloak for the air was yet a little cool. Mother insisted on my wearing my close silk hood and taking her calash (an oversized bonnet for older women). Later I understood the precaution. Father again told me of the haste (hurry) with which I must ride and the care to use for the safety of the despatches (documents), and we set forth with his blessing.

The British were at Providence in Rhode Island, so it was thought best for us to ride due north to the Massachusetts line and then east as best we could. The weather was perfect, but the roads were none too good as there had been recent rains, but we made fairly good time going through Norwich then up the valley of the Quinnebaugh to Canterbury where we rested our horses for an hour, then pushed on hoping to reach Pomfret before dark. All went well as I could expect. We met few people on the road. Almost all the men are with the army, so we saw only old men, women, and children on the road or in the villages.

Oh! War is a terrible and cruel thing. Uncle Jerry thought we had better take fresh horses in the morning and sun up found us on our way again. Aunt Faith had a good breakfast for us—by candle light.

We got our meals after that at some farm house generally. I left that to Uncle Starkey. As it neared hungry time he would select a house, ride ahead, say something to the woman or old man and whatever it was he said seemed magical, for as I came up I would be met with smiles, kind words "God bless you" and looks of wonder. The best they had was pressed on us, and they were always unwilling to take pay which we offered. Everywhere we heard the same thing, love for the Mother Country, but stronger than that, that she must give us our rights, that we were fighting not for independence, though that might come and would be the war-cry if the oppression of unjust taxation was not removed. Nowhere was a cup of imported tea offered us. We heard that it would be almost impossible to avoid the British, unless by going so far out of the way that too much time would be lost, so plucked up what courage I could as darkness began to come on at the close of the second day. I secreted the papers in a small pocket in a saddle bag under some of the eatables that mother had put up. We decided to ride all night. I confess that I began to be weary. It was late at night or rather very early in the morning, that I heard a sentry call and knew that if at all the danger point was reached. I pulled my calash as far over my face as I could, thanking my wise mother's forethought, and went on with what boldness I could muster. I really believe I heard Aristarchus' teeth chatter as he rode to my side and whispered "De British missus for sure." Suddenly I was ordered to a halt. As I could not help myself I did so. A soldier in a red coat appeared and suggested that I go to headquarters for examination. I told him "It was early to wake his Captain and to please let me pass for I had been sent in urgent haste to see a friend in need," which was true, if a little ambiguous (confusing). To my joy he let me go saying, "Well, you are only an old woman any way" Evidently as glad to be rid of me as I of him. Would you believe me—that was the only exciting adventure in the whole ride.

Just as I finished that sentence father came into my room and said "My daughter if you are writing of your journey, do not say just how or where you saw General Washington, nor what you heard of the affairs of the Colony. A letter is a very dangerous thing these days and it might fall into strange hands and cause harm. I am just starting in the chaise (carriage) for Hartford to see about some stores for the troops, I shall take the mare as the other horses need rest." What a wise man my father is. I must obey, but I can say I saw General Washington. I felt very humble as I crossed the threshold of the room where he sat in converse with other gentlemen, one evidently an officer. Womanlike I wished that I had on my Sunday gown. I put on a clean kerchief. I gave him the paper, which from his manner I judged to be of great importance. He was pleased to compliment me most highly on what he called my courage and my patriotism.



Oh, Patience what a man he is, so grand, so kind, so noble. I am sure we shall not look to him in vain as our leader.

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Well, here I am home again safe and sound and happy to have been of use. We took a longer way home as far as Uncle Jerry's, so met with no mishap.

I hope I have not tired you with this long letter. Mother desires to send her love.

Yours in the bonds of love.

Deborah.

P.S. I saw your brother Samuel in Boston. He sent his love if I should be writing you.

"Deborah Champion: American Patriot." Weblog entry. History of American Women. 02 April 2009. 09 August 2012
<<http://www.womenhistoryblog.com/2009/04/deborah-champion.html>>.