

MRS. ELLET'S WOMEN OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

In the 1840s Mrs. Elizabeth Ellet began writing The Women of the American Revolution, a 3-volume account of heroic actions of women in wartime.

Her intention was to cover all 13 colonies. The task was difficult because it was already more than 60 years after the event and there had been little written at the time. Scarce newsprint had been reserved for major battles, not for individual actions. Later histories had ignored the role of women.

In her preface to volume 3 Mrs. Ellet states that after the first two volumes came out she was accused of unequal treatment. She had printed more on South Carolina women than those of any other colony. Her defense was that she was able to locate more information and interest in South Carolina than anywhere else. She then told the readers that in volume 3 they would find a great deal more from South Carolina and especially from only one district. That district was Chester.

Whether Chester had more heroines than other sections, Mrs. Ellet did not know but she did say that she was able to write the stories of 11 Chester heroines because she was put in contact with Daniel Green Stinson of Chester District.

Stinson's father was a Revolutionary soldier, William Stinson, "a brave soldier." He was adopted by Daniel Green who lived in the Fishing Creek area. "Tales of the war were the amusement of his childhood; his early associations were with survivors of that period, and in youth he frequented places where they were accustomed to meet and talk over their battles and adventures."

Later, Daniel Stinson was a magistrate and in that role took down the pension applications of the old veterans. The pension law required an application be submitted every six months. Stinson welcomed them to his home. If the veteran was too feeble to travel to Stinson, Stinson went to the veteran with no expectation of reimbursement for his trouble.

When Judge J. Belton O'Neill informed Stinson of Mrs. Ellet's project, Stinson took it on as if it were his own. He interviewed numerous Chester District citizens to get as full and as accurate an account as possible and sent his writings to Mrs. Ellet.

The Chester District heroines included Nancy Green, a Covenanter; Esther Walker, a highly-skilled nurse; Mary McClure, who rode horseback through enemy lines to get to Charleston; Isabella Ferguson who guarded a cave containing the community's valuables; and Mary Johnstone who organized the women to work the fields and provided a set of signals by which they communicated.

Stinson wrote of Jane Boyd who was burned while rescuing her husband's books set fire by the enemy; of Jane Gaston who successfully defied the enemy who threatened to kill her; of Sarah McCalla, who bravely carried clothes and food to the prisoners at Camden and convinced the British officers to release her husband.

There was Mary Adair, roughly treated by the enemy but refused to influence her sons to join them. One of the sons was John Adair who was later to become prominent in Kentucky affairs. And there was Jane White who lost her property but not her determination to fight despotism.

While the men were at war the women harvested the crops. The team of Mary, Margaret and Ellen Gill, Isabella and Margaret Kelso, Sarah Knox, Margaret, Mary, and Elizabeth Mills, Mary McClure, and Nancy Brown joined together to reap the grain fields of Whigs away from home in the summer of 1780.

The final picture that emerged of the women of Chester District is one of great courage and determination. The heroines were all motivated by a firm believe that, in the words of Katherine Steele--"Katie of the Fort:--"We are in the right!"

By Louise Pettus