

The Ladies of Trenton: Women's Political and Public Activism in Revolutionary NJ**By Catherine Hudak****DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14713/njs.v1i1.12>****Abstract**

Using the Ladies of Trenton as a case study, this article examines the extent and forms of women's public and political activism in the early national period. An analysis of the Ladies of Trenton's efforts demonstrates the pivotal roles women played in the formation of the vibrant political culture that emerged in late eighteenth century America. These elite NJ women had access to rich worlds of social and educational refinement coupled with strong political connections. The Ladies of Trenton used their literacy skills, knowledge of the patriot cause, and high social standings to captivate the nation as they entered male-dominated spaces of politics and print culture. Among the civic acts organized by the Ladies of Trenton include a fundraising campaign to assist the Continental Army and a public tribute honoring newly-elected President Washington. Contemporaries publicly recognized the significance of their fundraising to the success of the war effort as these NJ women refashioned gender roles for women by assembling to establish a committee, managing financial matters, and delving into military concerns. The Ladies of Trenton's public tribute for Washington included profound symbolism commemorating the battles of Trenton and Princeton as well as being reflective of the new nation. The contributions of the Ladies of Trenton demonstrate the presence of active public roles for women during this critical historical period of nation building in the United States.

“She was what a woman OUGHT to be.”

Inscription on the tombstone of Mrs. Mary Smith¹

On April 21, 1789, the Ladies of Trenton organized a public tribute to honor newly-elected president George Washington at the bridge over Assunpink Creek in Trenton, NJ. At the dedication, the Ladies of Trenton imbued profound symbolism that reflected the ideals of the young nation. Newspapers throughout the young republic reported that the emblem adorned “TRIUMPHAL ARCH was erected and decorated by the ladies of Trenton.” A sunflower “as large as life” perched at the summit of the arch, “always pointing to the sun, was designed to express this sentiment, or motto—*To you alone*—as emblematic of the affections and hopes of the PEOPLE being directed to him [Washington], in the united suffrage of the millions of Americans.” This Triumphal Arch, commemorating George Washington’s military efforts during the American Revolution, was raised at the exact spot of the Battle of Trenton, a location that “has been twice memorable during the war.” As a letter published in *The Columbian Magazine* noted, “This arch was erected ... where our gallant general, at one time, made so noble a coup on the enemies of his country; and, at another, so important a stand, and a retreat worth more than a victory.” The Ladies of Trenton recognized Washington’s leadership throughout the war with the following inscription in large golden letters: “THE DEFENDER OF THE MOTHERS WILL BE THE PROTECTOR OF OUR DAUGHTERS.”²

¹ John Hall, *History of the Presbyterian Church in Trenton, N.J.: From the First Settlement of the Town* (Trenton: MacCrellish & Quigley, 1912), 148.

² For contemporary publications of Washington’s reception by the Ladies of Trenton, see “Extract of a letter from Trenton dated April 21,” *The Pennsylvania Packet, and Daily Advertiser*, May 1, 1789, 2-3; “Extract of a letter from Trenton, dated April 28,” *The New Jersey Journal and Political Intelligencer*, May 6, 1789; “ACCOUNT of the Manner of receiving, at Trenton,” *The Columbian Magazine*, May 1789, 288-290. Adjutant General William S. Stryker published a pamphlet, *Washington’s Reception by the People of New Jersey* (Trenton: Naar, Day & Naar, 1882.) Along with an account of the reception, Stryker included names and brief biographies of the women, plus addressed his research methods, noting information was “obtained from one of the participants in this reception who was living in the year 1850, from one who died in 1864 and another in 1871, from others who remember to have seen it, and from tradition in the families of Trenton,” 8.

In the winter of 1781, prior to Washington's public tribute, the Ladies of Trenton were recognized with a poem titled, "*The attempt is praise.*" Published in the *New Jersey Gazette*, this piece was "addressed to those AMERICAN LADIES, who have lately distinguished their patriotism, in generously contributing to the relief of the soldiery." The author, "A Soldier," begins with "ALL hail! superior sex" as he publicly acknowledges the women's relief efforts of raising subscriptions to assist the Continental Army. Designated as "sister angels of each state," these women fueled the patriot cause claiming, "Freedom no more shall droop her languished head." By asserting the women deserved an "eternity of praise," the soldier demonstrated acceptance of female patriotism outside of the household. He not only celebrated their public efforts, but immortalized these remarkable women for their influential role in the establishment of the new nation:

...And bid you admir'd from age to age;
With sweet applauses dwell on ev'ry name,
Endear your mem'ries, and embalm your fame
And thus the future bards shall soar sublime,
And waft you glorious down the stream of time...³

The soldier predicted these American women would be admired in perpetuity, yet to date, there has been no stand-alone study of the Ladies of Trenton. An in-depth analysis of the Ladies of Trenton, their patriotic acts, use of print culture, and public tribute to President Washington is vital to demonstrate the pivotal role women played in the formation of the new political sphere that emerged in late eighteenth century America. Through various public displays, early national women achieved an active presence as influential citizens. Their efforts were recognized by their contemporaries as having import and influence, but subsequently understudied by historians.

Current scholarship affirms the significance of women's roles in the political culture of the early republic, a significance recognized throughout the nation, but later obscured by

³ "The attempt is praise," *New Jersey Gazette*, January 17, 1781, 2.

traditional historical narratives. In 1780, an article detailing the fundraising efforts of American women published in the *Pennsylvania Packet* stated:

The women of every part of the globe are under obligations to those of America, for having shown that females are capable of the highest political virtue. Those of posterity will also acknowledge that they derive happiness and glory from them. I cannot help imagining, what some learned and elegant historian, the Hume of the future America, when he comes to write the affairs of these times, will say on the subject.⁴

The author is anxious to know how historians will interpret these unprecedented acts of American women. “In a history, which we may suppose to be published about the year 1820, may be found a paragraph to the following purpose.” The author recounts the “exhausted” treasury and army in want of necessities, then states “when the women gave a respite to our affairs...that will forever do honor to the sex.”⁵ Yet despite this author’s optimistic faith that history would “do honor to the sex,” the contributions of the Ladies of Trenton remain understudied. The Ladies of Trenton seized opportune moments during tumultuous years in American history to become politically active citizens. In so doing, these elite women purposefully entered the male-dominated arena of print discourse, composing broadsides and letters addressed to prominent men. As they employed masculine models of assembly to establish a committee, institute fundraising campaigns, manage financial matters, and intervene in military concerns, they dismantled traditional notions of proper feminine behavior. Strategically modeling their public and political efforts after male patriots, they organized civic affairs and engaged in patriotic rhetoric. Such demonstrations played a critical role in the process of nation building, enabling women to assert their political voices in the young republic. Although David Waldstreicher claimed that politically active women, “spatially...were led and surrounded by men,” there is no trace of male leadership in the fundraising endeavor instituted

⁴ *The Pennsylvania Packet, or the General Advertiser*, November 4, 1780.

⁵ *Ibid.*

by the Ladies of Trenton.⁶ Popular newspapers informed the masses of their distinctive role in Washington's tribute, writing, "The Ladies of Trenton formed a design, and carried it into execution, *solely under their direction*, to testify to his Excellency."⁷ In addition, Simon Newman praised the reception as, "one of the most remarkable female rites of the late eighteenth century."⁸ To fully appreciate the Ladies of Trenton's influence during this critical time of nation building, a reassessment of their efforts is crucial.

Historians of women and gender roles have expanded the scholarship, insisting that exploration of women's contributions is fundamental to understanding the larger social, cultural, and political worlds of Revolutionary America. Historians such as Catherine Allgor, Susan Branson, and Jan Lewis effectively argue that middle-class and elite white women were an

⁶ Various publications confirm that public efforts by ordinary citizens were critical in the development of politics, identity, and nationalism. Specifically, David Waldstreicher's *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, demonstrated that nationalism should be viewed in terms of a shared popular experience, as revealed in celebrations, songs, symbols, and printed discourse that "constituted the true political public sphere of the early Republic." See David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 1997), 293, 233.

⁷ This quote was printed then reprinted in various papers, see *The New-York Journal, and Weekly Register*, April 30, 1789; *New-York Daily Gazette*, May 1, 1789; *The Albany Journal, or the Montgomery, Washington and Columbia Intelligencer*, May 4, 1789; *Middlesex Gazette, or, Foederal Advertiser*, May 9, 1789; *Berkshire Chronicle, and the Massachusetts Intelligencer*, May 15, 1789; *The Salem Mercury*, May 19, 1789; *New-Hampshire Recorder*, May 21, 1789; *The Vermont Journal, and the Universal Advertiser*, May 25, 1789.

⁸ Simon P. Newman, *Parades and Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 48. German philosopher Jürgen Habermas developed the concept of the public sphere. His theories signify how private individuals unite when engaged in organized public acts which in turn have political implications. See Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989). For a valuable review of Habermas's influence on early national history, see John L. Brooke, "Reason and Passion in the Public Sphere: Habermas and the Cultural Historians," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 29 (1998), 43-67. For noteworthy sources that investigate the influence of political culture in the early national period, see Albrecht Koschnik, "Political Conflict and Public Contest: Rituals of National Celebration in Philadelphia, 1788-1815," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 118 (1994), 209-48; Jeffery L. Pasley, Andrew W. Robertson, and David Waldstreicher, eds., *Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History of the Early American Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Ray Raphael, *A People's History of the American Revolution: How Common People Shaped the Fight for Independence* (New York, New Press, 2001); Alfred F. Young, *Liberty Tree: Ordinary People and the American Revolution* (New York: New York University Press, 2006); and Alfred F. Young, Gary B. Nash, and Ray Raphael, *Revolutionary Founders: Rebels, Radicals, and Reformers in the Making of a Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011). In a review of *Revolutionary Founders*, Mary Beth Norton questioned, "Where are the members of the Ladies Association, the first organization of American female political activists?" This further demonstrates the value of this case study, see Mary Beth Norton, "Finding More Founders," *The New York Times*, May 20, 2011.

integral part of political life in the early republic. Allgor's narrative, *Parlor Politics*, examined the political implications women had on Washington, D.C. Allgor focused on the female elite of Washington who, because of their close political connections, played influential roles in the establishment of the national government under the administrations of presidents from Thomas Jefferson to Andrew Jackson. According to Allgor, "Here in Washington women—both well-known and not—appear as political actors in their own right, using social events and the 'private sphere' to establish the national capital and to build the extraofficial structures so sorely needed in the infant federal government." She argued that women created "an unofficial space" that developed a common political arena which connected the male dominated public realm and the private world of female domesticity. In turn, these casual and unofficial interactions established the politics of the new nation.⁹ More recently, Rosemarie Zagarri's groundbreaking study, *Revolutionary Backlash*, examines the extent and forms of women's political activism during the American Revolution through the election of Andrew Jackson. Zagarri characterized "female politicians" as "highly visible" elite white women who "assumed their political role with an independence of spirit and an intellectual assertiveness that impressed some people and alarmed others."¹⁰ Similar to the women in the nation's capital city, the Ladies of Trenton were

⁹ Catherine Allgor, *Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 1. Susan Branson, *These Fiery Frenchified Dames: Women and Political Culture in Early National Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); Jan Lewis, "Politics and the Ambivalence of the Public Sphere: Women in Early Washington D.C.," in Donald R. Kennon and Barbara Wolanin, eds., *A Republic for the Ages: The United States Capitol and the Political Culture of the Early Republic* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 199), 122-51; and Zagarri, *Revolutionary Backlash*.

¹⁰ For further discussion, see Rosemarie Zagarri, *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007). Although several significant works, such as those written by Linda Kerber and Mary Beth Norton, center on the lives of women in eighteenth century America, these publications claim that females were situated in a separate sphere of domesticity – detached from the public and political domain. Kerber's republican motherhood ideology claimed women asserted their connection to the state through a reinterpretation of long-established domestic responsibilities. See Kerber, *Women of the Republic* and Norton, *Liberty's Daughters* for comprehensive works supporting republican motherhood. This paradigm continues to serve as a framework for understanding women's roles during the early national period. For a recent example, see

quintessential “female politicians” as they strategically used their high social standings and strong connections to local and national politics to confidently delve into once forbidden territories concerning public, political, and military affairs.

Women of Trenton and the surrounding area united for political and ceremonial purposes under the title, “The Ladies of Trenton.” This designation leads to a key question: Were the women involved in raising funds for the Continental Army the same as those who organized Washington’s reception? An analysis of the participants reveals an overlap of key leaders and participants. Eleven of the twenty-two women who planned Washington’s tribute also publicly



Mary Dagworthy Hunt. Courtesy of the Hunt-Morgan collection, University of Kentucky Archives.

vowed to rouse “hearts hard as marble” to aid the military.¹¹ Every member of the central committee established to relieve the Continental Army were participants in Washington’s reception, four of which were the “Matrons” who “took charge:” Mrs. Esther Cox, Mrs. Sarah Furman, Mrs. Mary Dickinson, and Miss Mary Dagworthy (Married Abraham Hunt in 1785).¹²

Additional women from Hunterdon County who participated in both acts include Mrs. Rachel Stevens, Mrs. Mary Smith, Mrs. Mary Hanna, and Mrs. Esther Lowery.

Representative Mrs. Annis Stockton of Somerset County and Mrs. Mary Borden of Burlington County contributed to both endeavors. Additionally, two of the daughters of the fundraising women were also listed among the tribute organizers: Mrs. Catherine Stockton (daughter of

Carol Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers: Women in the Struggle for American Independence* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005).

¹¹ “Sentiments of a Lady in New Jersey,” *The New Jersey Gazette*, July 12, 1780.

¹² For marriage announcement of Miss Polly (Mary) Dagworthy and Abraham Hunt, see *The New Jersey Gazette*, May 9, 1785.

Esther Cox) and Mrs. Grace Woodruff (daughter of Esther Lowery). In addition, unmarried women, including daughters of participants, were among the thirteen young ladies who represented the states in the union: Miss Elizabeth Cadwalader (Member of Central Committee to support the Continental Army), Miss Elizabeth Borden, Miss Esther Cox, Miss Mary Cox, Miss Mary Dickinson, and Miss Mary Lowery.¹³ The Ladies of Trenton motivated New Jersey women and their daughters to become active participants in civic affairs, with profound political implications.

Sources pertaining specifically to these women and the two significant events they fostered in early New Jersey and American history are fragmented. Yet, an analysis of these various primary documents reveals several critical components that contributed to the Ladies of Trenton's success in organizing public endeavors, nurturing principles of the Revolution, and captivating the young republic. Unlike the majority of eighteenth century women, the Ladies of Trenton, privileged in financial and social status, benefited from direct exposure to education and the world of politics.¹⁴ Without the burdens of laborious household tasks, they were free to

¹³ Lists of participants of fundraising campaign can be found in "The Ladies of Trenton..." *The New Jersey Gazette*, July 5, 1780; "Sentiments of a Lady in New Jersey." For contributors to Washington's reception, see Stryker, *Washington's Reception*. By using these sources and various histories including genealogical studies a core group of women can be identified. Useful sources in verifying the participants include Eli F. Cooley, William Scudder Cooley, and Hannah Louisa Cooley, *Genealogy of Early Settlers in Trenton and Ewing, "Old Hunterdon County," New Jersey* (1883; rep., Lambertville: Hunterdon House, 1985); Henry Miller Cox, *The Cox Family in America: A History of Genealogy of the Older Branches of the Family from the Appearance of its First Representative in this Country in 1610* (Somerville: The Unionist-Gazette Association, 1912); Reuben Pownall Ely, Warren S. Ely, and Daniel Brittain Ely, *A Historical Narrative of the Ely, Revell and Stacye Families who were among the Founders of Trenton and Burlington in the Province of West Jersey 1678-1683, With Genealogy of the Ely Descendants in America* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1910); Hall, *History of the Presbyterian Church*; Henry Race, "Historico—Genealogical Sketch of Col. Thomas Lowery, and Ester Fleming, his Wife," *The Jerseyman: A Quarterly Magazine of Local History and Genealogy, Principally of Hunterdon County* vol. 1, no. 3 (1891), 22-26.

¹⁴ For discussions of colonial women's experiences, see Carol Berkin, *First Generations: Women in Colonial America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996); Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Cornelia Hughes Dayton, *Women Before the Bar: Gender, Law, and Society in Connecticut, 1639-1789* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Mary Beth Norton, *Separated by their Sex: Women in Public and Private in the Colonial Atlantic World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); *Ibid*, *Founding Mothers and Fathers: Gendered Power and the Forming of American Society* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1996); Laurel T.

allocate time towards more desirable activities, such as political activism. Emboldened by actions, rhetoric, and ideals born of the American Revolution, these learned women advanced their political objectives in the public realm through print discourse, specifically newspapers. In order to accomplish their political agenda, these women composed broadsides, corresponded with influential men, and welcomed the public attention they knew their activities would garner. The Ladies of Trenton used print culture to their benefit; detailed accounts of their public displays of patriotism were circulated throughout the young nation.¹⁵

Utilizing an array of sources to best illustrate these women and their impact on early national culture, the focus of this study will be *specifically* of the women who organized and participated in *both* the fundraising campaign and Washington's tribute. The most notable woman among the group was Mary Dagworthy Hunt of Trenton. Her correspondence with her stepson John Wesley Hunt of Kentucky in the Hunt-Morgan Papers at the University of Kentucky has provided a special glimpse into the life of "one of the most zealous of all the patriotic ladies" of Trenton. Mary Dagworthy was appointed secretary of the fundraising campaign, corresponded with General Washington in the midst of the war, and "was the head of every organization to make supplies for the wounded in the hospitals," yet her significant contributions during this critical period in New Jersey and American history have been largely overlooked in the historical record.¹⁶ An examination of correspondence, newspapers, and their public demonstration proves that Mary Dagworthy Hunt and the Ladies of Trenton were part of a

Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812* (New York: Knopf, 1990); and *Ibid, Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750* (New York: Knopf, 1982).

¹⁵ The actions of these New Jersey women challenges Michael Warner's assertion that print culture of the early republic was exclusively "masculine" in nature, and suggests that more research is needed in this critical area of the historical framework. See Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

¹⁶ Stryker, *Washington's Reception*, 12.

larger collection of Americans who utilized rites, festivals, and print discourse to become active members of the political process.

A product of a family who deeply valued education, Mary Dagworthy was the daughter of Sarah (Ely) and John Dagworthy, of Maidenhead Township, New Jersey. In her father's will Mary was left his "small silver cup" but more significantly provisions were made for her education. Dagworthy bequeathed his eldest son John "two hundred silver cups" and younger son Ely a "Negro boy." His directive for both sons was near identical: "Be kind to his sisters and in particular to be careful of the education and bringing up of his sister Mary."¹⁷ Without question, her father's request was fulfilled. As a single woman in Trenton, Mary "lived and taught school" in the same building.¹⁸ She was also responsible for the care and education of her niece, Elizabeth Dagworthy Adelott, adopted daughter of John Dagworthy, and her granddaughters, Mary and Theodosia Hunt, daughters of her stepson, John Wesley Hunt of Kentucky.¹⁹ Mary Dagworthy Hunt, like the other Ladies of Trenton, used education as a means to refashion the gender roles of the early American society.

Perhaps the most well-known of the group, Mrs. Annis Boudinot Stockton, has been long remembered for her cultured background, literary talents, unyielding patriotism and public presence in the early republic. A product of a prominent family, her brother Elias Boudinot became President of the Continental Congress and Director of the Mint, and her other brother

¹⁷ John Dagworthy, will dated August 27, 1756, proved September 6, 1756, at New Jersey State Archives, Trenton, NJ. Mary Dagworthy's mother's will, Sara Dagworthy dated July 17, 1780, proved July 5, 1784 is also at the New Jersey State Archives. In her will she bequeathed Mary Dagworthy her entire estate "both real and personal" and appointed her "Executrix" of the document.

¹⁸ Louise Hewitt, *Historic Trenton* (Trenton: Smith Press, 1916), 56. This location, on the corner of Broad and Ferry Streets later becomes the Eagle Tavern of Trenton. For more information in regards to this rich historic site, see Rebecca White, et. al., *A Historical Account and Archaeological Analysis of the Eagle Tavern: City of Trenton, Mercer County, NJ* (Trenton: Trenton Historical Society, 2005).

¹⁹ George William Marshall, *Memoir of Brigadier-General John Dagworthy of the Revolutionary War* (Wilimington: Historical Society of Delaware, 1895), 18, 20; and James A. Ramage, *John Wesley Hunt: Pioneer Merchant, Manufacturer and Financer* (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1974), 57-58.

Elisha Boudinot served as a justice of the Supreme Court of New Jersey. She married Richard Stockton, New Jersey delegate to the Continental Congress and a signer of the Declaration of Independence.²⁰

Like Annis Stockton, Abigail Adams, and Judith Sargent Murray, the Ladies of Trenton had social standing and family connections that enabled them to become political activists in the early republic.²¹ For example, Mary Pennington was married to Isaac Smith of Trenton, who was generally described as a “physician, judge, public official and banker.” In 1795, Smith became a Federalist leader in the United States House of Representatives, and then named first president of the Trenton Banking Company in 1805.²² In addition, Mrs. Mary Dickinson’s husband, Philemon Dickinson, brigadier general of battles of Trenton and Princeton, also had a political career serving as a member of the Provincial Congress of New Jersey and United States Senate from 1790-1793.²³ Mrs. Mary Dagworthy Hunt and Mrs. Sarah Furman were linked to Trenton’s most opulent, well-known merchants and patriot leaders: Abraham Hunt and Moore Furman. Both trustees of the First Presbyterian Church, they were influential citizens of Trenton. Hunt served as the postmaster of for six years and in 1792 Furman became the city’s first mayor.²⁴

²⁰ For a discussion of “Annis Stockton, Richard Stockton, and the New Jersey Elite,” see Annis Stockton, Carla Mulford, ed., *Only for the Eye of a Friend: The Poems of Annis Boudinot Stockton* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1995), 17-25. Personal and published poems and poetic correspondence of political and societal happenings in the early national period are compiled in this comprehensive source.

²¹ Judith Sargent Murray was born in Gloucester, Massachusetts to a successful family which not only gave her an “unspoken sense of security and privilege” but access to the printed word. Similar to the Ladies of Trenton, Judith Sargent was one of the privileged young girls “whose families could afford to indulge their daughters’ taste for reading, had time to spend with a good book.” See Sheila L. Skemp, *First Lady of Letters: Judith Sargent Murray and the Struggle for Female Interdependence* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 13, 23. Although Abigail Adams did not receive a formal education she “fondly remembered amateur teachers” who taught her how to “write well and think deeply,” her parents, grandmother, and peers molded her education. See Woody Holton, *Abigail Adams* (New York: Free Press, 2009), 8.

²² Richard A. Harrison, et al. *Princetonians: A Biographical Dictionary* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 147-150; Included in this work are biographical sketches of John Hanna and Richard Stockton, whose wives were affiliated with the group.

²³ For a biography of Philemon Dickinson, see John A. Garraty and Mark C. Carnes, ed., *American National Biography*, vol. 6 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) 572-573.

²⁴ Hall, *History of the Presbyterian Church*; 117-118, 172, 220-221; Ramage, *John Wesley Hunt*, 1-12. For additional biographical information of Dickinson, Hunt, Smith, and Furman see *A History of Trenton*, 130-138.

Well-versed in the nation's current military and political situation, the Ladies of Trenton utilized their elite status and educational attainments strategically, thereby transforming eighteenth century notions of female identity.

With the Ladies of Trenton's elite status came educational opportunities that extended beyond the traditional goals of reading, domesticity, and femininity. Historians have demonstrated how education is an essential tool in women's empowerment and activism. Mary Kelly attributed women's access to learning, whether informal or formal, as an impetus to enter "civil society." In this public space between the private, familial households and formal state apparatus, women expanded their roles in the early republic, becoming "makers of public opinion."²⁵ Recently, Lucia McMahon explores how the education of women was of "utmost importance" to the "early republic's government, institutions, and society" which relied on "properly educated women." An analysis of the Ladies of Trenton's public presence and use of print discourse supports McMahon's claim that learned women were not only welcome, but an "essential part of early national society."²⁶

Enjoying elite status in society enabled The Ladies of Trenton to acquire better- than-typical education and the freedom to make political statements. A brief biography of Esther Fleming Lowery provides an illustrative example. Born in 1739, Esther was the daughter of Samuel Fleming, an Irish immigrant who founded the town of Flemington, New Jersey in 1759. Her mother, Esther Mounier Fleming, was described as "pious and intelligent;" her "instruction and influence had a beautiful and lasting impression on the mind and character of her daughter."

²⁵Mary Kelly, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 1, 5, 7, & 25.

²⁶ Lucia McMahon, "Of Utmost Importance to Our Country": Women, Education, and Society, 1780-1820," *Journal of the Early Republic* 29 (2009), 476-477, 498. For additional discussions of women's literacy and education in the early national period, see Mary Kelly, "'The Need of Their Genius': Women's Reading and Writing Practices in Early America," and the essays on Kelley's book collected for a symposium on "Women and Civil Society," *Journal of the Early Republic* 28 (2008), 1-82. See also Lucia McMahon, *Mere Equals: The Paradox of Educated Women in the Early American Republic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012).

Esther Fleming was courteous and lady-like, exuding the cherished female attributes of amiability and refinement. She married Colonial Thomas Lowery, a “prominent man” and “an extensive land owner” in the village of Flemington. According to a genealogical sketch of Esther Fleming Lowery, “The people whom she called around her at her home, and those with whom she associated at Trenton and other places, were among the best class of the people.” Esther Lowery was a privileged woman, and, like other Ladies of Trenton, had access to rich worlds of social and intellectual refinement.²⁷

Although Esther Lowery was a woman of means, she shared a collective domestic experience with eighteenth century women from different colonial regions and various economic backgrounds. She was characterized as “an affectionate wife and mother,” yet she was also described as an “ardent patriot” who sympathized with the Revolutionary struggle for independence. According to one account, “She well understood the wrongs, oppression and persecution her ancestors had suffered and fervently desired that every vestige of British tyranny, arrogance and usurpation should be forever obliterated from the land of her adoption.” Whether Lowery was raising funds to support the Continental Army or organizing a public reception for Washington, her actions and those of the Ladies of Trenton provide noteworthy examples of the broad patriotic activities of American women in the early republic.²⁸

The summer of 1780 marked a turning point in the political acts embarked on by New Jersey women. The Ladies of Trenton abandoned traditional feminine virtues when they utilized print discourse, entering the male-dominated public realm to advance their political agenda. On June 28, 1780 they published an account of their efforts in *The New Jersey Gazette*:

The LADIES of this town (Trenton) and neighborhood, animated by the ardour which daily prevails more and more among the ranks of people to distinguish themselves in the

²⁷ Race, “Genealogical Sketch,” 24.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 24-25.

present conjuncture of publick affairs, have instituted a subscription to be applied as a donation to the soldiery...²⁹

Inspired by the patriotic fervor surrounding them, the Ladies of Trenton transitioned into the world of “publick affairs.” They published their intentions in the *New Jersey Gazette*, challenging long-established gender boundaries as they publicly set the stage for their future patriotic endeavors.³⁰

With the ultimate goal of providing immediate relief to suffering men of the Continental Army, New Jersey women organized a Central Committee to form a State Association. The Central Committee of the Ladies of Trenton sent invitations to representative women in every New Jersey county, calling on them to assemble in Trenton on July 4, 1780.³¹ Their inclination to assemble and establish a Central Committee indicates that the Ladies of Trenton were well-informed of innovative political actions and rhetoric born throughout the Revolution. According to Gordon Wood, “By the end of 1774, in many of the colonies local associations were controlling and regulating various aspects of American life.” To the amazement of royal governors, these new informal governments, or committees, gradually grew in importance. The

²⁹ *The New Jersey Gazette*, June 28, 1780.

³⁰ The activism of patriotic women assisting the war effort did not originate, however, with the formation of the Ladies of Trenton. American women began to develop a political consciousness prior to the American Revolution. Colonial tea boycotts enabled patriot women, privately and indirectly, to become involved in early American politics. The patriotic act of spinning homespun cloth also enabled women to express their political message while maintaining feminine and domestic virtues. Although women’s actions indicated their patriotism, these tasks were performed privately in their households and constituted only an indirect influence on the war effort. For an overview of how the conflict affected the lives of New Jersey women and how women of the state reacted to the conflict see Delight W. Dodyk, “Troublesome Times A-Coming: The American Revolution and New Jersey Women,” in Barbara J. Mitnick, ed, *New Jersey in the American Revolution* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 139-150; and Linda Grant DePauw, *Fortunes of War: New Jersey Women and the American Revolution* (Trenton: New Jersey Historical Commission, 1975).

³¹ *The New Jersey Gazette*, June 28, July 5, and July 12. Additional reports of the New Jersey drive appeared in *The Pennsylvania Packet*, July 8, 1780; *The Independent Chronicle and the Universal Advertiser*, July 13, 1780; and *Independent Ledger, and the American Advertiser*, July 17, 1780.

assembly of patriot groups, such as the Sons of Liberty and the Ladies of Trenton, points to an expansion of the rights of common Americans and their increased participation in politics.³²

Following their July fourth meeting, the Ladies of Trenton published a record of deliberations in the *New Jersey Gazette*. In declaring “their zeal in the glorious cause of American Liberty,” the women presented their ardent patriotic stance. They then informed the public of their intentions of raising a “subscription for the relief and encouragement of those brave Men in the Continental Army.” They praised the soldiers who “fought and bled in the cause of virtue and their oppressed country” while facing constant danger. A list of committee members followed: Mrs. Dickinson, Mrs. Cox, Mrs. Furman, and Miss Caldwell. It was the responsibility of the central committee to coordinate with other female representatives from thirteen New Jersey counties in order to raise contributions. Finally, the publication listed the female representatives and their counties of residence: County of *Hunterdon*, Mrs. (Vice-President) Stevens, Mrs. Judge Smith, Mrs. (Charles) Coxe...County of *Sussex*, Mrs. (Counsellor) Ogden...

Their goal was clear; to work together to “expeditiously” implement their “scheme into execution” in order to solicit subscriptions for the Continental Army. In the concluding words of the publication, the women strongly encouraged their compatriots to participate, and praised them in advance for their kindness and patriotism. They directed the public to address all correspondence to their secretary, Miss Mary Dagworthy, and to send collections, with names or anonymously, to the Treasurers, Mrs. Sarah Furman.³³

³² Gordon Wood, *The American Revolution: A History* (New York: Modern Library, 2002), 48. For accounts of how ordinary Americans became entwined in acts of resistance against the British, see T. H. Breen, *American Insurgents, American Patriots: The Revolution of the People* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010). See also, Alfred F. Young, *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party: Memory and the American Revolution* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), part 1.

³³ *The New Jersey Gazette*, July 5 and July 12, 1780.

By publishing articles in the *New Jersey Gazette*, the Ladies of Trenton utilized the public realm of print to support their fundraising efforts. Their patriotic language and strategic use of print culture were uncharacteristic of traditional eighteenth century women. Their act of assembly, coupled with their patriotic rhetoric and actions, paralleled those of male patriots and exemplified their knowledge of political culture. The date for the assembly—the four-year anniversary of the ratification of the Declaration of Independence—was no coincidence. This date epitomized the women’s understanding of the nation’s political situation and their dedication to the cause of freedom. They could have safely organized a sewing circle, but instead chose a public and political form of assembly. Establishing a committee, appointing leaders, and utilizing print medium, the Ladies of Trenton asserted themselves as patriots ready to serve the Revolutionary cause.³⁴

In addition to the political rhetoric, the Ladies’ July 5th publication demonstrated that the cause of liberty was equally significant to women and men of the state. In order to raise subscriptions in an efficient manner, the female representatives printed their names and the counties where they resided.³⁵ The publication of such personal information, coupled with the revolutionary use of print discourse and patriotic actions, was extremely dangerous in a time of war, especially in New Jersey. According to historian Richard P. McCormick, “No other state, so generally and continually felt the impact of the struggle for independence.” He attributes the “seven frightening years” of the Revolution to the state’s strategic location between New York and Philadelphia, which housed opposing armies throughout the war. Surrounded by both minor engagements and significant battles such as Trenton, Princeton, Red Bank, Monmouth, and

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

Springfield, the Ladies of Trenton jeopardized their well-being and the security of their families as they publicly aided the patriots' cause.³⁶

Concurrently, a small item specifically pertaining to the efforts of women in Essex County was printed in *The New Jersey Journal* informing the public about the central committee's meeting: "On July 4th Mrs. Josiah Hornblower was designated with Mrs. Governor Livingston, and Mrs. Elisha Boudinot and Mrs. William Burnet as a Committee of Essex County ladies with others equally prominent throughout the state to receive subscription for the succor of the country's defenders in the field."³⁷ This piece also listed the names of the women and their county of residence. Among those listed was Susannah French of Essex county, the wife of William Livingston, who in 1776 became the state's first governor (and Susannah its first first lady).³⁸ Such articles verify these women's elite status as well as their dedication to the cause of American independence and the soldiery.

The Ladies of Trenton positioned themselves squarely in the print and public spheres in order to disseminate propaganda designed to incite patriotic zeal among other New Jersey women. Their landmark piece of propaganda, titled "The Sentiments of a Lady in New Jersey," revealed no connection to their mother country, claiming the British were carrying on war against their "native country." Next, they challenged the British and the causes of the conflict, stating that it began "on their part without principle." They denounced the British by stating the "true characteristics of their country – a fierce barbarous spirit," was at the core of the conflict, highlighted their "unjust claims, their cruelties and their crimes," and characterized them as not

³⁶ McCormick, *New Jersey from Colony to State*, 132.

³⁷ *New Jersey Journal, and Political Intelligencer*, July 5, 1780.

³⁸ Biographic information about Susannah French Livingston and various New Jersey woman, see Joan Burstyn, ed., *Past and Promise: Lives of New Jersey Women* (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1990). In addition, biographic information pertaining to Susannah French Livingston and exclusively New Jersey women in the early republic, see Virginia M. Lyttle et. al., *Ladies at the Crossroads: Eighteenth Century Women of New Jersey* (Morristown: Compton Press Inc., 1978).

just as “unprovoked aggressors, but as enemies by principle and example to mankind in general.”³⁹ By utilizing a widely-circulated newspaper to criticize the British Empire and Army, the Ladies of Trenton boldly expanded the scope of American women’s political activism.

Recounting the horrors of war, the Ladies of Trenton attempted to mobilize the entire female population to support the American Revolution. They spoke of the slaying of their countrymen, who were left “to waste in the fields” and the destruction of their homes and churches as “unjust” acts of the British. They asserted the British “have desolated the aged and unprotected,” then specifically accused them of waging war against the women of the state. Finally, the Ladies of Trenton honored their female compatriots who were brutally murdered, calling them martyrs to their unwavering cause. They informed the masses “of the tragical death of Miss M’Crea, torn from her house, murdered and scalped by a band of savages hired and set on by British emissaries.” They also described, “the melancholy fate of Mrs. Caldwell, put to death in her own house in the late incursion of the enemy.” According to the women, these horrific events would rouse even “hearts hard as marble” and “make a deep and lasting impression in the minds of all.” The Ladies of Trenton bravely used vivid accounts of violence executed by the British in order provoke patriotic sentiments.⁴⁰

³⁹ “The Sentiments of a Lady in New Jersey,” *New Jersey Gazette*, July 12, 1780.

⁴⁰ Ibid. The Ladies of Trenton tactically utilized the murders of McCrea and Caldwell to instill in every New Jersey female the significance of their efforts in raising subscriptions for the virtuous cause of independence. First, they recounted the summer of 1777 and the brutal slaughter of an unmarried female, Jane McCrea. She was a young Tory who traveled north from New Jersey to marry her fiancé, David Jones, an officer in General John Burgoyne’s army. The couple planned to marry once the British came through the Hudson Valley. Allegedly, during McCrea’s travels to Fort Edward she was captured, scalped, and murdered by a party of Native Americans allied with the British. Her death fueled patriot propaganda and inspired eighteenth and nineteenth century music, poems, plays, newspaper articles, paintings and etchings. For a useful overview and analysis of works pertaining to McCrea’s murder see, June Namias, *White Captives: Gender and Ethnicity on the American Frontier* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), esp. 117-144. Namias maintains the legend of McCrea contributed to the formation of an ideology for women in post-Revolutionary America that reinforced Native American savagery and the acceptance of white male hegemony. McCrea’s sister, Mrs. Mary Hanna, was a participant in the Ladies of Trenton’s fundraising campaign and aided in the organization of Washington’s reception. Stryker, *Washington’s Reception*, 11. In 1780, Mrs. Hannah Ogden Caldwell, mother of nine children and wife of the “High Rebel Priest” James Caldwell, was a resident of Connecticut Farms (present-day Union) in northern New Jersey. Seven of the

In its entirety, this broadside showcased the Ladies of Trenton as well-informed about the young nation and the world surrounding them. Their knowledge of political affairs, combined with their rhetoric and actions, were uncharacteristic of traditional notions of eighteenth century femininity. In an assertive manner, they denounced the British Empire, praised the Continental Army, “engaged in the best and most glorious of all causes,” and informed the masses of their plan to solicit subscriptions.⁴¹ Politicized by the American Revolution, the Ladies of Trenton used their elite status, educational prowess, and print culture as vehicles to mobilize women of New Jersey to directly, and publicly assist the war effort. As Zagarri suggests, the actions of these women, “not only affected the fates of individual families but also had an impact on the course of the war, politics, and society.”⁴² In addition to the broadened women’s societal roles, principles of the Revolution transformed the gender meanings of virtue in the early republic. Ruth Bloch claimed “public virtue” was not an “inherently feminine characteristic” yet was indeed “possible for exceptional woman.”⁴³ Utilizing political rhetoric and emergent ideology, the actions of the Ladies of Trenton depict how American women reconfigured traditional gender roles and female virtues to influence the political landscape of the new republic.

older children were visiting Caldwell’s sister and her husband was at the Springfield Church when Hessian troops invaded the surrounding areas. Although Caldwell was encouraged to evacuate, she remained with her younger children and two household assistants. On June 9, Hessian mercenaries approached Connecticut Farms. Hannah, her young children, and female employees gathered in a rear bedroom in the parsonage. According to a disposition given by one of her household assistants, “a short, thick man wearing a red coat came around the end of the house and stood opposite the window. He raised his gun and fired at Caldwell, who fell back and died immediately.” See James Caldwell, *Certain Facts Relating to the Tragic Death of Hannah Caldwell, Wife of Rev. James Caldwell*, ed. A. L. Johnson, Union County Historical Society, *Proceedings*, II (1923-24) 10-15. For further discussions, see Ellet, *The Women of the American Revolution*, vol. II, 107-114, 221-226; Gregory Evans Dowd, “Declarations of Dependence: War and Inequality in Revolutionary New Jersey, 1776-1815,” *New Jersey History* 103 (1985), 47-67, esp. 53-55.

⁴¹ “The Sentiments of a Lady in New Jersey”

⁴² Zagarri, *Revolutionary Backlash*, 26.

⁴³ Ruth H. Bloch, “The Gendered Meanings of Virtue in Revolutionary America,” *Signs*, 13 (1987), 37-58. In addition to the broadening of societal roles, Susan Klepp demonstrated how the American Revolution profoundly affected how women thought about their roles as individuals, their relationships with their husbands, and childrearing. See *Revolutionary Conceptions: Women, Fertility, and Family Limitation in America, 1760-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

The Ladies of Trenton were not the only women to participate in such activities. In the summer of 1780, The Ladies of Trenton coordinated their efforts with women's organizations in neighboring states under the national leadership of Esther DeBerdt Reed of Philadelphia.⁴⁴ Like their compatriots in New Jersey and Philadelphia, the women of Maryland and Virginia also assembled to assist the Continental Army. Collectively, these organizations were referred to as the "Ladies Association." Although the methods employed by the Ladies of Trenton to raise subscriptions were vastly different, they have been forever linked to the Philadelphia women within the historical framework under the "Ladies Association" designation.⁴⁵ Furthermore, the Ladies of Trenton did not halt their active civic involvement at the conclusion of the Revolutionary War. These women organized a public tribute for Washington during his inaugural journey, which incorporated profound symbolism of the new nation in its commemoration of the Battles of Trenton and Princeton.

Several weeks prior to the publication of "Sentiments of a Lady in New Jersey," the women of Philadelphia published their well-known broadside entitled, "Sentiments of an

⁴⁴ Biographical information and correspondence related to Esther Reed can be located in published work of her grandson, William Reed, *The Life of Esther DeBerdt, Afterwards Esther Reed of Pennsylvania* (1853; rep., New York: Arno Press, 1971).

⁴⁵ For a discussion about the Ladies Association of 1780, consult L. H. Butterfield, "George Washington's Sewing Circle," *American Heritage* 2, (1951), 7-10, 68. This piece neglected to address the public and political nature of the women's efforts, hence the quaint phrase "Sewing Circle." For further discussions, see Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect & Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 99-106; Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1980), 178-188. Unlike the other Ladies Associations, the New Jersey women united publicly for a second time in the young republic, first to solicit funds then in 1789 to "testify" their support for soon-to-be President Washington. The public acts of the Ladies of Trenton and Ladies Association as a whole have been largely forgotten in histories of the city of Trenton, the state of New Jersey, and the early America. Examples of Trenton histories include John O. Raum, *History of the City of Trenton, New Jersey* (Trenton: W. T. Nicholson, 1871); Hamilton Schuyler, "Trenton and Trentonians in the Revolutionary Era," in *A History of Trenton 1679-1929: Two Hundred and Fifty Years of a Notable Town with Links in Four Centuries*, ed. Edwin Robert Walker et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1929), 101-148. Examples of New Jersey histories include Alfred Hoyt Bill, *New Jersey and the Revolutionary War* (Princeton: Van Nostrand, 1964); and Richard P. McCormick, *New Jersey from Colony to State -1609-1789* (Princeton: Van Nostrand, 1964). Examples of early American histories include John Ferling, *A Leap in the Dark: The Struggle to Create the American Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); and Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: Norton, 2005).

American Woman.” The “Sentiments” of the Ladies of Philadelphia, presumably written by their founder Esther De Berdt Reed, was first printed on June 10, 1780. Three days after its publication, thirty-six women of Philadelphia assembled to discuss how to implement a plan to support the Continental Army. The outcome of their deliberation was published in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* on June 21, 1780. Beginning with “IDEAS, relative to the manner of forwarding to the American Soldiers, the Presents of the American Women,” the ladies of Philadelphia called upon the entire female population to act immediately to alleviate the burdens placed on the soldiers.⁴⁶

According to Kerber, the two broadsides “are differently phrased, but share many of the same themes;” while Norton contended that the Ladies of Trenton’s “Sentiments” were a “deliberate imitation of the Philadelphians.”⁴⁷ Both Ladies’ Associations utilized popular newspapers in order to publicize their patriotic standpoint. This demonstrates that both groups understood the power of the rapidly expanding print culture in the late eighteenth century. Patriotic rhetoric, including the terms “zeal” and “liberty,” are infused throughout both broadsides. In addition, the women of Trenton and Philadelphia denounced the tyrannical British government and recounted the horrors and devastation caused by war. Both “Sentiments”

⁴⁶ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, June 10; June 21, 1780. “The Sentiments of An American Woman” is easily accessible. For a facsimile see, Linda Grant DePauw and Conover Hunt, *Remember the Ladies’: Women in America 1750-1815* (New York: Viking Press, 1976), 93; and Library of Congress: American Memory, [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=rbpe&fileName=rbpe14/rbpe146/14600300/rbpe14600300.db&recNum=0&itemLink=h?ammem/rbpebib:@field\(NUMBER+@band\(rbpe+14600300\)\)&linkText=0](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=rbpe&fileName=rbpe14/rbpe146/14600300/rbpe14600300.db&recNum=0&itemLink=h?ammem/rbpebib:@field(NUMBER+@band(rbpe+14600300))&linkText=0). Evidence reveals New Jersey women donated to the Pennsylvania campaign. Mrs. Sarah Bache of Philadelphia writes to Mrs. Meredith of Trenton: “I am happy to have it in my power to tell you that the sums given by the good women of Philadelphia for the benefit of the army have been much greater than could be expected...I write to claim you as a Philadelphian, and shall think myself honored in your donation.” See Elizabeth F. Ellet, *Women of the American Revolution*, 3 vols. (New York: Baker and Scribner, 1849): I, 344. Mrs. Margaret Meredith was the wife of military general, government official, and treasurer of the United States (1789), Samuel Meredith. For a discussion of the Meredith family, their influence on early American life, and details of Margaret Meredith’s educational attainments including her knowledge of French history, see Anne Hollingsworth Wharton, *Salons Colonial and Republican: With Numerous Reproductions of Portraits and Miniatures of Men and Women Prominent in Colonial Life and in the Early Days of the Republic* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1900), 46, 97-99, 132.

⁴⁷ Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 104; Norton, *Liberty’s Daughters*, 183;

expressed sincere gratitude to the men of the Continental Army and attempted to rouse patriotic sentiments in their fellow women. Finally, both broadsides outlined a plan for women to raise subscriptions in order to improve the condition of the military.⁴⁸

Despite their basic similarities, the Ladies of Trenton's approach transcended societal boundaries which diverged from the previously established model implemented by the Ladies of Philadelphia. Although the Ladies of Trenton asserted they were "emulating the noble example of their Patriotic Sisters of Pennsylvania," their "Sentiments" were in fact bolder in tone.⁴⁹ In order to encourage women to stretch the boundaries of domesticity, the Ladies of Philadelphia identified historic role models such as female monarchs, Roman matriarchs, and Old Testament women. The Ladies of Philadelphia especially celebrated the efforts of Joan of Arc because she had driven from France "the ancestors of those same British, whose odious yoke we have just shaken off; and whom it is necessary that we drive from this continent." Instead of recollecting the accomplishments of well-known women of the past, the Ladies of Trenton roused patriotic sentiments by recalling the brutal murders of female contemporaries, Miss Jane M'Crea and Mrs. Hannah Caldwell. Furthermore, the Ladies of Trenton included specific examples of destruction caused by the British: "[they] spill the blood of our fellow countrymen...destroy our dwellings and even the houses consecrated and set apart for the worship of the Supreme Being." The Ladies of Philadelphia generally informed the masses of the unjust British government, but they failed to discuss the true destruction of war and the specific dangers encountered by women. The broadside published by the women of New Jersey, on the other hand, had no feminine undertones their justification for raising funds was inherently political in nature: "We ought to do this if we desire to keep the enemy from our borders." The Ladies of Trenton fervently claimed

⁴⁸ "The Sentiments of a Lady in New Jersey;" "The Sentiments of An American Woman."

⁴⁹ *New Jersey Gazette*, July 5, 1780.

that the British were not battling the young nation as a whole, but New Jersey women in particular, when they claimed that [The British] “waged war against our sex.”⁵⁰

Moreover, the terminology presented in “The Sentiments of a Lady in New Jersey” was modeled after male patriots of the Revolution, not the more demure language employed by the “Sisters of Philadelphia.” The Ladies of Trenton declared July 4, 1780 as the date they “assembled.” In addition, the women “unanimously appointed” members of their central “Committee” whose “duty it shall be to correspond with the Ladies...of different counties throughout the state” in order to effectively execute their plan. Both Ladies’ Associations established the positions of county and state “Treasurers,” but the language employed by the Ladies of Philadelphia lacked assertiveness. The Ladies of Philadelphia made no reference to the establishment of a “Committee,” nor did they mention the position of “Secretary.” When the Ladies of Trenton addressed leadership positions they utilized the term “appointed” rather than the mild notation that county “Treasurers” would be “chosen by the others” in the county.⁵¹

In addition to political rhetoric used by the Ladies of Trenton, another difference between the broadsides was the public disclosure of personal information. The Ladies of Trenton revealed their identities and general locations of their homes, whereas the Ladies of Philadelphia chose to remain anonymous. Although Esther Reed was the probable author, the Philadelphia broadside was signed “By an AMERICAN WOMAN.” The Ladies of Trenton listed the names of the committee members and the female representatives from thirteen New Jersey counties who participated in the patriotic endeavor. Although the women of Philadelphia were the first to

⁵⁰ “The Sentiments of a Lady in New Jersey;” “The Sentiments of an American Woman.” References to female Roman elites were common in private and public writings of women such as Abigail Adams and Mercy Otis Warren. For an analysis of this practice see Philip Hicks, “Portia and Marcia: Female Political Identity and Historical Imagination, 1770-1800,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 62 (2005): 265-294.

⁵¹ “The Sentiments of a Lady in New Jersey;” “The Sentiments of An American Woman;” “IDEAS, relative to the manner of forwarding to the American Soldiers,” *Pennsylvania Gazette*, June 21, 1780.

implement this plan, the methods and rhetoric utilized by the women of New Jersey were more radical.⁵²

Although their listing of names left them vulnerable to specific attacks and criticism, the Ladies of Trenton encountered no overt opposition in subsequent articles published in the *New Jersey Gazette*. This lack of public criticism could be interpreted as acceptance or support of their civic efforts, and indeed evidence from personal correspondence suggests that the Ladies of Trenton generated support and inspiration. Kitty Livingston, daughter of NJ participant Susannah Livingston, sent a letter to her sister Sarah Livingston Jay living in Madrid informing her of the American women's plan to raise subscriptions. Kitty responded with "I thank you my dear, for the plan inclosed in yr. Letter which the ladies have adopted for the relief of our worthy soldiers...so agreeable & honorable a representation of my lovely Country women. I am quite charm'd with them and indeed with every thing truly American."⁵³ Abigail Adams remarked, "Virtue exists, and public spirit lives—lives in the Bosoms of the Fair Daughters of America." She recognized their "Efforts to reward the patriotic, to stimulate the Brave, to alleviate the burdens of war..." and observed "the spirit catching from state to state."⁵⁴ Such evidence demonstrates that fellow women valued and welcomed these new public roles established by American women.

⁵² Ibid. Esther DeBerdt Reed is the probable author and considered the president of the Ladies Association. See Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*, 352. Most Ladies Associations utilized the widely circulated "The Sentiments of An American Woman," whereas the New Jersey women created their own piece, specifically related to the women and war in their home state. For a reprint of "The Sentiments of an American Woman" used to inspire Maryland women, see *The Maryland Journal, and Baltimore Advertiser*, June 27, 1780. For an additional piece related to the Maryland women's campaign see published letter, "From a lady in Philadelphia to her friend in this place," *The Maryland Gazette*, July 28, 1780.

⁵³ John Jay, Sarah Livingston Jay, Landa M. Freeman, Louise V. North, Janet M. Wedge, ed. Selected *Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and his Wife* (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2004), 96.

⁵⁴ Abigail Adams to John Thaxter, July 21, 1780, Massachusetts Historical Society in the Adams Papers Digital Editions, <http://64.61.44.187/publications/apde/portia.php?id=AFC03d286>.

In addition their fellow countrywomen, these New Jersey women received support from men. A letter written by Abraham Clark, New Jersey Continental Congress delegate, to the Treasuress Mrs. Sarah Furman on July 11, 1780 expressed gratitude for efforts to aid the ill-equipped Continental Army: “The Station you fill in the benevolent Society of Ladies in New Jersey formed for Obtaining speedy supplies for the Army, induces the Medical Committee of Congress to address you in behalf of the sick and wounded officers and soldiers now in the hospital at or near Baskingridge...” Clark expressed his frustration regarding the lack of medical supplies and continued by noting, “would the Ladies consent to exercise a part of their generosity in this way it will be of essential service.” Concluding with “Your humanity for distressed Objects, and known Zeal for our common Cause, will immediately Accomplish all that is wished on this head,” Clark approached Mrs. Sarah Furman and the Ladies as equals who shared the aspiration of American independence.⁵⁵

The New-Jersey Journal published a public letter “To the Associated Ladies for public donations, in the State of New-Jersey.” Using the alias, “Machaon,” and writing from an undisclosed “Jersey Camp,” a likely soldier begins: “I have with pleasure perused the scheme for donations, proposed by you for the support of the suffering soldiery of this state...I most religiously applaud the patriotism and generosity of my country-women, most brilliantly exhibited in this instance.” Although the article initially commended the women, “Machaon” suggested subscriptions be applied “to the orphans and children, born with the army, whose fathers have bled and died in the service, or so far beggared themselves as to be unable to give them proper education.” He argued that supporting the nation’s poor, innocent youth would be

⁵⁵ Abraham Clark to Mrs. Sarah Furman, July 11, 1780. The original letter is located at The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens in San Marino, California in their Thomas Addis Emmet collection of the signers of the Declaration of Independence (call number EM 41). A contemporary copy of the letter can be located in the New Jersey State Archives, Trenton, NJ.

“more laudable and beneficial to society.” While, “Machaon” did not endorse the Ladies of Trenton’s allocation of funds, he did not condemn the women’s involvement in the public realm.⁵⁶

These pieces served as evidence that both women and men accepted the Ladies of Trenton’s transition out of their private, domestic realm as they become visible, political beings. Clark corresponded directly with the women, while “Machaon” addressed the women in the widely-circulated *New-Jersey Journal*. “Machaon” utilized print to question the ends to which the means were allocated, which further demonstrates the Ladies of Trenton’s position in the late eighteenth-century public sphere. In requests from Clark and “Machaon,” the women received suggestions that were rooted in traditional notions of feminine responsibility to serve as nurturers, yet there are no accounts of the women fulfilling these requests. The Ladies of Trenton appeared to have attained their initial goal by amassing \$15,488 in order to relieve the suffering soldiers of the Continental Army.⁵⁷

The Ladies of Trenton’s lack of compliance to suggestions for the allotment of their funds demonstrated their dedication to their cause, as well as their knowledge of the situation of the Continental Army. Throughout the war, the needs of the Continental Army were inexhaustible; every soldier required clothing, nourishment, shelter, arms, and to be moved about. Following his visit to Saratoga, Richard Stockton, remarked: “Marching with cheerfulness, but great part of the men barefooted and barelegged... There is not a single shoe nor stocking to be had in this part of the world, or I would ride a hundred miles through the woods

⁵⁶ *The New-Jersey Journal*, September 13, 1780. The soldier is referring to Machaon, son of Asclepius, who inherited his father’s talent for healing and became a master surgeon. See Bernard Evslin, *Gods, Demigods, and Demons: An Encyclopedia of Greek Mythology* (New York: Scholastic Book Services, 1975).

⁵⁷ This evidence further challenges Warner’s interpretation of the public sphere and print culture. Although Warner recognizes the significance of the widespread print media, he fails to acknowledge women as participants. See Warner, *The Letters of the Republic*.

and purchase them with my own money.”⁵⁸ The needs of the Continental Army only multiplied. In late winter and spring of 1780, the Army was in desperate want of necessities, including stockings, shirts, and medicines. In addition, the value of Continental currency had depreciated and the funds of the national treasury were exhausted.⁵⁹ In New Jersey, Washington’s plea for basic necessities for the soldiers can be found in countless pieces of correspondence to military generals, political leaders, and clothiers. During the winter of 1780 he wrote to James Wilkinson in Morristown, “The approach of Spring makes me anxious to know whether any or what provision has been made of their clothing... There is now the greatest complaint for want of shirts and that will be daily increasing.”⁶⁰ In Springfield he stated, “For the Troops to be without clothing at any time, is highly injurious to the service and distressing to our feelings.”⁶¹ The Ladies of Trenton, being well-informed of these deplorable conditions, were inspired to become directly involved in military affairs during a time of urgency in their young nation.

The steadfast dedication of the Ladies of Trenton is further evidenced in their correspondence with George Washington. Just five days after the publication of their “Sentiments,” Miss Mary Dagworthy wrote General Washington:

By order of Mrs. Dickinson and the other Ladies of the Committee, I have transmitted to your Excellency by Colonel Thompson Fifteen Thousand four hundred & eighty eight Dollars, being the Subscription receiv’d at this place, to be disposed of in such manner as your Excellency thinks proper, for the benefit of the Continental Soldiers....⁶²

⁵⁸William Nelson, *New Jersey Biographical and Genealogical Notes: From the Volumes of the New Jersey Archives* (Newark: New Jersey Historical Society, 1916), 198.

⁵⁹Wood, *The American Revolution*, 115-116.

⁶⁰ George Washington, “General Washington to James Wilkinson,” in *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745-1799*, ed. John C. Fitzpatrick et al., vol. 18 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1944), 38. For a useful source that examines the Continental Army’s winter in Morristown, NJ as well the impact these times had on the course of the war, see John T. Cunningham, *The Uncertain Revolution: Washington & the Continental Army at Morristown* (West Creek: Cormorant, 2007).

⁶¹ Washington, “General Washington to President of Congress,” in *The Writings of George Washington*, vol. 19, 36.

⁶² Mary Dagworthy to George Washington, July 17, 1780 in *George Washington’s Papers at the Library of Congress 1741-1799*.

The efficiency of their campaign and commitment to the soldiery and patriot cause is exhibited in this letter. In addition, Mary Dagworthy's language was atypical of her gender. Women often began letters, especially to men of prominence, with extensive apologies for their boldness in writing, especially for their interest in political affairs.⁶³ Women of the Philadelphia committee included apologetic undertones in correspondence to Washington stating, "Pardon most revered Sir if we have intruded on your time which we are sensible is invaluable..."⁶⁴ Yet, there is no trace of female passivity in Dagworthy's letter. "By the order..." demonstrated a confident political voice. The Ladies of Trenton transcended societal boundaries by implementing a valuable fundraising campaign to assist the war effort, by boldly displaying their patriotic stance in print, and by confidently communicating with men of prominence.

On August 6, 1780 General Washington responded to Mary Dagworthy: "So much patriotism, while it is a pleasing fresh proof of the spirit of the ladies of New Jersey, entitles them to every applause. The Army feels most sensibly both the design and benefaction."⁶⁵ He recommended that the New Jersey women contact Mrs. Reed of Philadelphia prior to forwarding any more subscriptions because he was unsure at the time how he would apply the funds. Through the act of correspondence, Washington validated the Ladies of Trenton's transition into the public realm and their vested interests in military and political affairs.⁶⁶

⁶³ For a discussion of traditional writing tactics of eighteenth century women, see Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*, 119.

⁶⁴ Committee of Philadelphia Ladies to General Washington, February 13, 1780 in *George Washington's Papers at the Library of Congress 1741-1799*.

⁶⁵ George Washington to Mary Dagworthy, August 6, 1780; *George Washington's Papers at the Library of Congress 1741-1799*. Individuals noted Washington corresponded with great seriousness with the women, he "writes as judiciously on the humble topic of soldier's shirts, as on the plan of a campaign or the subsistence of the army." See Elizabeth F. Ellet, *Women of the American Revolution*, vol. 1 (New York: Baker and Scribner, 1849), 54.

⁶⁶ Correspondence between Washington and Ester Reed reveal two opposing ideas of how the funds would be implemented to assist the Continental Army. On July 4, 1780 Reed wrote to Washington, "The Ladies are anxious for the soldiers to receive the benefit of it (campaign) and wait your directions how it can best be disposed of..." In response, Washington wrote to Reed on the July 14th and proposed "the purchasing of coarse linen, to be made into shirts with the whole amount of their subscription." Then he reiterated this decision remarking it would be "the best mode" for the application of funds. Reed informed Washington on the 31st of her difficulties securing linen and of a

Over \$15,000 forwarded to General Washington by the Ladies of Trenton was used to provide the soldiers with desperately needed clothing. On December 29, 1780, Mary Dagworthy wrote General Washington, notifying him: “By order of the Ladies of the Committee I inform your Excellency they have delivered to Col Nelson D.Q.M. of this state three hundred and eighty pairs of Stockings to be forwarded by him to your Excellency and disposed of as you shall judge proper for the benefit of the Continental Soldiers.”⁶⁷ Washington graciously replied:

I have had the pleasure to receive Your favor of the 29th of December and have given directions to Colonel Nelson to deliver three hundred and eighty pair of Stockings for the use of the Troops of the State of New Jersey – This Gratuity of the Ladies, I am persuaded, will be very acceptable at this season and will produce every expression of gratitude to the generous Donors, from those who are the immediate sharers in their liberality.⁶⁸

Washington and prominent military leaders not only corresponded with Miss Mary Dagworthy in the midst of war, they discussed the women’s actions with praise in their own correspondence. On January 21 1781, Colonel John Nelson informed Washington about the distribution of “three hundred Eighty pairs of Stockings” to the New Jersey troops “by the Ladies of the Committee for securing donations for the Soldiers of the American Army.”⁶⁹

With the British surrender at Yorktown in 1781 and the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1783, the Ladies of Trenton may have concluded that their wartime patriotism was no longer necessary. While no evidence of their activities between 1781-1789 has been uncovered,

shipment of 2000 shirts from the French fleet. Next she proposed her ideas about the dispersal of funds, “the whole of the money to be changed into hard dollars, and giving each soldier two, to be entirely at his own disposal.” On August 10th Washington expressed his “apprehensions” to her suggestion and stressed how clothing would be much more beneficial. The same day Reed responded, “the ladies had not the most distant wish, that their donation shou’d be bestow’d in any manner that did not perfectly accord with your opinion.” As a result of this exchange, the Ladies Association determined the funds would be utilized to provide the Continental Army with much needed clothing.

⁶⁷Mary Dagworthy to George Washington, December 29, 1780 in *George Washington’s Papers at the Library of Congress 1741-1799*.

⁶⁸George Washington to Mary Dagworthy, January 9, 1781 in *George Washington’s Papers at the Library of Congress 1741-1799*.

⁶⁹George Washington to John Nelson, January 21, 1781 in *George Washington’s Papers at the Library of Congress 1741-1799*.

presumably these politically-minded women were interested in the new forms of government and society that progressed throughout the young republic. Most likely, the Ladies of Trenton kept aware of national affairs through reading and in various interactions with leading members of society.⁷⁰

In 1789, the Ladies of Trenton seized the moment to participate in the public world. In preparation for Washington's inaugural journey, the women organized a reception in Trenton. Newspapers throughout Mid-Atlantic and New England states brimmed with details of the women's preparations, descriptions of the Triumphal Arch, and included significant pieces relating to the event such as the ode, "Welcome, Mighty Chief!" and Washington's letters addressed "To the Ladies of Trenton." Along with the written account, widely circulated *The Columbian Magazine* ran the "View of the TRIMUPHAL ARCH." This widely-circulated image included the Triumphal Arch but even more significantly showed a crowd of New Jersey men, women, and young children openly united to greet Washington and witness the "unexampled" public actions of the Ladies of Trenton.⁷¹

⁷⁰ For an example of women's political awareness in early national Philadelphia, see Branson, *These Fiery Frenchified Dames*.

⁷¹ For in-depth contemporary accounts see various magazines and newspapers, especially "ACCOUNT of the Manner of receiving, at Trenton, his Excellency George Washington..." *The Columbian Magazine* (Philadelphia), May 1789, 288. Included in this letter to the editor is the most accurate image of Washington's reception. See also "Account of the PRESIDENT'S Reception at Trenton..." *The Massachusetts Magazine: or, Monthly Museum of Knowledge and Rational Entertainment* (Boston), May 1789, 318. Newspaper accounts of the reception include *The New-York Journal, and Weekly Register* (New York), April 30, 1789; *New-York Daily Gazette* (New York), May 1, 1789; *The Albany Journal, or the Montgomery, Washington and Columbia Intelligencer* (New York), May 4, 1789; *Pennsylvania Packet, and Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia), May 1, 1789; *New Jersey Journal, and Political Intelligencer* (Elizabeth Town), May 6, 1789; *Middlesex Gazette, or, Foederal Advertiser* (Middletown, Conn.), May 9, 1789; *Berkshire Chronicle, and the Massachusetts Intelligencer* (Pittsfield, Mass.), May 15, 1789; *Salem (Mass.) Mercury*, May 19, 1789; *New-Hampshire Recorder* (Keene), May 21, 1789; *The Vermont Journal, and the Universal Advertiser* (Windsor), May 25, 1789. In the eighteenth century, newspapers were the chief source of information for Americans and were a vital component of the emerging political culture of the time. As the Ladies of Trenton raised subscriptions for the Continental Army and organized Washington's reception, Americans from neighboring and distant areas had access to the innovative language and acts employed by these New Jersey women. Newman characterized the dissemination of newspapers as a "veritable explosion" with approximately forty in circulation prior to the Revolution to over one hundred in the early 1790s. The Ladies of Trenton were well-informed of the medium of print and the significance it had on the political culture of the time. See Newman, *Parades and Politics of the Street*, 3. Newman and Waldstreicher place Washington's reception in the context of



View of the triumphal arch, and the manner of receiving General Washington at Trenton, on his route to New-York, April 21st 1789.

The Columbian magazine, or, Monthly miscellany. Philadelphia: Printed for Seddon, Spotswood, Cist, and Trenchard, v. 3, 1789 May.

Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Various contemporary accounts recognized this tribute for its deep political and national importance, yet the centrality of the Ladies of Trenton's efforts have been largely forgotten in the historical record. Samuel Stillman's 1789 Independence Day oration recounted every critical element that led to the formation of the United States of America. Discussions of British tyranny, Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, the Declaration of Independence, Revolutionary War, and economic hardships of the early republic are components of this rousing speech. Stillman proved

additional rites and festivals which attributed to the expansion of the late eighteenth century political culture. For their accounts of the Ladies of Trenton's public demonstration see Newman, *Parades and Politics of the Street*, 47-49; and Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 122-123. For a discussion of receptions organized for Washington throughout his inaugural journey, see Douglas Southall Freeman et al., "Chapter 7: Well, He Deserves it All: April 17-23, 1789," in *George Washington: A Biography* vol. 6 (New York: Scribner, 1948) 167-184; Clarence Winthrop Bowen, "The Inauguration of Washington," *The Century Magazine* 37 (1889), 803-833.

the significance of Washington's reception organized by the "grateful mothers" and "little maids" of Trenton. He noted the profound impression they had on Washington: "The Illustrious Chief in solemn silence stopped to listen to their [the Ladies of Trenton's] song: His soul was in his eyes, and the silent tear stole down his venerable cheek."⁷² The following winter, the tribute organized by these New Jersey women was again recognized. On January 23, 1790, well-known artist of the American Revolution John Trumbull announced his plan to paint "the most remarkable events of the late American Revolution." Trumbull's projected list of paintings included the following momentous events in American history: "The Surrender of the Hessians at Trenton" and "The Signing of the Treaty of Peace." One of the thirteen pivotal moments he presented was, "The President received by the Ladies of Trenton at the Triumphal Arch."⁷³ Stillman's oration and Trumbull's proposal capture the significant roles the Ladies of Trenton played in nation building and their continued relevance to eighteenth century Americans.

Although their public actions contradicted customary feminine virtues, the Ladies of Trenton demonstrated their comfort in public as they showed no fear of criticism. They received no overt opposition in the public arena while soliciting funds to support the Continental Army during a time of necessity. Furthermore, their public tribute was accepted and acknowledged by

⁷² Samuel Stillman, *An Oration Delivered July 4, 1789* (Boston), 22-23; For a discussion how fourth of July celebrations impacted the early national period, see Len Travers, *Celebrating the Fourth: Independence Day and the Rites of Nationalism in the Early Republic* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997).

⁷³ *The New York Magazine, or Literary Repository*, February 1, 1780, 53. John Trumbull completed eight of the thirteen proposed paintings. Public interest in this idealistic portrayal of the Revolution wavered and by 1793 the project slowed down. Helen A. Cooper attributes the incompleteness of the series to political and economic problems in the new republic, coupled with the excesses of the French Revolution. See Cooper, *John Trumbull: The Hand and Spirit of a Painter* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 37-39; For a further discussion, see Irma B. Jaffe, *John Trumbull: Patriot-Artist of the American Revolution* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1975), Ch. 9. An advertisement for Rice & Co. Booksellers further demonstrated the influence the reception had on the nation. Using the "CHORUS, sung before General Washington, as he passed under the Triumphal Arch...composed and dedicated by permission, to Mrs. Washington" this establishment attempted draw customers to purchase this song as well as other musical pieces and musical instruments. The music of "Welcome Mighty Chief!" was written by A. Reinagle who would later be the music teacher of Mrs. Washington's youngest granddaughter, Nelly Custis. See Dorothy T. Potter, *'Food for Appollo': Cultivated Music in Antebellum Philadelphia* (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 2011), 41.

various prominent individuals. Before General Washington left Trenton he directly addressed a letter “To the Ladies of Trenton,” in which he acknowledged their involvement in public affairs and expressed his deep gratitude. He described the “exquisite sensation he experienced” and assured the women he would long remember their tribute which was completed in “elegant taste.” His attention to various details such as the “*white robed choir*” and the “gratulatory song” demonstrated the profound impression that the Ladies of Trenton’s reception had on Washington, remarking that “the impression of it on his heart could never be effaced.”⁷⁴

This reception at Trenton moved and inspired Washington, the Ladies of Trenton, and others who witnessed the event. Jane Ewing, an eyewitness to the reception, sent a letter to her brother James Hunter Jr. in which she described the “Triumphal Arch supported by thirteen pillars adorned with wreaths of flowers, the form was thus.” She included a sketch of the arch and briefly described the tribute:

The Ladies was rang’d in a line from the arch along the Bridge and thirteen Girls dress’t in white with Baskets of flowers, they sung the inclos’d song and when they come (to) these words “Build and strew thy way with flowers” they skaterd them round, that is the flowers, out of their Baskets round his horses feet he sat on his horse while they sung and then made them a low Bow say’d the Ladies had done them a very great honour requested them to except his most grateful thanks...⁷⁵

The enthusiastic, unapologetic nature of Jane Ewing’s letter demonstrated that she found the event significant and believed her brother would appreciate the public efforts of the Ladies of Trenton. Although Jane Ewing wrote from the perspective of an observer, not a direct participant in the event, her letter revealed her comfort with women who self-assuredly transitioned out of their households into the world of political and public affairs. Ewing was one of many women,

⁷⁴Washington Irving reiterated the profound impression the reception had on Washington: “We question whether any of the testimonials of a nation’s gratitude affected Washington more sensibly than those that he received at Trenton,” see Irving, *Life of George Washington* vol. 4 (New York: Putnam, 1869), 508.

⁷⁵ Jane Ewing to James Hunter Jr., April 23, 1789, New Jersey State Archives.

who with the “entire populace of Trenton and vicinity,” witnessed this moving tribute.⁷⁶ Those who were unable to attend could read about of every aspect in widely circulated late-eighteenth century publications.

Within days of Washington’s reception, these elite women continued to be visible in political spaces and use their educational attainments to masterfully convey their sentiments of the new republic within the public realm. Fully immersed in the formation of the new government, Annis Stockton shared with Washington her sentiments regarding the reception in correspondence, stating her “heart was so filled with respect, love, and gratitude” for his leadership. Along with the letter, Stockton included a poem that was later published anonymously in the *Gazette of the United States*. Here she attempts to articulate the feeling of ineffable joy that was shared at the reception: “Oft times, when rapture swells the heart, Expressive silence can impart, More full the joy sublime...” In stanzas two and three she reminisced about Washington’s reception:

The muse of *****’s peaceful shade,
Gave way to all the gay parade
For transports all her own;
She felt the tear of pleasure flow,
And gratitude’s delightful glow
Was to her bosom known.
Triumphal arches—graulating song,
And shouts of welcome from the mixed throng,
Thy laurels can not raise.
We praise ourselves; exalt our name,
And in the scroll of time, we claim
An interest in thy bays.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Harry Podmore, “Arch Erected for Washington,” in *Washington in Trenton, 1732-1932* (1928), 18. This booklet is a reprint of articles that appeared in the *Trenton Times* telling the story of the various visits Washington made to Trenton before, during, and after the Revolution.

⁷⁷ Annis Stockton to George Washington, May 1, 1789 in *George Washington’s Papers at the Library of Congress 1741-1799. Gazette of the United States*, May 13, 1789. See also *Only for the Eye of a Friend*, pg. 150-152. For additional insights into the relationship between Stockton and Washington, consult L. H. Butterfield, “Annis and the General: Mrs. Stockton’s Poetic Eulogies of George Washington,” *Princeton University Library Chronicle* 7 (1945), 18–39.

Stockton reiterated to the nation that the Ladies of Trenton used “transports of her own” to prepare Washington’s most moving inaugural tribute. This piece recognized that while many may read of this event captured in the “annals of mankind,” the glory of the occasion will resonate by those who were able to greet and applaud Washington, the “ONE the people crown’d.” This poem demonstrates that the reception organized by the Ladies of Trenton was a critical component in the establishment of the young nation’s vibrant political culture.

Indeed these New Jersey women remained part of the political landscape of the early republic due to their continued presence in both formal and informal political spaces. On May 7, George Washington, John Adams, members of Congress, foreign ministers, and military leaders, were present at the Inauguration Ball, held at the Assembly Rooms on Broadway in New York. A “collection of ladies” were present. It was also noted that, “among the most distinguished women at this ball were Lady Stirling and her two daughters Lady Mary Watts and Lady Kitty Duer.”⁷⁸ Several years later, in a letter to her stepson John in November, 1792, Mary (Dagworthy) Hunt discussed local election results. She noted Senator Stephen Lush’s “electioneering,” as well the “assemblymen” and opposing political “parties.” She conveyed the unfortunate news, “our side was outvoted by one only.” Hunt reported, “Trenton is incorporated” and provided her stepson with a description of the newly established boundaries. Continuing to politick, she stated “Mr. Furman is mayor” and that “Maskell Ewing wanted an office...but could not succeed with the assembly nor people.” Hunt was not positioned on the outskirts; her remarks, especially the phrase “our side” demonstrated she played larger role in political developments.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Rufus Wilmot Griswold, *The Republican Court, or American Society in the Days of Washington* (New York: D. Appleton, 1867), 154-156.

⁷⁹ Mary Hunt to John Wesley Hunt, December 20, 1792 in Hunt-Morgan Papers, University of Kentucky Special Collections.

Along with politicking, Mary Hunt's correspondence demonstrated that education remained a central focus of elite women and their families. She informed John of his brother Theodore's promising future, noting, "he is mightily delighted at present with his prospects and applies diligently to arithmetic at school in order to qualify himself for this expected promotion." Mary appeared very selective of companions for her stepdaughter, Theodosia. She preferred her to associate with Peggy Wilson instead of Nancy Houston because Peggy "will be of advantage toward improving her" claiming she was "much better educated."⁸⁰ John and Catherine Hunt of Lexington, Kentucky sought to provide their children with the best education possible. Therefore, they sent their two eldest daughters to New Jersey for schooling. In 1810, Mary wrote to John after bringing her granddaughter to Miss Sophia Hay's Young Ladies' School in New Brunswick. Young Mary appeared "well satisfied" and "bore the separation with great *magnimity*," indeed, her grandmother observed "as she is by no means devoid of sensibility." Deeply valuing education, Mary stated, "I have great hopes for her improvements...as far as I can judge Miss H. keeps an excellent school."⁸¹ Young Mary reassured her family, "I will exert myself very much to please both Grand mama and Miss Hay."⁸² Mary Hunt went to great lengths

⁸⁰ Mary Hunt to John Wesley Hunt, February 10, 1793.

⁸¹ Mary Hunt to John Wesley Hunt, November 2, 1810. Mary mentioned to John that young Mary "is not quite alone at Miss Hay's," this is indeed true. Seventeen-year-old, Rachel Van Dyke attended Miss Hay's school during the same time as Mary L. Hunt. For deep insights into Rachel Van Dyke's life including her desire to enrich her education, opinions of societal customs, and her relationship with teacher Ebenezer Grosvenor, see Lucia McMahon and Deborah Schriver, ed. *To Read My Heart: The Journal of Rachel Van Dyke, 1810-1811* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000). For an analysis of women's educational opportunities in New Jersey throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, see Lucia McMahon, "A More Accurate and Extensive Education than is Customary": Educational Opportunities for Women in Early-Nineteenth-Century New Jersey," *New Jersey History* 124 (2009), 1-28. Mary Hunt's correspondence to John Wesley Hunt provides a unique glimpse of her life in early Trenton. Her interests included playing the lottery, "Our Tickets, O John what unlucky creatures we are! One a blank the other a prize of five dollars only, Abraham a blank." She also gossiped, "He (George) is so intimate at Mr. Furmans that some people think he is courting Maria but that can't be..." Later in the same letter she states, "Aunt Gordon told me she heard Jeremy Stevens was courting Susan Hunt." In addition Mary Hunt discussed sleigh riding with household guests, "All our Philadelphia connections are in Trenton except Payton Abbot. They came up part of them however in a sleigh, but must find their way down by some other mode of conveyance for the chief ingredient to make sleighing agreeable as entirely disappeared during the last twenty four hours. In short they left upon bare ground." Later she remarked, "We have had very little sleighing this winter."

⁸² Mary L. Hunt to mother Catherine Hunt, November 2, 1810.

to provide her children and grandchildren the knowledge bestowed upon her as a child. She not only educated her granddaughters when caring for them in Trenton, she was eager to share the gift of knowledge with grandchildren from afar with this plea to John, “I have some books I want to send the children if I knew how to get them to Lexington. If any of your merchants come to Philadelphia & I could know of it perhaps they would take charge of the Box. Let me know how I can manage the matter.”⁸³

The reexamined evidence from eighteenth century sources reaffirms the Ladies of Trenton’s participation in the public sphere and political culture that surfaced during the early national period. By seizing ideal moments to exercise their political beliefs, the Ladies of Trenton effectively inspired fellow women and their daughters to become involved in the new republic. These women’s efforts were highly calculated and deliberate. The act of organizing a tribute for Washington demonstrated their knowledge of the newly-formed government and of the military struggles encountered by the Continental Army in Trenton. Their actions represented symbolic and patriotic values of the new republic. Various pieces of evidence suggest that their public acts were a welcomed part of a new, expansive political culture. The abundance of published accounts of the reception circulated throughout the nation, illustrated the significance of their efforts. Numerous articles informed men, women, and children of the “unexampled” actions of the Ladies of Trenton. Through the distribution of newspapers, those who were unable to observe the event were able to learn about the Ladies of Trenton’s public demonstration of political consciousness and the profound impression they had on the first president of the United States. The medium of print not only enabled the American public to engage in of the civic tribute, but served as an affirmation of the Ladies of Trenton’s unapologetically public efforts. An analysis of their efforts within a historiographical framework that recognizes both the

⁸³ Mary Hunt to John Wesley Hunt, April 20, 1810.

importance of political culture and the women's participation in public rituals reaffirms the significance of the Ladies of Trenton's actions.

Over fifty years following the reception, mid-nineteenth century artists and printing companies, such as Currier & Ives, also recognized the impact this tribute had on Washington and the nation at large. Over a dozen different versions with titles typically beginning, "Washington's Reception by the Ladies," can be identified, none of which actually include the carefully chosen symbols successfully used by the Ladies of Trenton to captivate the young republic. Instead, the focal point of the arch, the sunflower symbolizing the American PEOPLE, was unceremoniously replaced by an eagle. The newly-freed thirteen states were represented by the thirteen pillars supporting the arch, along with the exact number of young women greeting Washington, yet the number thirteen was not reflected in popular images. "Wreaths of evergreen and artificial flowers of all kinds, made by the ladies" were obstructed in prints by displays of American flags, crest-like symbols, and stars of various shapes and sizes. These revised representations were inspired by more masculine, martial themes, disregarding the Ladies of Trenton's presence in the political landscape of the late-eighteenth century and erasing the centrality of their efforts.⁸⁴

While the public and political forms of expression



Currier & Ives, c. 1845. Washington's reception by the ladies, on passing the bridge at Trenton, N.J. April, 1789: on his way to New York to be inaugurated first President of the United States. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

⁸⁴ Mid-nineteenth century artists, such as James Baillie, and printers such as Currier & Ives, chose to illustrate this event reflecting more male and militaristic symbols. See Newman, *Parades and Politics of the Street*, 49. One of these inaccurate portrayals resurfaced on the cover of the January 17, 1965 issue of the *New York Times Magazine* as the nation prepared for the inauguration of President Lyndon B. Johnson.

instituted by the Ladies of Trenton were celebrated in the early national period, their efforts have been largely forgotten in the historical record. Their acts of raising subscriptions in support of the Continental Army and organizing a reception for Washington earned these New Jersey women nationwide recognition as revealed in correspondence, orations, and newspapers. Contemporaries acknowledged these women's contributions to the war effort and their efforts in refashioning gender roles for women. It was noted that women around the globe were "under obligations to those of America" for exhibiting the "highest political virtue" and should be valued for "posterity." Their public reception during the inaugural journey captivated the United States as a whole during a critical time in nation building. Americans were united in celebration of these women's public actions which included deep symbolism reflecting the ideals of the new nation. In time, the centrality of these women's efforts has been largely understudied, even skewed, in the historical pieces. The event John Trumbull coined one of the thirteen "most remarkable" events of the American Revolution has been portrayed inaccurately in countless mid-nineteenth century prints. Now the public and political contributions of the Ladies of Trenton in the early republic will be restored in their proper place—admired and treasured from "age to age."⁸⁵

Catherine Hudak is an educator at Morris Hills High School in Rockaway, NJ. In 2001, she earned an undergraduate degree in Special Education from Bloomsburg University, PA. She completed her masters degree in History from William Paterson University in 2007, where she discovered the Ladies of Trenton. Since then she has been dedicated to furthering her research

⁸⁵ *The Pennsylvania Packet, or the General Advertiser*, November 4, 1780; *New York Magazine, or Literary Repository*, February 1, 1780; "The attempt is praise," *New Jersey Gazette*, January 17, 1781.

and sharing the powerful story of these women throughout the state to ensure their position in NJ and US History.