



True Patriotic Women

The Four DAR Founders

On April 30, 1889, as the Colonial Revival movement and the Progressive Era converged, the Sons of the American Revolution (S.A.R.) was founded in New York City. Initially, some S.A.R. societies permitted women to join and some did not. Seeking a consensus, the organization put the matter to a vote a year later at its general meeting. As a result, the S.A.R. officially decided to exclude women from its membership.

The decision sparked controversy and discussion in the national press, and caught the attention of Mary Smith Lockwood. Incensed by the refusal to recognize the contributions that “true patriotic women” made to the Revolutionary cause, Mrs. Lockwood wrote a fiery editorial that was published in *The Washington Post* on July 13, 1890. She asked, “Were there no mothers of the Revolution?”

Eighteen women attended the DAR’s first official organizing meeting on October 11, 1890, at Mrs. Lockwood’s home. These included the four women traditionally considered to be the organization’s Founders. Each one is revered for helping to lay the groundwork for the National Society’s long tradition of patriotic service. Yet for each of the Founders, her role in DAR tells only part of her story. Meet Mary Desha, Mary Smith Lockwood, Ellen Hardin Walworth and Eugenia Washington—determined, adventurous, passionate women who forged their own unique legacies.

By Tracy E. Robinson



Mary Desha

“I am good for any amount of work.” True to her word, this quote from Mary Desha as she first appears in DAR history predicts her energetic commitment to the Society and reveals her faith in the value of hard work for its own sake.

Miss Desha was born on March 8, 1850, in Lexington, Ky. She was well-educated and for a short time studied at what is now the University of Kentucky. When her family was impoverished by the Civil War, Miss Desha and her mother opened a private school in which they taught their friends’ children. She also worked as a clerk

in Washington, D.C., for a short time before accepting a teaching position in Sitka, Alaska, in 1888.

Finding the living conditions endured by the Alaskan natives unacceptable, she submitted a written protest to the government in Washington, which resulted in a federal investigation. Although not all of her experiences in Alaska were positive, she generally enjoyed her time there and often commented on the state’s natural beauty. Calling the territory “magnificent beyond description,” Miss Desha wrote that she did not “believe heaven [would] be any more beautiful.”

She returned to Lexington in 1889, but shortly thereafter accepted a post in Washington as a clerk in the Pension Office. She later worked as a copyist in the Office of Indian Affairs. She continued in the civil service until her death. Miss Desha remained unmarried all her life and, like many single women in Washington in this era, lived in the city’s boardinghouses. According to the city directory, Miss Desha moved several times during the DAR’s early years and was partial to the portion of the city north of the Capitol building.

Miss Desha was elected Vice President General on October 11, 1890. Later, she was the first Recording

Secretary General, and also served as Vice President General in Charge of Organization, Surgeon General, Corresponding Secretary General and Honorary Vice President General. In 1898 Miss Desha was appointed Assistant Director of the DAR Hospital Corps under Dr. Anita Newcomb McGee. In that capacity she helped process the applications of more than 4,500 women who aspired to serve as nurses in the Spanish-American War.

She never missed a night of work during her five months of service for the Hospital Corps. Mary Desha died suddenly on January 29, 1911, likely of a stroke. Her fellow Daughters honored her memory with the first memorial service and the only funeral service ever held in Memorial Continental Hall, the Society’s first home. She was remembered for her absolute devotion to DAR from the time she read Mrs. Lockwood’s letter in *The Washington Post* until her death.

At the memorial service Mrs. Lockwood said, “She worked hard, and if there is any picture in my mind it is of Mary Desha with a bundle of papers in her hand that pertained to the Daughters of the American Revolution.”

Mary Smith Lockwood

“She is friendly to all progressive movements, especially so in the progress of women,” an acquaintance once said of Mary Smith Lockwood. Dedicated to the work of women’s organizations, Mrs. Lockwood was both the founder of the Washington Travel Club and, for a time, president of the Women’s Press Club. The widow of a Union soldier, she was a member of the Woman’s Relief Corps, auxiliary to the Grand Army of the Republic. She was active in the women’s suffrage movement and also held the position of lady manager at large

at the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. Mrs. Lockwood was a prolific author who wrote many noteworthy books. Her last book, *The Historic Homes of Washington*, was dedicated to her older brother to whom she became close after her mother died when Mrs. Lockwood was only 4 years old.

Mrs. Lockwood was born in Hanover, Chautauqua County, N.Y., on October 24, 1831. She moved to Washington, D.C., in about 1878. Mrs.



Lockwood’s residence was Washington’s elegant and imposing Strathmore Arms, and it was there that the formal organization of the NSDAR took place on October 11, 1890.

Mrs. Lockwood was DAR’s first historian and the Society, inspired by Mrs. Lockwood’s commitment to historic preservation, resolved on October 18, 1890,

to “provide a place for the collection of Historical relics which will accumulate ... and for historical portraits, pictures,

etc. This may first be in rooms, and later in the erection of a fire-proof building.” The movement to build Memorial Continental Hall developed from this resolution.

Mrs. Lockwood also served as Surgeon General, Assistant Historian General, Chaplain General and State Regent of Washington, D.C. At the time of her death she held the offices of Honorary Chaplain General and Honorary Vice President General. Ironically, Mrs. Lockwood had difficulty proving her DAR eligibility and just barely qualified to become a charter member.

So devoted was Mrs. Lockwood to DAR that she attended Continental Congress mere months after her only daughter, Lillian M. Lockwood, died in 1909. She said, “I cannot live without my Daughters. I love them all and they will comfort me.” When speaking at Congress, it was Mrs. Lockwood’s custom to stand at the edge of the platform and address the members as “girls,” rather than “ladies” or “Daughters.” For their part, the Daughters thought of Mrs. Lockwood affectionately as “Little Mother.” After delivering a passionate, extemporaneous patriotic speech at the 27th Continental Congress in

April 1918, Mrs. Lockwood received 27 American Beauty roses presented by 27 pages. Declaring herself “overpowered” by the gesture, she admitted, “there are times when even little Mary gets rattled.”

Mary Lockwood died in Plymouth, Mass., on November 9, 1922, and is buried in Glenwood Cemetery in Washington, D.C. She is the last Founder to die and the only Founder buried in Washington. At her passing, the Society she helped found had grown to a membership of almost 140,000 women. She gave more service, for a longer period of time, than any other Founder.



Ellen Hardin Walworth

In her youth Ellen Hardin Walworth was considered a beauty, and when older she was described as “queenly.” Janet Richards, a charter member of DAR who was acquainted with all of the Founders, remembered sitting near Mrs. Walworth during one early meeting of the National Society. Miss Richards was very impressed with Mrs. Walworth’s “wise suggestions and authoritative manner, also by her tall and stately figure when she rose to speak.”

Mrs. Walworth was born on October 20, 1832, in Jacksonville, Ill. Her widowed mother married Reuben Hyde Walworth, chancellor of New York, in 1851 and moved the family to Saratoga Springs, N.Y. In 1852, Ellen married

Mansfield Tracy Walworth, her stepfather’s youngest son. Mansfield, who became a well-known fiction writer, proved unstable and violent, frequently erupting into rages that included physical assaults on his wife.

After they separated in 1871, a series of abusive and threatening letters he sent to Mrs. Walworth so disturbed their son, Frank, that he intentionally shot and killed his father in a New York City hotel room in 1873. Taking up the study of law to secure Frank’s acquittal by reason of insanity, which she achieved in 1877, Mrs. Walworth earned her law degree at New York University.

Mrs. Walworth was a prolific historian, author and suffragist. In addition, she delivered or published papers for several of the organizations to which she belonged. She was an authority on the battlefields of Saratoga and also published an account of the Burgoyne campaign.

Always ready to speak out in support of a worthy cause, in one of her earliest public efforts after moving to Washington, D.C., Mrs. Walworth made a moving plea to members of her local community to contribute to the fund to renovate George Washington’s home, Mount Vernon. In a speech at the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, she was one of the first to urge the establishment of a national

archives. Although she never joined a women’s rights group, she declared herself in support of “the advancement of women” and “always a Suffragist.”

As director general of the Woman’s National War Relief Association in 1898 during the Spanish-American War, she was present at the field hospital at Fort Monroe to meet the first wounded soldiers arriving from Santiago. Mrs. Walworth’s duties included assisting with the distribution of supplies and the management of the nursing staff. Her daughter, Reubena, fell ill and died while nursing the wounded in the hospitals at Montauk Point, N.Y. Mrs. Walworth never fully recovered from the loss.

Mrs. Walworth served as NSDAR’s first Corresponding Secretary General and was an Honorary Vice President General at the time of her death. She was the first editor of the official publication of NSDAR, *American Monthly Magazine*—a precursor to *American Spirit*—serving from the spring of 1892 until July 1894.

Mrs. Walworth died at Georgetown University Hospital in Washington, D.C., on June 23, 1915, of an obstruction caused by gallstones. She was buried in Old Greenridge Cemetery in Saratoga Springs, N.Y. A memorial service was held in her honor at Continental Congress in 1916.

Eugenia Washington

Eugenia Washington was of the immutable opinion that NSDAR must be a patriotic organization founded on the service of its members' ancestors. It is said that she opposed a proposal to make eligibility for DAR membership contingent on descent from officers alone. She advocated for the democracy of service rather than the aristocracy of rank.

Miss Washington was born on June 24, 1840, near present-day Charles Town, W.Va. In 1859 her father moved the family to Falmouth, Va., just north of Fredericksburg. Her mother died near this time, and her disabled father relied on his daughter to care for him. When the Battle of Fredericksburg was imminent in December 1862, Miss Washington wanted to escape to safety quickly but was delayed so long that she was obligated to remain so near the battlefield that she witnessed the entire battle. It is said that her experiences that day inspired in her a will to assist women from both the North and the South in the worthy cause of preserving their shared heritage, and that this was her purpose in helping to found DAR.

At the close of the war, Miss Washington was offered a position as a clerk with the Post Office Department,



and she and her father moved to Washington, D.C. Miss Washington remained unmarried all her life and lived in a boardinghouse in the city. Known fondly as "Miss Eugie," she was considered quite attractive and received a great deal of attention wherever she went. *The Washington Post* published an account of a man who, on visiting the Post Office Department one day, was immediately taken with Miss Washington's appearance and became determined to meet her. Later, when he met her in the street, she gave him a look that expressed her disinterest in no uncertain terms.

Intimately involved in the earliest planning stages of the National Society, Miss Washington was the Society's first Registrar General. Later she served as Secretary General, Vice President

General and Honorary Vice President General. A tireless worker who was a stickler for accuracy, Miss Washington was remembered as conscientious and particular, with little tolerance for sloppy or casual attention to detail.

An advocate for careful recordkeeping, she was concerned that applications with incomplete information would prove to be of defective historical value. Charter member Janet Richards recalled a remark with which all subsequent Registrars General will sympathize, "Miss Eugenia Washington remarked to me after scanning my historic references, 'I wish all applications were as clear and authentic as these. It would certainly save me a whole heap of trouble!'"

Although she often spoke her mind without hesitation, Miss Washington's devotion to DAR won her the love and respect of its members. Her interest in collecting and preserving American history from its earliest days never abated. She was a founder and the first President General of the National Society of Daughters of Founders and Patriots, which was chartered in Washington, D.C., in 1898.

The first Founder to die, Eugenia Washington passed away at her home in Washington on November 30, 1900. She is buried in Falmouth, Va. 🏛️



In Perpetual Memory

In 1923, the 32nd Continental Congress adopted a resolution directing that an appropriate memorial or monument be placed over each DAR Founder's grave. That plan was found to be impractical, and later the idea of erecting a single memorial on the grounds of Memorial Continental Hall was substituted. A committee was appointed in 1926 and a sculpture by DAR member Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney was placed on the grounds and dedicated on April 17, 1929, during the 38th Continental Congress. Each year during Congress the President General, joined by the Executive Committee, places a wreath at the base of the monument as tangible evidence that DAR remembers and honors its Founders.

Indispensable Charter Members

The Four Founders of the DAR will always be remembered as the women whose fortitude and vision formed the Society's foundation. However, the formative years of the DAR required the help of many women to mold it into a stable organization. The following charter members are only a few who were instrumental in its success. By Rebecca C. Baird



Alice Morrow Clark became Registrar General, along with Eugenia Washington, at the organizing meeting of the DAR on October 11, 1890. Examining the lineage of prospective members was a considerable task, so it was “deemed advisable to elect two ladies to fulfill the duties of the office.”

Her husband, A. Howard Clark, the Secretary General of the S.A.R. and curator at the American Historical Association, provided resources and assistance to the new Registrars General. Mrs. Clark's efforts soon turned toward the acquisition of published Revolutionary records for the future DAR Library, knowing these would be the basis of the Society's genealogical research. Mrs. Clark also served as the Corresponding Secretary General in 1893 and as Vice President General in 1894–1895. She was acknowledged in *American Monthly Magazine* as “one of the younger working officers of the National Society and has cheerfully given her time and strength to many arduous efforts in its early organization.”



Helen Mason Boynton was elected a Vice President General on October 11, 1890. In October 1891 she was chosen to fill the office left vacant by the resignation of Flora Adams Darling, Vice President General in Charge of Organization of Chapters (the position now known as

Organizing Secretary General). Mrs. Boynton received praise from her fellow DAR officers for her efforts in establishing new chapters and coordinating the roles of the chapter, the state and the National Society. In addition to her national office, she worked on several committees including the Credentials Committee and the Printing Committee. Even after vehemently advocating for the less popular view of allowing collateral descent from a Patriot, or descent from a Patriot's sibling, to qualify for DAR membership, mostly in the spirit of inclusiveness, Mrs. Boynton maintained her reputation as a hardworking, loyal supporter of the Society. She was elected an Honorary Vice President General in 1906 and Librarian General in 1907.



Mary H.L. Shields was the first Recording Secretary General of the DAR. Her sturdy, handwritten minutes recorded the earliest and most tumultuous meetings of the National Board of Management. She and her husband, who served as the DAR's legal advisor, devoted

many months to the business of the Society. Appointments to two significant committees—the committee that coordinated DAR's representation at the World's Fair in 1893 and the first committee to investigate building a new home for the Society—attested to her credibility and sound judgment. An article by Mrs. Shields titled “The Continental Hall” that appeared in the July 1893 issue of *American Monthly Magazine* detailed the DAR's preliminary ideas for a building worthy of the Revolutionary Patriots the Society honored. After returning to her native Missouri with her husband, she soon became an active member in the state society. Nine Missouri chapters were formed while she served as State Regent from 1897–1904.



Mary E.M. McDonald became the first Treasurer General of the National Society on October 11, 1890, and remained in that office until March 1892. In December 1891, after the adoption of a resolution to begin planning for a new DAR headquarters, she

moved to create a building fund with money paid toward life memberships. During her report to Congress in 1892, Mrs. McDonald reported the amount in this fund totaled \$650. After resigning her position as Treasurer General, she served as Vice President General until 1893. In a June 1932 ceremony at DAR Headquarters in the President General's Reception Room, Mrs. McDonald was recognized as “one of our earliest and most distinguished charter members.” The Virginia Daughters donated her portrait to the National Society.