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# Margaret Corbin

*Heroine of the Battle of Fort Washington*

16 November 1776

By

EDWARD HAGAMAN HALL  
L.H.M., L.H.D.



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✧ F O R E W O R D ✧

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*The story of Margaret Corbin, famous in 1776, herein graphically related, is finally closed through the identification of "Captain Molly," in 1926, as the lost heroine of the Battle of Fort Washington. This long desired ending is the reward of exhaustive research by Dr. Hall, an archeologist and scholar of acknowledged distinction who has thus revealed the final record of her life, verified her homely resting place, and with the bestowal of the official honors of the nation has completed a rarely interesting chapter in the history of the War for Independence. § The American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society, appreciating the genius of the author, for many years its Secretary, and realizing the importance of his work and the interest of its attendant details, has followed the desire of its late President, Dr. George Frederick Kunz, in publishing this Memoir and in offering it as a contribution to the observance of the 200th Birthday of GEORGE WASHINGTON.*

*D. Bryson Delavan.*

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✻ P R E F A C E ✻

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WHEN, about six years ago a group of patriotic friends recovered from an obscure grave the remains of Margaret Corbin and with suitable honors transferred them to the Cemetery at West Point, they expressed reverence for the memory of a brave woman and rendered long delayed justice where justice was due.

The occasion was not unusual; men have ever admired great heroes. Thus the church canonizes her saints, nations immortalize their brave, and personal shrines are cherished in the hearts of faithful friends. In this respect the ceremonies herein described have often been paralleled.

As to the rendering of justice and the restoring of merited honor so tardily given, the event was almost unique. The case of Captain John Paul Jones, although similar, was not identical; for although his resting place was long neglected, his fame was never forgotten. Margaret Corbin lost both name and fame for more than a century.

The glory of Joan of Arc was undimmed by the vagaries of a protracted life. To understand the full significance of Margaret Corbin's history, one must contrast her portrait as a Revolutionary heroine with that of an aged woman, known only as Captain Molly.

Margaret Corbin followed the fortunes of her soldier husband to the war. Young, full of health, vivacity and wit, she brightened his hard life and that of his companions by her helpful ministrations in camp. At the height of furious battle she arose heroically to the full measure of splendid courage. Later, bereft and permanently disabled, recognition

of her services by the government made her, it is believed, the first woman pensioner of the American Revolution. In time her name disappeared completely from the official records.

In sharp comparison with her earlier history is the sadly lonely, invalided and impoverished woman recognized as of unusual nature but one whose later life should be remembered in pity. No one suspected her identity; thus unrecognized her case was unspeakably pathetic. After more than a century, her burial plot threatened with obliteration, men began to wonder who this Captain Molly really was.

Printed records and unprinted manuscripts diligently searched, clearly proved that she was none other than Margaret Corbin, heroine of the Battle of Fort Washington. At once the woman long unknown received again her rightful title and position and in so doing Captain Molly entered into the just inheritance of the fame of Margaret Corbin, a fame made brighter by the knowledge of her sufferings. As a result of the proceedings recorded in the following pages hers is now a brilliant name among the illustrious of the nation's scroll. Pro-martyr among women in the cause of American Freedom, she is the symbol of conjugal devotion in time of fiery trial, and an example of the self-sacrificing loyalty of the mothers of the Republic without which Independence could not have been won.

EDWARD HAGAMAN HALL

*November 16, 1932.*



IN MEMORY OF  
MARGARET CORBIN  
HEROINE OF THE REVOLUTION  
KNOWN AS MOLLY

1751 - 1800  
WHO AT THE BATTLE OF FORT MIFKINGTON NEW YORK  
IN 1776 HER HUSBAND JOHN CORBIN WAS KILLED KEEPING FIRE  
IN ACTION UNTIL SEVERELY WOUNDED AND THEREAFTER  
OF CONGRESS RECEIVED HALF THE PAY AND ADVANCES  
OF SOLDIERS IN THE SERVICE  
SHE LIVED NEAR AND WAS BURIED ON THE HUDSON RIVER BANK  
NEAR THE MILLAGE NOW CALLED RICHLAND FALLS  
IN RECOGNITION OF HER DEEDS FOR THE CAUSE OF LIBERTY  
AND THAT HER HEROISM WAS NOT FORGOTTEN  
BY THE NATIONAL SOCIETY OF THE DAUGHTERS OF THE  
AMERICAN REVOLUTION IN NEW YORK STATE  
1900

HONORS TO THE HEROINE OF  
FORT WASHINGTON



THE recent identification of the obscure grave of "Captain Molly" at Highland Falls, N. Y., as that of Margaret Corbin, the heroine of the battle of Fort Washington on Manhattan Island in 1776, and the re-interment of her remains, on March 16, 1926, in the West Point Military Academy cemetery with appropriate honors, recall a romantic incident in the War for Independence, and add an interesting chapter to the already rich annals of the Highlands of the Hudson. They also prepare the way for the rendering of historical justice to the memory of a brave and noble woman, whose identity for many years had not only been lost but had also been confused with that of another, and whose physical infirmities due to service in her country's cause, had become the subject of unmerited reproach.

MARGARET CORBIN'S ORIGIN

Margaret Corbin\* was the daughter of Robert Cochran and was born in what is now called Franklin County, Pa., November 12, 1751. That part of Pennsylvania was settled chiefly by substantial families of Scotch and Irish descent at a period when the hazards of the frontier were great and when the exactions of pioneer life required great courage and strength of character. During an Indian raid in 1756, when Margaret was only five years old, her father was killed and

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\* For the facts of her birth, marriage, etc., see "Notes and Queries, Historical, Biographical and Genealogical, Relating Chiefly to Interior Pennsylvania, Fourth Series," i, 264, by the learned Pennsylvania archivist, Dr. William Henry Egle.

## MARGARET CORBIN

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her mother was taken captive by the savages.\* Margaret and her brother John appear to have been absent from home at the time, for they fortunately escaped the fate of their parents, and Margaret was brought up in the family of her maternal uncle. About the year 1772, she married John Corbin, of whose antecedents little is known except that he was a native of Virginia.

### FOLLOWS HER HUSBAND TO THE WAR

At the commencement of the Revolutionary War, John Corbin enlisted as a matross in Capt. Thomas\*\* Proctor's first company of Pennsylvania artillery ("Pennsylvania Archives, 5th series," iii, 948).

Matrosses were soldiers who assisted the gunners in loading, firing and sponging the guns. Having no family to keep her home, Margaret followed her husband's fortunes with the army. "With almost every command," says Dr. Egle in "Notes and Queries," "a certain number of married women were allowed who did the washing, mending and frequently the cooking for the soldiers." We may add that at times they carried water, attended the wounded, and performed other ministrations to the sick and needy. The fact that Margaret accompanied her husband is evidence of her character and places her in the class of those who went with the army to help.

When, by the evacuation of Boston by the British, on March 17, 1776, the center of military operations was transferred to Manhattan Island and the Hudson River, Corbin's artillery

\* For a similar instance of massacre and capture in the same region at nearly the same time see "The Life of Mary Jemison," by James E. Seaver, 1932 Edition, to which the present writer has contributed some notes on the character of the pioneer settlers, etc.

\*\* In Dr. Egle's "Notes and Queries," before cited, the name is given as Francis, but Thomas appears to be correct.

company was ordered to reinforce the garrison at Fort Washington, and was there on the memorable 16th of November, 1776, when Fort Washington was assaulted and captured by the British.

WOUNDED IN THE BATTLE OF FORT WASHINGTON

The circumstances of the battle of Fort Washington may be briefly outlined as follows. On September 15, 1776, the British captured New York City and possessed themselves of Manhattan Island from the southern end up as far as the Heights of Harlem. On the following day occurred the Battle of Harlem Heights. At that time, the Americans prevented the farther advance of the enemy northward on the island; but soon afterward the British began the encircling movement which led to the Battle of White Plains on October 28. A few days later the Americans on Manhattan Island found themselves completely hemmed in by the enemy. The center of the American position was a five-bastioned earthwork called Fort Washington (later called Fort Mifflin) which stood on the west side of the present Fort Washington Avenue and about on the line of 183rd Street. It had several supporting outworks. To the southward were three successive lines of redoubts crossing the island; to the eastward were several redoubts, the chief of which (later called Fort George) was on Laurel Hill, on the site of the present Washington High School, at Amsterdam Avenue and 190th Street; to the westward were two or three substantial lunettes on Fort Washington Point; and to the northward, about seven-tenths of a mile, on an eminence known in Colonial days as Forest Hill, were several redoubts, later called Fort Tryon.\* One

\* For history, illustrations and map of Fort Tryon, see Annual Report of American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society, for 1917, pp. 735-780.





TABLET PLACED ON APARTMENT BUILDING  
*Corner Broadway and West 159th Street*  
*New York City*

of these redoubts was a two-gun battery, as appears by the Sauthier-Faden "Topographical Map of the North Part of New York Island exhibiting the Plan of Fort Washington, now Fort Knyphausen," etc. Here were stationed Maryland and Virginia riflemen under command of Col. Moses Rawlings, and a few Pennsylvania artillerymen. Among the latter was John Corbin, accompanied by his wife.

On November 15, 1776, the British summoned the Ameri-

cans to surrender. Col. Robert Magaw of Pennsylvania, who commanded the post, replied to Lord Howe\*:

“ACTUATED BY THE MOST GLORIOUS CAUSE THAT MANKIND EVER FOUGHT IN, I AM DETERMINED TO DEFEND THIS POST TO THE VERY LAST EXTREMITY.”

On November 16, the assault began. Two columns of Hessians led by Gen. Knyphausen and Col. Rall (or Raille) came down from Kings Bridge and delivered a powerful and concentrated attack on Forest Hill (see Sauthier-Faden map, above mentioned, Force's Archives, etc.). Under the cover of a lively bombardment from Fort No. 8 on Fordham Heights (now in the campus of New York University), Gen. Matthews and Gen. Cornwallis with their troops crossed the Harlem at Sherman's Creek (201st Street). A little lower down, at the site of High Bridge, the 42nd Highlanders crossed the Harlem. From the south, Lord Percy advanced with both British and Hessian troops. And on the west, the British warships delivered their fire at the land batteries.

The attack from the north interests us particularly, because Forest Hill bore the brunt of it. After crossing to the island Knyphausen's division was divided into two columns. The right, or western column, under Col. Rall, ascended Cock Hill (Inwood Hill), easily possessed it, and approached Forest Hill along the riverside. Knyphausen himself led the left column in a direct frontal attack on Forest Hill from the Dyckman Street valley, a detachment, however, attacking the east slope of the hill.

The scene presented at this central point of the height of the battle must have been terrifying even to the stout hearts

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\* Force's "American Archives, 5th Series," iii, 700.

of the men who defended the hill. A concentrated cannonade from the frigate Pearl on the west, from the 12-pounders and howitzers which Col. Rall stationed on Cock Hill on the north and from the guns covering the British landing at 201st street on the east, filled the air with its thunderous roar, and plunging shot and shell crashed against the rocky crags, ploughed the shallow soil, and dealt death among the Marylanders and Virginians, while up the rocky slopes swarmed over four thousand mercenary troops, impressive looking in their picturesque uniforms of blue coats, yellow breeches, black top boots and high brass-mounted caps, uttering fierce oaths and charging with bayoneted muskets when firing was impossible. Ensign Wiedeshalt described the cannonading as terrible.

For two hours the little handful of Americans withstood this terrible onslaught, the riflemen aiming with deliberation and picking off their men with cool determination to stem the tide if possible. Under their practiced marksmanship Capt. Medern of the Wutgenau regiment and his Lieutenant von Lowenfeld, Col. von Bork, Capt. Barkhausen and Lieutenant Briede of Knyphausen's, and Capt. Walther of Rall's Regiment, with many others of the enemy, fell. John Reuber of Rall's Regiment wrote: "We were obliged to creep along the rocks, one falling down alive, another shot dead. We were obliged to drag ourselves by the birch tree bushes up the height where we really could not stand."

The little two-gun battery of the Americans was also handled bravely, but the small complement of artillerymen was soon depleted by casualties, and in the emergency, Margaret Corbin took a man's part, and assisted in swabbing and loading her husband's cannon. At length John Corbin

fell, mortally wounded; then Margaret took his place until she was struck down by three grape shot. Although she was terribly lacerated, lost the use of one arm, and was physically incapacitated for the remainder of her days, she survived her husband. The death of Corbin is recorded in "Pennsylvania Archives, 5th Series," iii, 948, in these words: "Corbin, John, killed at Fort Washington. See Colonial (Provincial) Records, vol. xii, p. 34, where his widow received a donation from the Supreme Executive Council. She was afterward pensioned by the State of Pennsylvania." The details of Margaret's injuries, including mention of the three grape shot, the loss of the use of her arm, and her complete disability, are given in "Pennsylvania Colonial Records," xii, 34, 35, and "Journals of the Continental Congress," xvii, 664, quoted hereafter.

Notwithstanding the fall of Corbin and his equally brave wife, the defenders of the hill continued to resist; but, as Hohenstein, a Hessian company commander, declared, "The Hessians made impossibilities possible," and the Americans were at length overcome. Col. Rawlings, the American commander on Forest Hill, was wounded in the thigh; his Major was struck down; many of his men had fallen; the two cannon could no longer be served and the rising tide could no longer be stayed. Up the hillsides the enemy swarmed, and pausing a moment on the crest, blew their bugles. Then one of the commanders shouted "Forward, all that are my grenadiers," and with cries of "Hoch" they overran the earthworks. Now there was a confused and tumultuous mingling of Americans and Hessians and a desperate hand to hand struggle in which many Americans were bayoneted,

the Hessians steadily forcing the obstinate Americans back toward Fort Washington.

Gen. William Heath, in his Memoirs, says of the operations at Forest Hill:

“The Americans made a noble opposition . . . and, for a considerable time, kept them from ascending the hill, making a terrible slaughter among them. But the great superiority of the assailants, with an unabating firmness, finally prevailed; their loss was greater here than at any other place.”

It is generally conceded that Rawlings and his little band on Forest Hill made the best resistance of the day.

The Americans were also crushed in by the overpowering numbers of the divisions under Cornwallis from the east and Earl Percy from the south; at about 4 p.m., Col. Magaw was forced to capitulate, and the whole surviving American force became prisoners of war.

Washington, who with Greene and others, viewed the conflict from the Palisades at Fort Lee, is said to have wept at the sight of the unequal contest and of the brave men he had to lose, for the garrison of Fort Washington and its outworks numbered only about 2800, while the trained forces of the enemy numbered about 8900. The number of casualties is variously stated by different authorities, but indicates that the Americans had about 54 killed and as many more wounded; and the British had 78 killed and 380 wounded. The Americans surrendered 2818 officers and privates according to the British return (Force's Archives, 5th Series, iii, 1058) and 2634, according to the American count (ibid, 1481).

Two monuments on the west side of Fort Washington

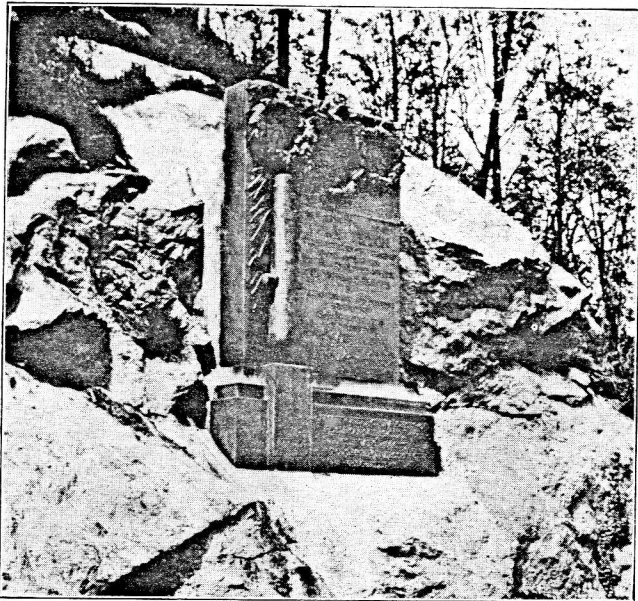


MONUMENT COMMEMORATING THE BATTLE OF  
FORT WASHINGTON

Avenue memorialize the battle. One at 183rd street marks the site of Fort Washington and is inscribed as follows:

*This Memorial Marks the Site of  
FORT WASHINGTON*

*Constructed by the Continental Troops in the Summer of 1776, taken by the British after an heroic defense November 16, 1776. Repossessed by the Americans upon their triumphal entry into the City of New York, November 25, 1783. Erected through the generosity of James Gordon Bennett by The Empire State Society of The Sons of the American Revolution, November 16, 1901. Site registered by The American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society.*



FORT TRYON MONUMENT

The other, about three quarters of a mile farther north,  
bears the following inscription:

*1776 Hudson-Fulton Celebration Commission 1909*

*On this Hilltop stood*

*FORT TRYON*

*The Northern Out-work of Fort Washington. Its gallant  
defense against the Hessian Troops by the Maryland and  
Virginia Regiments, 16 November 1776, was shared by*

*MARGARET CORBIN*

*The first American woman to take a soldier's part in  
the War for Liberty. Erected under the auspices of  
The American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society  
through the generosity of C. K. G. Billings.*

INVALIDED AND PENSIONED

The British made prisoners of the American soldiers wounded in the battle of Fort Washington, as is indicated by the return on page 175 of Johnston's "Campaign of 1776 around New York," which includes the wounded in the count of prisoners. The British kept their prisoners on the field of battle over Sunday, the 17th, and on Monday morning marched them off to the city of New York, which then lay at a distance of ten miles from Fort Washington. (Greene to Washington, Force's "Archives," 5th series, iii, 751.) Only one American escaped from the strict guard of the captors, as far as available records show, and it is of particular interest to note that he was one of the artillerists who fought the Hessians on the north side of the fort and who, therefore, must have been a comrade of Margaret Corbin's. He crossed the river Sunday night and reported to Gen. Greene, and Greene wrote to Washington on the 18th:

"One of the train of artillery came across the river last night on a raft. By his account the enemy must have suffered greatly on the north side of Fort Washington. Colonel Rawlings' regiment was posted there and behaved with great spirit."

For several days all the particulars of the battle which Washington and his generals had were those given by this refugee, referred to by Washington as "one of the artillery" and by Col. Robert Harrison as "one of the train." (Force's "Archives" 5th Series, iii.)

What became of the unfortunate Margaret Corbin at this juncture does not appear. If she was carried across the river on the raft by her fellow patriot, no mention is made of it by Greene in his letter of the 18th or by Washington in his letter of the 19th referring to the artillerist; and on the 20th



MARGARET CORBIN



TABLET IN HOLY ROOD CHURCH  
*West 179th Street and Fort Washington Avenue  
New York City*

the Americans were forced to evacuate Fort Lee.\* All that is definitely known is that in the course of time she found her way back to the American Army and was enrolled in the Invalid Regiment. This regiment, formed pursuant to resolution of Congress adopted June 23, 1777, was designed "not only to be a retreat for those who suffered in the service, but also, a recruiting corps and military school." ("Pennsylvania Archives," Series vii, 255.) Major Lewis Nicola had suggested the idea, and on July 16, 1777, Congress appointed him Colonel of the regiment. The regiment consisted of eight companies, and, according to the resolution of Congress, was

\* Mr. Arthur P. Abbott of Highland Falls, in a statement quoted on page 143 of the Annual Report of the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society for 1915, says that Margaret Corbin was paroled to Greene across the river at Fort Lee and was carried with other sick and wounded to Philadelphia. The present writer has not found documentary evidence to confirm this statement.

“to be employed in garrison and for guards in cities and other places where magazines, or arsenals or hospitals are placed, and to serve as a military school.”

Soon after the action of Congress creating this regiment the War Office put an advertisement in several newspapers announcing that Congress had ordered the formation of a regiment of invalids for the reception of those who “have already been, or may in future be, rendered by wounds or disorders incapable of doing field duty but are yet fit for garrison service.” The advertisement notified persons living in Philadelphia or twenty miles of the city who desired to enter the regiment to apply to “Col. Nicola, in Front Street, four doors below the Coffee House,” within fifteen days. The records also show that the regiment continued to receive additions long after the period mentioned and that invalids were eligible from all the states.

In this Invalid Regiment Margaret Corbin was enrolled. Available records do not show the date of her enrollment, but her membership is attested by “Pennsylvania Archives, 5th Series,” iv, 65, and other records quoted hereafter.

The rations which were at first allowed to her were not adequate to her needs, in her helpless situation, and on June 29, 1779, the Supreme Council of Pennsylvania voted her a grant of \$30 and recommended to the Board of War that Congress lend its aid also. The Board of War promptly transmitted this recommendation to Congress, and on July 6, 1779, Congress voted to give her a pension of half the pay of a soldier for the rest of her life, and to give her also one complete suit of clothes, or its equivalent in money. It appearing during the ensuing year that even this provision

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was inadequate, and that Margaret was a cripple for life, Congress on July 25, 1780, voted to give her a complete suit of clothes every year in addition to the provision previously made. These transactions, which record not only Margaret's pitiable condition but also the extraordinary consideration of Congress for the heroine of Fort Washington, are recorded in the following very interesting documents:

The action of the Supreme Council of Pennsylvania is recorded as follows in "Pennsylvania Colonial Records," xii, 34, 35:

In Council,

Tuesday, June 29th, 1779

*Present:*

His Excellency Joseph Reed, Esquire, President  
Hon'ble George Bryan, Vice President  
Col. Hart, Mr. Urie, and  
Mr. Mackey, and Mr. Thompson (now first returned).

... The two following orders were drawn on the Treasurer, viz.: In favor of John Woods for the sum of one hundred and fifty pounds, three shillings, and four pence, for Materials furnished to the Armed Boats and Gallies belonging to the State. And in favour of Margaret Corbin, for Thirty Dollars, to relieve her present necessities, she having been wounded and utterly disabled by three grape-shot, while she filled with distinguished bravery the post of her Husband, who was killed by her side, serving a piece of artillery at Fort Washington.

Ordered, That the case of Margaret Corbin, who was wounded and utterly disabled at Fort Washington, while she heroically filled the post of her husband, who was killed by her side serving a piece of Artillery, be recommended to a further consideration by the Board of War. This Council being of opinion that notwithstanding the rations which have already been allowed her, she is not provided for as her helpless situation really requires.

Following is an extract from the "Journals of the Continental Congress," xiv, 805, under date of July 6, 1779:

MARGARET CORBIN

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A letter, of three, from the Board of War, was read;\* Whereupon

Resolved, That Margaret Corbin, who was wounded and disabled in the attack on Fort Washington, whilst she heroically filled the post of her husband who was killed by her side serving a piece of artillery, do receive, during her natural life, or the continuance of said disability, the one-half of the monthly pay drawn by a soldier in the service of these states; and that she now receive out of the public stores one complete suit of cloaths, or, the value thereof in money.

Following is an extract from the "Journals of the Continental Congress," xvii, 664, under date of Tuesday, July 25, 1780:

A report from the Board of War, was read; Whereupon

At a Board of War, July 24, 1780

Present Col. Pickering, Mr. Peters, Col. Grayson, Genl. Scott, Genl. Ward

The board having received information that Margaret Corbin (for whom Congress made provision in their act of July 6, 1779, for her gallant conduct in serving a piece of artillery when her husband was killed by her side) still remains in a deplorable situation in consequence of her wound, by which she is deprived of the use of one arm, and in other respects much disabled and probably will continue a cripple during her life. Beg leave to report

Resolved, That Margaret Corbin receive annually, during her natural life, one compleat suit of cloaths, out of the public stores, or the value thereof in money, in addition to the provision made for her by the act of Congress of July 6, 1779.\*\*

As previously intimated, the exact date of Margaret

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\* This letter is in the "Papers of the Continental Congress," No. 147, III, folio 501.  
\*\* This report is in the "Papers of the Continental Congress," No. 147, IV, folio 460.

MARGARET CORBIN

Corbin's enrollment in the Invalid Regiment is not known, but extant records show that she belonged to it as early as August 1, 1780, if not earlier. The earliest available document showing her membership in this corps gives her name as "Margery Corbet," but the entry "Resolve of Congress 6 July '79" identifies her as Margaret Corbin. It appears in "Pennsylvania Archives, Fifth Series," iv, 40, in the "Roll of the Non-Commissioned Officers and Privates of the Invalid Regiment in the Service of the United States for Pay from 1st August, 1780, to, 1st June, 1781," in Capt. Lieut. Will McElhatton's company. The entries given in vertical columns in the original but here arranged horizontally for convenience, are as follows:

Names and Ranks: Margery Corbet.

State and Regiments: Resolve of Congress 6, July '79.

When Commenced: 1 Aug. '80.

When Left the Regt. and Reason: 31 May '81.

No. of Months and Days: 10 months ..... days.

Pay per Month: Dol. 3 30/90.

Amount of Pay: Dol. 33 30/90.

The foregoing date "31 May '81" does not mean that she left the regiment on that date, but that the pay roll extends only to that date. It is interesting to note in passing that the payroll from which the foregoing is taken shows that privates generally received \$6 60/90 per month, but, in accordance with the resolution of Congress, Margaret Corbin received only half pay, namely, \$3 30/90 a month.

THE INVALID CORPS AT WEST POINT

An important link in the evidence tending to establish the identity of Margaret Corbin with "Capt. Molly," who lived at Highland Falls and drew her hospital supplies and

commissary stores from West Point, is the location of the Invalid Regiment at West Point, 1781, by Washington's order. The concentration of the whole corps at West Point was authorized by resolution of Congress adopted June 13, 1781, and recorded in the "Journals of the Continental Congress," xx, 637, as follows:

The Board of War, to whom was referred the letter of 17 April from Governor Trumbull, report,

That from Colonel Nicola's return, it appears that there are no invalids from the Connecticut Line at this post, and only thirty at Boston; that, however, as the Commander-in-Chief has called for the whole to compose part of the garrison at West Point, the Board are of opinion the general's requisition should be complied with.\*

Resolved, That Congress agree to the said report.

Thacher's Military Journal (page 16) shows that on June 20, 1781, the resolution of Congress was carried out in General Orders which required most of the troops to march to Peekskill, leaving the Invalids and a small party to garrison West Point.

Up to May, 1781, the Invalid Regiment appears to have been "mustered for" in Philadelphia, but the regiment was "new modelled on Sept. 11, at Fishkill," ("Pennsylvania Archives, Fifth Series," iv, 72), and the personnel of many of the companies changed. Then, at the time of concentration at West Point, Margaret Corbin appears in Capt. John Reiley's company, as shown by the "Roll of Non-Commissioned Officers and Privates of the Invalid Regiment in the Service of the United States for Pay from 1 June, 1781, to 1 January,

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\* This report is in the "Papers of the Continental Congress," No. 147, V, folio 329.

MARGARET CORBIN

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1782" on page 65 of volume iv of "Pennsylvania Archives, Fifth Series," as follows:

Names and Ranks: Private Margery Corbet.  
States and Regiments: By order of Congress 6 July '79.  
When Commenced: 1 June '81.  
When Left the Regt. and Reason: 31 Decemb. '81.  
Number of Months and Days: 7 (months).  
Pay per Month: Dol. 3 30/90.

We may repeat what was said on a previous page that the date "31 Decemb. '81" does not mean that Margery left the regiment then, but that this pay roll extends only to that date.

On Page 79 of the same volume of "Pennsylvania Archives," are the following entries referring to those above given.

Names and Ranks: Priv. Margery Corbet.  
Amount of pay: 23 30/90.  
Rec'd on account 22.  
Rate for 1: 5.  
Amount in specie: 4 36/90.  
Ballances: 18 84/90.  
Vouchers: R-108.

The tables from which these extracts are taken give an interesting indication of the confused condition of the national currency at that time. Under the Colonial regime, the money system was based on the pounds, shillings and pence of the mother country. There were 12 pence to the shilling and 20 shillings to the pound. At the period of the tables above quoted, the States were groping toward the dollar system but had not yet reached the decimal system, and they reckoned only 90 parts to the dollar. As Margaret Corbin's pay was 3:30 a month—that is to say, three and thirty-

ninetieths dollars a month—her pay for seven months from June 1 to December 31, 1781, was \$23 30/90. She had received 22 dollars in Continental currency, but, as the table indicates, the ratio of value of currency to specie was 5 to 1, so that 22 dollars in currency was equal to only \$4 36/90 in specie; and \$4 36/90 deducted from \$23 30/90 leaves \$18 84/90 as above stated. We shall see a little later (page 28 following) that in converting shillings and pence into dollars, 8 shillings or 96 pence were reckoned as a dollar. The bookkeeper of those days, obliged to figure in pounds, shillings and pence, and in dollars sometimes containing 90 units and sometimes 96 units, and with specie and currency at different ratios, must have had his perplexities.\*

In 1782 Margaret Corbin's condition was again the subject of solicitous official correspondence. She had then a second husband—whose name is not mentioned, and she was still called Mrs. Corbin—but he, having become a crippled invalid himself, was no help to her, and her condition grew more pitiable. This became so apparent to the West Point authorities that it excited their compassion, the more so, as it was discovered that the allowance for liquor which went with a soldier's ration had been withheld from her because she was a woman. In the fall of 1782, Capt. Samuel Shaw\*\*

\* The ratio of 5 to 1 between currency and specie in the payroll above quoted appears to be very moderate. The manuscript accounts of Gen. Knox in the Massachusetts Historical Society (xlvi, 158) show that in 1781 it took 72 paper dollars to make one silver dollar. The proceedings of the Continental Congress for May 22, 1783, show a ratio of 75 to 1. See also greater depreciation mentioned in Lossing's "Pictorial Field Book of the Revolution," i, 316-320.

\*\* Capt. Samuel Shaw was aide-de-camp to Gen. Knox from June, 1782 to November, 1783 (Heitman's Register). Gen. Knox was appointed to the command of West Point, August 29, 1782. The correspondence herein quoted as from the "Knox Mss." is found among the more than 10,000 Knox manuscripts, in 55 volumes, deposited by the New England Historic and Genealogical Society with the Massachusetts Historical Society, 1154 Boylston Street, Boston, in February, 1910. The American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society offers its acknowledgments to those two societies for permission to consult these valuable papers and also to Mr. Julius H. Tuttle, Librarian of the Massachusetts Historical Society, for courtesies.



M A R G A R E T   C O R B I N

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aide-de-camp to Gen. Knox, commandant at West Point, wrote to Col. Tench Tilghman at headquarters asking for more liberal treatment of Mrs. Corbin, and referring to the act of Congress in her behalf. (Knox Mss. ix, 149):

Head Quarters 9th September 1782

Dear Shaw:

I would ever wish to pay proper attention to the business of Ladies, but without I am acquainted with the Resolve of the 6th July 1779 in favr. of Mrs. Corbin, I cannot tell what it is she wants. We have not the Resolves of that date with us.

I am

Yours sincerely,  
T. Tilghman.

Capt. Shaw wrote again to Col. Tilghman as follows (Knox Mss, ix, 154):

West Point,  
10 Sept, 1782

Dear Sir:

It is not in my power to transmit to you the resolve of Congress of the 6th July 1779, respecting Mrs. Corbin, Her case is a peculiar one. Her husband and son killed and herself wounded in the service were misfortunes of so aggravated a nature as justly rendered her worthy of public attention. I saw Col. Nicola just now, who told me that the resolve of Congress referred to gave her, in consequence of the distress she was involved in, a complete ration per day and half pay for life and that Congress afterward passed the subsequent resolution which I have already sent you. Both these resolves were founded on Col. Nicola's application in her behalf, but however benevolent the intention, the poor woman has derived very little advantage from it, having received only her ration, and a few articles of clothing, by no means adequate to one suit annually. Her present application is in consequence of the rum or whiskey which composed part of her ration being

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stopped by the Commissary agreeable to his common custom in the issue to women of the army in general. Hers being so singular a case, she thinks that this regulation should not extend to her, and prays she may have an order for what has been detained from her, and that the Commissary be directed to issue the full ration in the future. With this back allowance she will be able to procure sundry necessaries that will render her present wretchedness a little more tolerable. Col. Nicola of the Commissary who may be present will give a certificate on the back of the order for the quantity that may be due to her. I am sorry to trouble you again on this subject but the woman is truly an object of compassion. Her present husband is a poor crippled invalid who is of no service to her but rather adds to her trouble . . .

I am, dear sir,

Sincerely yours,

Col. Tilghman.

S. S.

It is to be observed in passing that it was not the liquor that she was seeking, as much as the money equivalent to which she was entitled, so that it could be expended on necessities. On the following day, Col. Tilghman wrote to Capt. Shaw (Knox Mss. ix, 156):

Head Quarters 11th Sept. 1782

Dear Shaw:

It appears clearly to me that the order forbidding the issue of Rum to women does not extend to Mrs. Corbin. Granting provision at all, to women who are followers of the army, is altogether a matter of courtesy, and therefore the Commanding General may allow them such Ration as he thinks proper. But Mrs. Corbin is a pensioner of Congress, and therefore, upon producing the Resolve made in her favor, Genl. Knox, as Commandant, may direct the Contractor to commute her Retained Rations of liquor. Perhaps it would not be prudent to give them to her all in liquor.

I am, Yours affecty.

T. Tilghman

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Three days later, the following certificate and order were issued in her favor (Knox Mss. ix, 170):

West Point, 14 Sept, 1782

This is to certify that Mrs. Margaret Corbin (wife of John Corbin, a soldier in the corps of invalids) has not drawn any liquor with the ration allowed her since 1st Jany. 1782.

Jona. Pugh,

Lt. Invalids.

Sir:

There are two resolves of Congress in favor of the above named Mrs. Corbin, she having had a husband and son killed and was herself wounded at Brandywine in 1777. She is allowed a full ration per day, half pay for life, and a suit of clothes annually. You will therefore give her a due bill for two hundred and fifty-seven gills of liquor, being the quantity retained from her since the first of last January to this day inclusive, and in future issue to her a complete ration, agreeable to the resolutions of Congress, for which this shall be your voucher.

Given at West Point this 14th Sept. 1782.

By order of the Commandant

S. Shaw, A. D. C.

To the Issuing Commissary.

Capt. Shaw was in error in attributing her wounds to the battle of Brandywine (Septembr 11, 1777), the official records showing that her husband was killed and she was wounded at Fort Washington, November 16, 1776. The reference to having a son killed appears also to be an error, unless the child was very young, for she was not old enough at that time to have had a son of military age.

Margaret Corbin continued to be enrolled as a member of the Invalid Regiment until it was mustered out in April, 1783.

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The roster, containing the "Names and rank of the Invalid regiment of Pennsylvania, commanded by Col. Lewis Nicola, as it was discharged, April, 1783," is given on pages 275-282 of volume ii of "Pennsylvania in the War of the Revolution, Battalion and Line, 1775-1783," edited by John Blair Linn and Wm. H. Egle, M.D., and on page 277 is the name of Margaret Corbin among the "privates and others." The same entry of her name appears in "Pennsylvania Archives, Fifth Series," iv, 90, edited by Thomas Lynch Montgomery.

It is interesting to note, as having a significant bearing on the identity of "Captain Molly" and Margaret Corbin, that in the whole list of about 286 names in Nicola's Invalid Regiment as it was discharged, Margaret Corbin's is the only woman's name.

### LIFE IN THE HIGHLANDS

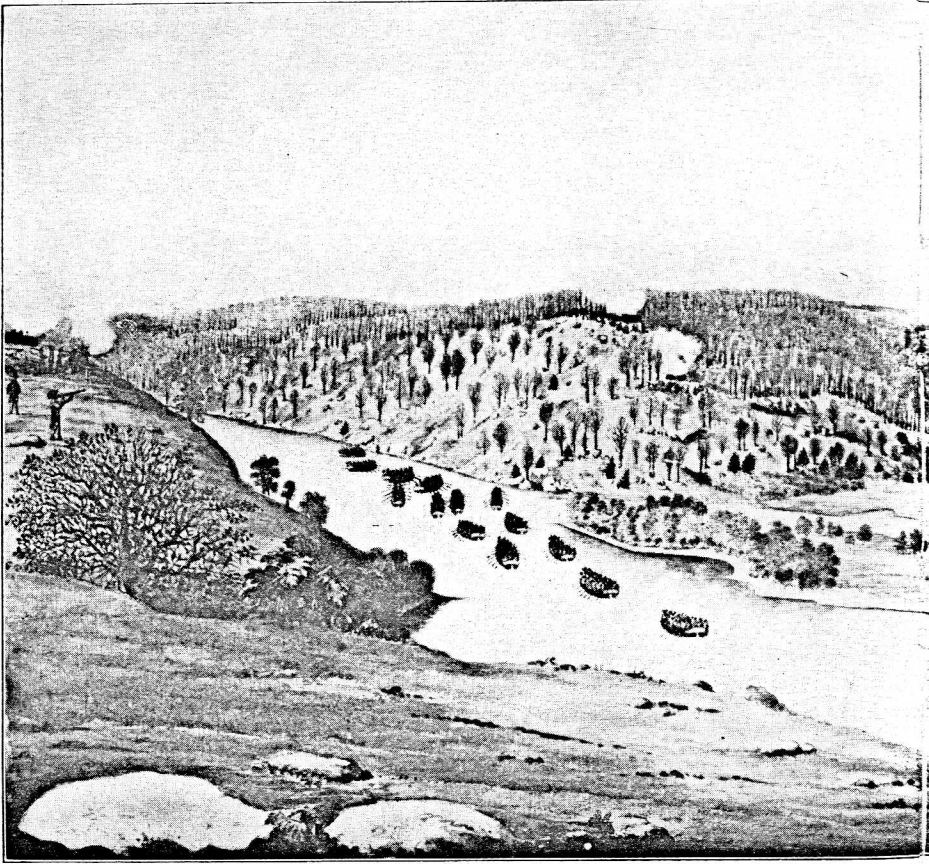
It is not likely that when the Invalid Regiment was stationed at West Point Margaret Corbin, in her disabled state, performed any garrison duty. On the contrary, the records indicate that she was a helpless invalid, dependent entirely upon the government for her subsistence, and requiring the ministrations of others for her bodily care. With the mustering out of the Invalid Regiment we lose track of Margaret Corbin by that name, but find her place taken by a woman living at Highland Falls who had come to be known as "Captain Molly," who drew her hospital and commissary supplies from West Point, and who corresponds so closely in all respects to Margaret Corbin as to dispel doubt as to her identity as the heroine of Fort Washington. As the question of her identity can be more intelligently discussed in the light of the data concerning Captain Molly given hereafter, its

consideration may be deferred for the present while some other facts bearing on the subject are mentioned.

The town of Highland Falls, which adjoins the southern boundary of the West Point Military Academy Reservation, was originally a part of the town of Cornwall. The earliest settlement at what is now Highland Falls village was called Swimtown or Swimstown, from Cornelius Swim, who settled there prior to the Revolution. Ruttenber's "History of Orange County" says that Swim "was killed by a British scout because he refused to divulge the place where certain supplies were concealed." This quotation is interesting as indicating the loyalty of the Swim family with whom the history of Captain Molly is connected in the years immediately following the war. It may also be mentioned in passing that the unpublished manuscript "Waste Book for the Quartermaster Stores," in the library at West Point shows that firewood was transported for the garrison at West Point in 1792 (and perhaps other years) by Moses Swim, Luke Mandigo and Henry Faurot—family names which appeared later in the local history. In 1849, a post office was established there under the name of Buttermilk Falls, from the white foam of the cascade that can be seen pouring down the cliff into the Hudson at that place; and in 1873 the town of Highland Falls was organized.

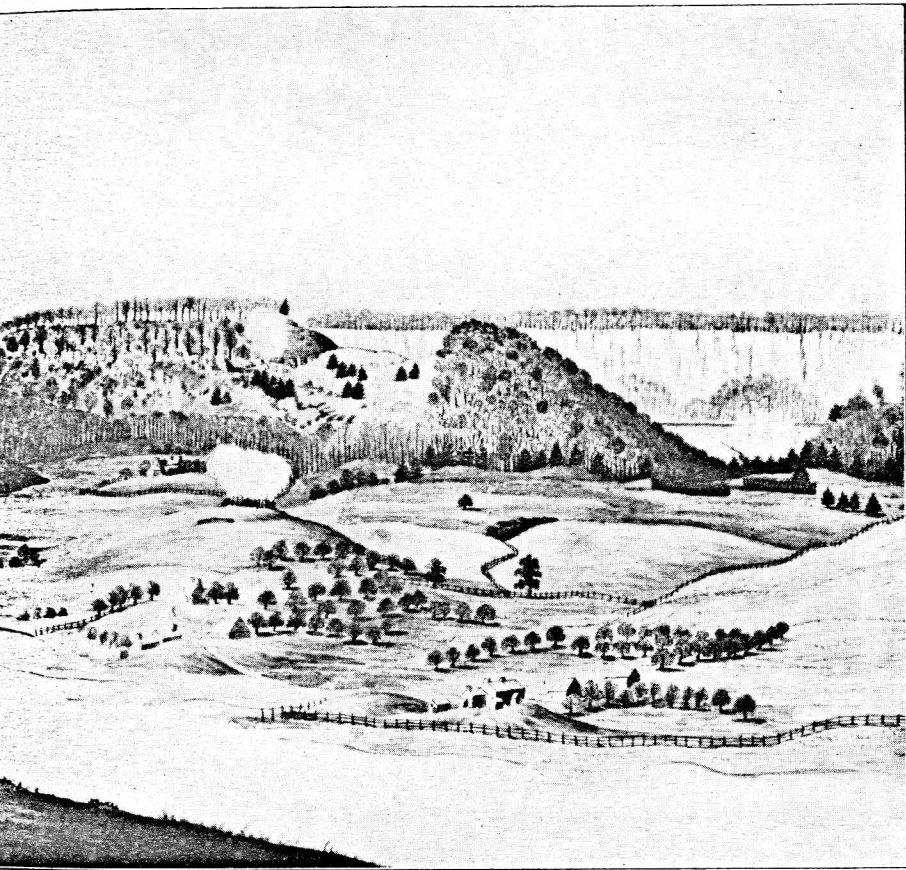
For much of the following information about Captain Molly's life at Highland Falls we are indebted to the Manuscript "Letter Books" of Captain William Price, Commissary of Ordinance and Military Stores, and the manuscript "Waste Books for the Quartermaster Stores," which are preserved in the library of the United States Military Academy at West Point. Capt. Price was appointed

to this office shortly before January 6, 1784, (letter from Gen. Knox to Capt. Price on that date, Knox Mss., xvi, 159). His letter books contain copies of only a comparatively few, apparently, of the letters which he wrote. Copies of his predecessor's correspondence have not been preserved, but Commissary Price's letters of 1785 show that Captain Molly had already been the subject of communications, and that in the fall of that year he arranged with Mrs. Elizabeth Swim, who resided "about three miles" from West Point, to care for her at the rate of twelve shillings a week. Three miles was just about the distance from West Point to Highland Falls, or Buttermilk Falls, as they were then called. Mrs. Swim found that she could not provide Captain Molly with everything to eat and drink for twelve shillings a week, and Commissary Price asked Secretary of War Knox for permission to supplement this pay with one or two rations. Captain Molly continued with Mrs. Swim until September 27, 1786, but she was not as well treated there as Commissary Price thought she ought to be, and he then transferred her to the care of Mrs. Elizabeth Randal. Captain Molly appears to have been a pitifully helpless and troublesome invalid at the time, and in the fall of 1785 it was a question whether she would live until the next spring. She did live, however, but became such a burden that it was difficult to find anyone who was willing to care for her. Mrs. Randal evidently was very patient with Captain Molly's infirmities, for she kept her until August 24, 1789—nearly three years—and perhaps longer; but the records go no further. Apparently Captain Molly was unable to manage her own affairs, for her money was paid directly to those who took care of her and not to



*From an engraving in possession of The New York Public Library*

THE BATTLE OF  
*A View of the Attack against Fort Washington  
16th of November 1776 by the*



FORT WASHINGTON

*Drawn on the spot by Tho. Davies, Capt. R. B. of Artillery*

*and Rebel Redouts near New York on the  
British and Hessian Brigades*



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Captain Molly herself.\* She was so poorly provided with clothes that at one time West Point issued old tents to Mrs. Randal to supply material for shifts, etc., and also issued to her "old bed sacks" from stores that were useless for other purposes. "Bed sacks," which corresponded to the modern "bed-ticks" were bags which were filled with straw for soldiers' beds.

The passages in Commissary Price's Letter Books and in the Quartermaster's Waste Book which supply the foregoing information read as follows. In the reproduction, the spelling, but not the capitalization, of the original has been followed:

West Point, 14th Sept. 1785

Sir:

Agreeable to your letter to me of 7th instant, I have procured a place for Capt. Molly till next spring, if she should live so long, about three miles from this place, at 12/- per week, and wish you to inform me how the money for the payment is to be come at, and how often she is to be furnished with hospital stores.

I am sir your

Very humble servt.,

William Price,

Dept. Com. Mil. Stores.

Major William North

\* \* \* \*

West Point, 31st Jany, 1786

Sir:

Enclosed is an account of Mrs. Elizabeth Swims for taking care of Capt. Molly twelve weeks. As the bearer will return you can forward the money by him. I am at a loss what to do with

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\* The receipts forwarded by Commissary Price to the Secretary of War were evidently signed by the persons whom he paid for the care of Captain Molly, with the result that the West Point records do not disclose Captain Molly's real name, but always refer to her as "Captain Molly." Similarly the "Waste Book" shows articles charged to Mrs. Randal, "for the use of Captain Molly" but not charged to Captain Molly by her real name.

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Captain Molly. She is such an offensive person that people are unwilling to take her in charge. This woman informs me that she cannot keep her longer than the first of March, and I cannot (find) \* any that is willing to keep her for that money and find her everything to eat and drink. If you should think proper to extend one or two rations to her it will be better than money and may induce some person to keep her . . .

I am

The Honorable Major Gen'l Knox  
Secretary at War

\* \* \* \*

West Point, 7th Oct., 1786

Sir:

I have sent another Acct. of Mrs. Swim for taking (care of Capt. Molly) \*\* up to 27th of Sept., and have removed her to another place, as I (thought she was) \*\* not so well treated as she ought to be . . .

I am

The Honorable Major Gen'l Knox  
Secretary at War

\* \* \* \*

West Point, April 21st, 1787

Sir:

. . . I am inform'd by the woman who takes care of Captain Molly that she is much in want of shifts. If you should think proper to order three or four I should be glad . . .

I am sir, etc

The Honorable Major Gen'l. Knox  
Secretary at War

\* \* \* \*

Mrs Randal,

Dr.

April 27th ('87) 1 bed-sack, unfit for service  
2 sheets

Deliv'd to Mrs. Randal for the use of Capt. Molly

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\* Leaf torn; words supplied.  
\*\* Word omitted in original, here supplied.

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West Point, June 12th, 1787

Sir:

. . . If the shifts which you informed me should be made for Capt. Molly are done, I should be glad to have them sent as she complains much for want of them.

I am sir, etc.

The Honorable Major Gen'l Knox  
Secretary at War

\* \* \* \*

West Point, 8th July, 1787

Sir:

I have drawn three orders upon you for the maintenance of Capt. Molly in favor of Mr. Denniston, one is from January 29th to April 12th, the other is from April 18th to July 5th, 1786, inclusive—which accounts was lodged in the War Office last fall, and one Mrs. Swim's—the other is from September 28th to December 20th 1786, inclusive and will be deliv'd by Mr. Denniston to Mr. Randal—As Molly is such a disagreeable object to take care of, and I promised to pay them every quarter, I have been obliged to borrow the money to pay the people, if it can possibly be replaced I should be very glad . . .

I am sir, etc

The Honorable Major Gen'l Knox  
Secretary at War

\* \* \* \*

West Point, August 13th 1787

Sir:

. . . Enclosed is receipts for one hundred and thirty pounds, six shillings, equal to 325 72/96 dollars, which I have paid to sundry persons as per receipts. One hundred and fifteen pounds 18/- of it, out of the money which I received from you on July 30th, 1787. The other fourteen pounds 8/- is for taking care of Capt. Molly twenty-four weeks, twelve of which was from October 26th, 1785 to January 18th, 1786 inclusive. The other twelve is from

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July 6th to September 27, 1786, inclusive, as the receipts will show. All the above receipts are duplicates. I have also enclosed a duplicate receipt for what articles I delivered seven Indians as you directed in your letter.

I am sir, etc

The Honorable Major Gen'l Knox  
Secretary at War

\* \* \* \*

December 27th, 1787

The United States, by Order of the Secretary of War

123 pounds of steel	{	Deliv'd to James Morrow to repair
100 do. of old iron		three hundred & twenty-eight axes
4 pounds of glue	{	Deliv'd to James Morrow to repair
5 pounds of wire		1000 stands of arms
5 pounds of spikes	{	Deliv'd to Michael Trout for the purpose
25 do. of deck nails		of repairing the magazines and barracks
1 chalk line		Deliv'd to do. for the use of the carpenter shop
1 old common tent	{	Deliv'd to Mrs. Randal for to make
		shifts, cape, &c for the use of
		Capt. Molly

\* \* \* \*

West Point, Feb'y 14th, 1788

Sir:

I have sent by Mr Moor an account for Mrs Randals taking care of Capt. Molly twenty four weeks, being from June 7th to Nov. 21st, 1787, inclusive

I am sir, etc

The Honorable Major Gen'l Knox  
Secretary at War

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West Point, June 4th, 1788

Sir:

. . . I have made out an account for the maintenance of Captain Molly, for forty eight weeks—which, Mrs Randal, who takes care of her will present.

I am sir, etc

The Honorable Major Gen'l Knox  
Secretary at War

\* \* \* \*

June 18th, 1788

Dr.

Mrs Elizabeth Randal

By Order of the Secretary of War

4 Breech Bands	}	Sold to Mrs Randal for the sum of one pound sixteen shillings. On acct of keeping Captain Molly
2 pair Trace Chains		
2 Blind bridles		
2 Single Trees		

\* \* \* \*

West Point, Decem. 4th, 1788

Sir:

. . . Mr Garrison\* for the last winter's wood and Mrs Randal for the maintenance of Capt. Molly are very anxious for their money, the accounts for which is lodged in the War Office . . .

I am sir, etc

The Honorable Major Gen'l Knox  
Secretary at War

\* \* \* \*

December 12th, 1788

The United States, by Order of the Secretary at War      Dr.

1 old common tent	}	delivered to Mrs Elizabeth Randal for the use of Captain Molly
2 do bed sacks		

\* Isaac Garrison.

When Benson J. Lossing, author of the "Pictorial Field Book of the Revolution," in 1848 visited the Highlands, he talked with old residents who remembered Captain Molly personally. Among them was Beverly Garrison, a man eighty-seven years old living near the north end of Lake Sinnipink (now Bear Mountain Lake) who "remembered the famous Irish woman called Captain Molly . . . She generally dressed in the petticoats of her sex, with an artilleryman's coat over." Lossing also talked with Mrs. Rebecca Rose, who was eighty years old and who lived close by Fort Montgomery. She also remembered Captain Molly "living between Fort Montgomery and Buttermilk Falls." About the year 1916, James D. Faurot of Highland Falls, a retired Hudson River steamboat captain, then about seventy years old, related to Mr. Arthur P. Abbott of Highland Falls interesting details about Captain Molly which Capt. Faurot had received orally from his grandfather. The latter described Captain Molly as an Irish woman with a characteristically sharp tongue and quick temper, not always particular about her dress or person, yet commanding and haughty. He said that when she was not present she was called "Dirty Kate" by those who had incurred her displeasure, but was invariably saluted as "Captain Molly" when face to face; and that in spite of hard things said about her, she was held in high esteem by all.

It is but just to Captain Molly's memory to recall that her deplorable condition was not due to her own fault. In 1776 she had accompanied her husband as a hale and hearty woman of 25; in addition to the shock, in her childhood, of having her father murdered by the Indians, she had that of seeing her husband killed by her side at Fort Washington, had been

terribly lacerated by Hessian grape-shot, had lost the use of one arm and had been so completely disabled that she could not take care of herself. She had no near relative to give her the loving attention she needed, but was dependent on the tender mercies of others, and lived on the miserable pittance of 3 30/90 dollars a month, supplemented by one new suit of clothes a year and occasionally an old tent canvas for a cape, etc. It is no wonder that her person became neglected; that her nervous tension was great and her temper high; and that she became the "offensive person," and "disagreeable object" that Commissary Price's letters indicate her to have been; but this was the result of her self sacrifice at Fort Washington and is not to be accounted a reproach.

#### HER DEATH AND BURIAL

The date of Captain Molly's death is not known. Boynton, in his "History of West Point," edition of 1863, pp. 166-167, says that she lived and died on the premises owned in 1883 by Alfred Pell. He thinks she died in "1789, as on that date her name ceases to appear on the Commissary's books." This conclusion does not necessarily follow, because Commissary Price's letter-books do not go beyond 1790. She died, however, during the life-time of the grandfather of Captain Faurot, before mentioned, for the elder Faurot assisted at the burial.

Captain Molly's original grave was one of several in a little unenclosed cemetery on the estate which was acquired by the late J. P. Morgan, Sr., and which he called "Cragston." This site is a few rods west of the West Shore Railroad track, just south of Con Hook lighthouse about a mile and a half

in an air line south of Highland Falls village, and about 3¼ miles south of the Parade Ground at West Point. Parts of the old military road which ran from West Point to Fort Montgomery can be seen a little west of the cemetery. Of late years, the graves had become obscured by vines and weeds, and their location was known only to the owners of the property and to a few local residents familiar with the ground. The mound over the grave of Captain Molly was rounded up from time to time and was a little more prominent than the others. It was marked by a low, rough headstone, without inscription, and a small foot-stone, like the other graves, and was distinguished from them by the stump of a cedar tree which had been planted at the head of the grave a number of years ago.

The identity of the grave was never lost. The elder Faurot who assisted at her burial had pointed it out to his son, who in turn indicated it to his son Captain James D. Faurot,\* and about a dozen years ago Capt. Faurot identified it to Mr. Abbott. Capt. Faurot told Mr. Abbott that his father said to him; "Your grandfather brought me here as I have you, and pointing out her grave said, 'Here we buried Molly Pitcher.'" Colonel Herbert L. Satterlee, a member of the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society, whose summer residence is at Highland Falls, wrote to us several years ago as follows (Annual Report of the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society for 1918, p. 262):

"Most of my information comes from Peter Mandigo, who had it from his father who knew her. The elder Mandigo was accustomed to seeing her when he was a small boy . . . She spent much of her time fishing on the river. She went out from a dock at the

\* Capt. James D. Faurot was the father of Joseph A. Faurot, formerly Third Deputy Commissioner of Police of the City of New York.



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foot of a lane where the brook empties into the river at Cragston. There was a blacksmith shop near the bridge over the brook and not far from where the shop stood are a few graves and a clump of trees. One of these graves the elder Mandigo knew to be Moll Pitcher's burial place. In old days every one in the village knew it, and a Mr Tracy of the village put up a sign-board on a tree at the head of the grave after the original head-board disappeared. This sign-board also disappeared years ago, but Peter Mandigo pointed out the grave to me about 1904."

The late Dr. Edward S. Holden, librarian of West Point Military Academy, told Mr. Abbott that there was a family in the Highlands who claimed to have the personal effects of Captain Molly, purchased at public vendue after her death. Mr. Abbott called on the family and was shown a flax reel, a spinning wheel, andirons, and other domestic articles said to have belonged to Captain Molly.

### THE IDENTITY OF CAPTAIN MOLLY

The facts given in the foregoing pages seem to indicate plainly that Captain Molly was Margaret Corbin; but a few words should be added to show who Captain Molly was not.

Lossing, in his "Pictorial Field Book of the Revolution," says that Captain Molly was Molly Pitcher of Monmouth fame, and Boynton, in his "History of West Point," referring to Lossing, repeats his error. And we have seen from the foregoing quotations from Capt. Faurot and Peter Mandigo how persistent this error was among the villagers. To show the impossibility of the identity of Captain Molly of Highland Falls and Molly Pitcher of Monmouth fame, a few facts about the latter may be given.

Molly Pitcher's maiden name was Mary Ludwig. She was born in Lancaster County, Penn., October 13, 1744, her

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parents being German immigrants and her father's name being John George Ludwig. She lived at Carlisle, Penn., where she married John Hays, July 24, 1769. ("Notes and Queries, Fourth Series," i, 265, by Wm. Henry Egle.)

John Hays and John Corbin, coming from the same general section of Pennsylvania, both enlisted in Capt. Thomas Proctor's first company of Pennsylvania Artillery, and as both were accompanied by their wives when they joined the army, it is quite likely that Mary Hays and Margaret Corbin knew each other and were associated in the first few months of their camp experience.

Hays, with the rank of Sergeant in the Pennsylvania Artillery Regiment, "was wounded at Monmouth," June 28, 1778, (Penn. Archives, 5th Series, iii, 1018.) Dr. Egle says that when Sergeant Hays was wounded, his wife "took his place in the forefront, and when the combat was over assisted in carrying water to the disabled. This won for her the soubriquet of Moll Pitcher. There may have been other Moll Pitchers, but the heroine of Monmouth was none other than Molly Hays." On page 1018 of volume iii of the 5th Series, Pennsylvania Archives, it is stated that "Sergeant Hays' wife was the celebrated Moll Pitcher who distinguished herself in the battle of Monmouth. For this service she was pensioned by the State of Pennsylvania. She died at Carlisle in January, 1832, aged 89 years and was buried with military honors. When the citizens of Cumberland County erected a gravestone over her last resting place in 1876, they changed the year of her death to 1833, to adapt it to the New Style, but made an error of ten years in giving her age. The inscription on the stone, as reproduced photographically in Capt. John B. Landis' "Short History of Molly Pitcher," reads as follows:

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MOLLIE McCAULY  
*Renowned in History as*

MOLLIE PITCHER  
*The Heroine of Monmouth Died Jan. 1833*  
*Aged 79 Years*

---

*Erected by the Citizens of Cumberland County*  
*July 4, 1876*

The substantial facts about Molly Pitcher show that Lossing, Boynton, and others were in error in saying that she was Captain Molly of Highland Falls. Captain Molly was Irish; Molly Pitcher was German. Captain Molly was a helpless invalid after the battle of Fort Washington and died about the age of 50; Molly Pitcher came out of the war in good health and lived to her 89th year. Captain Molly was buried in Highland Falls, N. Y.; Molly Pitcher was buried in Carlisle, Penn. Manifestly they were two different persons.

If Captain Molly was not Molly Pitcher (Mary Hays) who was she? What other woman served in the Continental service in such a way as to be completely disabled physically, to receive the official recognition of the State of Pennsylvania and the Congress of the United States, to be enrolled in the Invalid Regiment, to be located at West Point, to receive hospital and commissary supplies from West Point, to be paid the equivalent of a soldier's half-pay, and to be the object of especially solicitous correspondence with the Secretary of War? A diligent search of the records fails to supply anyone except Margaret Corbin. She was so terribly wounded at Fort Washington that she was completely disabled; Pennsyl-

vania granted her a donation; Congress voted her a soldier's half-pay for life and other aid; she was enrolled in the Invalid Regiment; *she was the only woman as far as extant records show who was so enrolled in it when it was stationed at West Point and she was in it when the regiment was discharged in 1783*, thus accounting for her location there. All of the foregoing is clearly traceable under Margaret Corbin's own name, and if the British had not destroyed priceless records when they burned the capitol at Washington in 1814, we could probably produce documentary evidence to show that Margaret Corbin and Captain Molly were one. But even without it, the story goes on connectedly and consistently in Captain Molly's name: She had the same complete disability that characterized Margaret Corbin and that led Congress to recognize her situation; she continued to receive through the West Point Commissary the aid voted by Congress to Margaret Corbin; she continued to be recognized locally as an artilleryman's wife who herself had rendered conspicuous service; and she was saluted as "Captain Molly" till death ended her miseries.

How did she come by her nickname of "Captain Molly?" Dr. Egle's suggestion that "there may have been other Moll Pitchers" may be true. "Molly" was apparently a term of comradeship applied by soldiers to women who helped them in camp. Margaret Corbin as well as Mary Hays may have carried water. It is quite likely that both were called "Molly" by the men of the regiment and that after the battle of Fort Washington, Margaret Corbin was distinguished as "Captain Molly" and after the battle of Monmouth, Mary Hays was called "Molly Pitcher." But however that may be, it is

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certain that Captain Molly was *not* Molly Pitcher and it is morally certain that she *was* Margaret Corbin.

### REINTERMENT AT WEST POINT

The identity of Captain Molly and Margaret Corbin was first suggested to the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society in 1914 by Mr. Arthur P. Abbott of Highland Falls, and the suggestion seemed so plausible that the Society gave place to it in its Annual Reports to the Legislature in 1915 and 1916 (q.v.). Mr. Abbott also wrote to others and was tireless in urging that the grave be suitably marked. The historical evidence, however, was not at first satisfactory and further research was necessary. Among those whose interest was enlisted by Mr. Abbott was the late Dr. James Sullivan, New York State Historian. On April 8, 1922, the latter wrote to Miss Amelia D. Campbell (later Mrs. Alton Brooks Parker) of New York, Vice Chairman of the National Committee on Historical Research and Preservation of Records, Daughters of the American Revolution, and she also was indefatigable in the effort to secure suitable honors to Margaret Corbin's memory. Meanwhile, this Society, Mrs. Parker and the State Historian kept up their researches, eventually assembling the evidence which satisfied them of the identity of Captain Molly as the heroine of the battle of Fort Washington.

In the Spring of 1925, Col. Satterlee, son-in-law of the late Mr. J. P. Morgan, on whose property, called Cragston, Captain Molly was buried, suggested that the heroine's remains be transferred to an appropriate place elsewhere. Mr. Morgan had died on March 31, 1913, and Mrs. Morgan on November 16, 1924; and the possibility that the property

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might pass into other hands for real estate development aroused the fear that Captain Molly's grave might be obliterated. In 1925, Dr. A. C. Flick, then New York State Historian, invited the New York State Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution to appoint a committee to consider plans for the reinterment. In reference to this invitation, Mrs. Charles White Nash, State Regent of the D. A. R., appointed a committee, consisting of herself, ex-officio; Mrs. Alton Brooks Parker, State Chairman for Margaret Corbin Research and State Historian for the D. A. R.; Mrs. Frank H. Parcels, State Chairman of the Genealogical Research Committee; and Mrs. Theodore de LaPorte, State Chairman of Historical Research and Preservation of records; with whom were associated Mr. Peter Nelson of the Division of Archives and History of the New York State Department of Education; and Dr. Dixon Ryan Fox, Professor of History at Columbia University.

On July 7, 1925, Mrs. Nash, Mrs. Parker, Mrs. de LaPorte, Mrs. Parcels, Mr. Nelson, Mr. Arthur P. Abbott of Highland Falls, Rev. Roland Bunten, rector of the Church of the Holy Innocents at Highland Falls, and Dr. Edward Hagaman Hall, Secretary of the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society, met Colonel Satterlee at Highland Falls, visited the grave, and discussed suggestions for the reinterment of Captain Molly's remains and the erection of a suitable memorial. During the next eight months the D. A. R. committee industriously matured its plans; secured the permission of Mr. J. P. Morgan, Jr., to remove the remains from the Cragston estate; obtained from the United States Military authorities at West Point consent to the reinterment in the Military Academy cemetery; arranged for the erection

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of the memorials mentioned hereafter; engaged the necessary services of an undertaker; and finally appointed Tuesday, March 16, 1926, as the day for the translation.

In the early afternoon of the date mentioned, the following persons assembled at the grave on Mr. Morgan's estate: Mrs. Nash, Mrs. Parker, Mrs. de LaPorte, and Mr. Peter Nelson, in their capacities as members of the D. A. R. committee; Miss de LaPorte; Rev. and Mrs. Roland Bunten; Mr. Arthur P. Abbott, who was the first to suggest the identity of Captain Molly and Margaret Corbin; Mr. Reginald Pelham Bolton, Vice President of the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society, historian and archaeologist; Dr. Edward Hagaman Hall, co-worker with Mr. Bolton in historical and archaeological research for over twenty-five years; Captain George S. Andrew, Captain and Surgeon L. R. Moore, Captain and Dental Surgeon W. D. Love, and Lieutenant W. R. Fleming, the latter four of the United States Army from West Point; Mr. Isaac Newell, an old inhabitant of Highland Falls who had been familiar with the location of the grave for over a half a century; Frank Canero, an employe of Mr. Morgan's who frequently cared for the grave; Mr. W. F. Hogan, of the undertaking firm of Hogan & Bevans, of Highland Falls; a helper; and several photographers.

When the undertaker's helper had excavated the grave to the depth of about three and a half feet and the earth began to give indications of organic remains, Dr. Hall then took the helper's place and with the aid of a small trowel, a hand shovel, and his bare hands, slowly and carefully removed the remaining soil until the skeleton was exposed to view. A few decayed fibers of wood and several rusty hand-forged nails were the only traces of the coffin. The bones of the

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DISINTERMENT OF MARGARET CORBIN AT HIGHLAND FALLS, 16 MARCH, 1926



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skeleton were complete except the small bones of the feet and the bones of the right hand which had disintegrated. The feet were toward the east, the right arm by the side, and the left arm folded across the body so that the bones of the left hand were found lying on those of the pelvis. No traces of clothing, buttons or other objects were found. In order that nothing of significance should be lost, Mr. Bolton carefully sifted the earth handed up to him by Dr. Hall in accordance with their long practice in making archaeological excavations. The bones were carefully taken up in succession, beginning at the feet, handed to Mr. Bolton who removed the superfluous earth, and placed in their relative positions in a casket together with a package of the earth that pillowed the head.

The remains lay at a depth of about five feet at the head of the grave, and, on account of the slope of the ground, at a depth of four feet at the foot. They were those of a strong, large-boned person, about five feet and eight inches high, and were identified by Surgeon Moore as those of a woman.

When the disinterment had been completed, the casket was closed and covered with an American flag, and was carried by Capt. Andrew, Capt. Moore, Capt. Love and Lieut. Fleming to the hearse. Just at this moment, in a thick but brief fall of snow, Nature laid a pall of purest white upon the ground, and upon the casket.

The reburial took place about twenty minutes later, at 3:30 p. m., in the cemetery of the United States Military Academy at West Point, just west of the Mortuary Chapel. The latter is about half a mile northwest of the Parade Ground. Those present at the interment, besides the undertaker and assistants, were the Rev. and Mrs. Buntin, Mrs. Parker, Mrs. Nash, Captain Andrew, Mr. Nelson and Dr. Hall. Mr.

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Bunten read the brief but impressive committal service of the Protestant Episcopal Church, all present joining in the Lord's Prayer. At the words of the ritual "earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust," earth from the Highland Falls grave was sprinkled on the casket. After the benediction, the witnesses also sprinkled earth from the old grave into the new one, and Mrs. Nash dropped a bouquet of violets upon the casket.

These simple ceremonies were followed, on April 14, 1926, by others more formal and elaborate, dedicating a tablet in memory of the heroine in the Patriot's Corner of the Church of the Holy Innocents at Highland Falls and dedicating the monument over her grave at West Point.

The Highland Falls tablet, designed by Mr. Kerr Rainsford, bears the following inscription:

*In Memory of*

MARGARET CORBIN

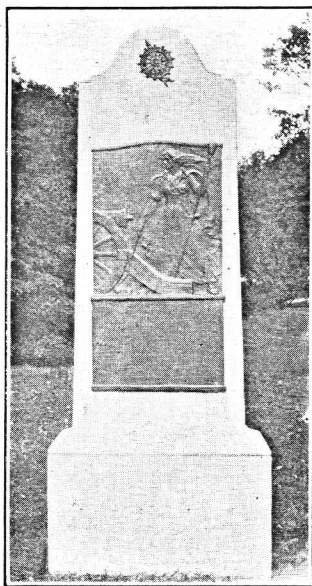
*A Heroine of the Revolution known throughout  
the Highlands of the Hudson as*

CAPTAIN MOLLY

*She was born in Pennsylvania, November 12th, 1751. Her father Robert Cochran was killed and her mother taken prisoner by the Indians in 1756. She was with her husband John Corbin at the Battle of Fort Washington on Manhattan Island, Nov. 16, 1776. When he was killed she loaded and fired his field piece until she fell severely wounded. She was granted by the Government half the pay and allowances of a soldier in service, receiving them from the Army Post at West Point. Until her death about 1800 she lived childless and alone on the river bank near Cragston Brook, and was buried there. After many years her dust was removed to consecrated ground, and that her courage and patriotism may not be forgotten, this tablet is erected by The National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution in New York State, 1926.*

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*Monument to Margaret Corbin  
at West Point Military Cemetery*

The monument at West Point, designed by Mr. Brython Jones of the Bronze Memorial Studios of Utica, N. Y., is inscribed as follows:

*In Memory of*  
**MARGARET CORBIN**  
*A Heroine of the Revolution known as*  
**CAPTAIN MOLLY**  
**1751-1800**

*who at the Battle of Fort Washington, New York City, when her husband John Corbin was killed kept his field piece in action until severely wounded, and thereafter, by Act of Congress, received*

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*half the pay and allowances of "A Soldier in the Service." She lived, died and was buried on the Hudson River bank near the village now called Highland Falls. In appreciation of her Deeds for the Cause of Liberty and that her Heroism may not be forgotten, her dust was removed to this spot and this memorial erected by The National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution in New York State 1926.*

Thus, in the 150th year of the Independence which she helped to win, "Captain Molly" came into her name again, and into her just inheritance of the fame of Margaret Corbin, who battled beside her husband at Fort Washington in what with immortal words, was declared to be

**"THE MOST GLORIOUS CAUSE  
THAT MANKIND EVER FOUGHT IN"**



MARKER AT MILITARY CEMETERY  
WEST POINT, N. Y.