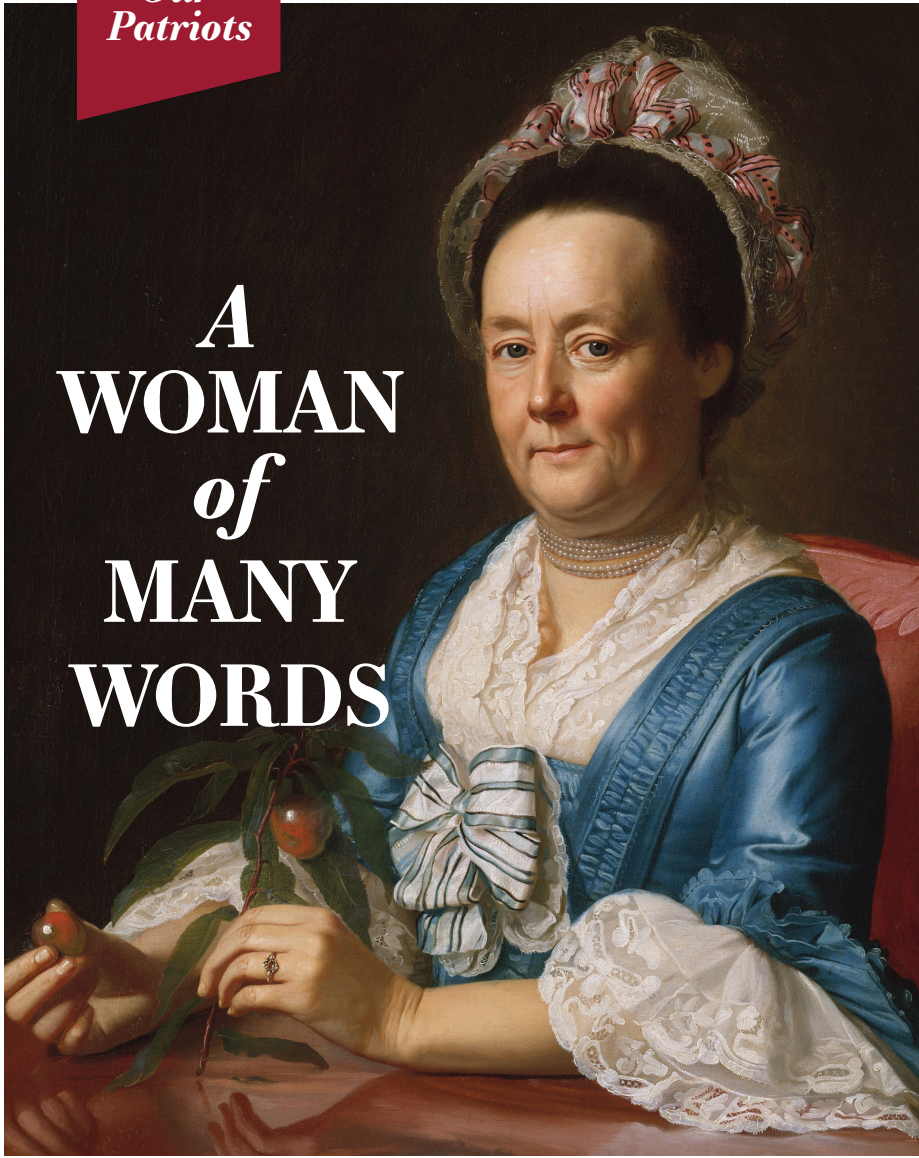


A WOMAN of MANY WORDS



“And be it known unto Britain, even American daughters are Politicians & Patriots and will aid the good work with their Female Efforts.”

— A LETTER FROM HANNAH WINTHROP TO MERCY OTIS WARREN IN JANUARY 1774

An American Life

Hannah Fayerwether’s ancestors first arrived in the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1630. Hannah, the oldest daughter of Thomas and Hannah Waldo Fayerwether, was baptized at the First Church of Boston on February 12, 1727.

In 1745, Hannah married Parr Tolman, but he died young. Eleven years later, in 1756, she married John Winthrop, a widowed father who was a second great-grandson and named after the founder of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. John was a professor of mathematics and natural philosophy at

Harvard College in Cambridge, as well as a prominent physicist and astronomer.

Hannah “shared her husband’s interests and pursuits to a remarkable degree for a woman in those days,” Mary Smith Lockwood, one of the four Founders of the DAR, wrote in 1906. “We find her assisting him in his astronomical observations and writing to Mercy Warren at Plymouth with enthusiastic appreciation of the study of the heavens.”

The couple bonded over not only their interest in astronomy, but also a passion for public affairs and the fight for independence. John Winthrop served as a probate judge in Middlesex County and as a member of the Governor’s Council in 1773–1774. As a professor, he taught some of the great minds of the American Revolution, such as John Adams, and was an outspoken voice for independence.

continued on page 48

Hannah Winthrop’s Legacy Lives on Through Collection of Letters, and as Namesake to a DAR Chapter

/ By Nancy Mann Jackson /

Men were on the Revolutionary front lines in both military and political efforts, but many women—often nameless—played equally significant roles. Hannah Fayerwether Winthrop was one of the few female Patriots whose work to establish an independent nation is well-documented, mainly through letters with other female Patriots such as Mercy Otis Warren and Abigail Adams.

continued from page 46

A Patriotic Duty

Hannah was also outspoken in her support of the Revolutionary cause. Her correspondence with friends and confidantes Warren and Adams is peppered with patriotic sympathies. And because the Winthrops lived right on the square in Cambridge (now known as Winthrop Square), Hannah’s letters to her friends offer a colorful inside view of the Revolution’s early days.

On April 18, 1775, Paul Revere and William Dawes received word from Dr. Joseph Warren that the British were coming. Revere left Boston around 10 p.m., and two lanterns shone from the Old North Church steeple, a prearranged signal designed by Revere to alert Bostonians. Hannah was just across the Charles River at her home in Cambridge. Later that night, the Redcoats rowed from Boston Common across the river to East Cambridge and began marching down present-day Gore Street at 2 a.m. Three hours later, the first shots of the Revolutionary War rang out in Lexington, with more to follow later on the morning of April 19.

Some members of the Cambridge militia marched toward Lexington while others waited at Harvard Square for the Redcoats to return. As the war began taking shape before her eyes, and as she and other women in Cambridge were urged to leave the town, Hannah wrote to Warren about her experience:



Abigail Adams, left, and Mercy Otis Warren, two of Winthrop’s confidantes

“Not knowing what the event would be at Cambridge at the return of these bloody ruffians, and seeing another brigade dispatched to the assistance of the former, looking with the ferocity of barbarians, it seemed necessary to retire to some place of safety till the calamity was passed.... We

were directed to a place called Fresh Pond, about a mile from the town, but what a distressed house did we find it, filled with women whose husbands had gone forth to meet the assailants, seventy or eighty of these, with numbers of infant children, weeping and agonizing for the fate of their husbands.”

Later, Hannah wrote of being so near to the conflict that she became covered with dirt and dust from the firing of muskets. Her stepson, James Winthrop, was severely wounded at the battle of Bunker Hill, but he continued to serve in the Continental Army “with her blessing,” Lockwood wrote.

That same year, with the Colonial fight for independence moving forward, the Massachusetts Bay Colony General Court appointed Hannah, along with Adams and Warren, to question other Massachusetts women who were accused of remaining loyal to the crown.

John Winthrop died in May 1779 as the Revolutionary War raged on. After burying her husband, Hannah continued her ardent support for the fight. Less than one year later, on March 2, 1780, Hannah made a continental loan of \$200 to support the war effort, earning her recognition as an established Patriot. “The

name of Hannah Winthrop is inscribed on the ‘Roll of Honor’ as one who gave of her substance to the government in the time of need,” Lockwood wrote.

Hannah Winthrop died in Cambridge on May 6, 1790, but her legacy lives on. In 1894, a Massachusetts DAR Chapter was named in honor of her patriotic legacy. Although the chapter disbanded in 1984, a group of Massachusetts Daughters organized to create a new chapter in 2019 and chose to resurrect the former chapter name.

“We admired Hannah so much and we appreciate the trend of more and more DAR chapters being named for female Patriots, as they are an underrepresented piece of Revolutionary War history,” said Mary Tedesco, Organizing Regent of the Hannah Winthrop Chapter in Boston.

