



E-Newsletter | July 2012

Colonial Era Women

In June, we received the exciting news that *Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America* and its authors are going to receive the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) History Award Medal! Thus it is very timely to profile some Colonial Era women - women who we uncovered as we did the research for our book. Read and learn about Elizabeth Key, Sarah Fulton, Esther DeBerdt Reed, and Mum Bett.

At a time in our country's history when all women were viewed as property of a man and most black women in the New World were enslaved, the slave Elizabeth Key, daughter of a free white man and an enslaved woman, sued for her freedom. Hers is one of the earliest such suits filed in the English colonies. Through a series of owners, she was enslaved for a total of nineteen years, although a previous owner had committed to releasing her after nine years of service. Two courts ruled against her. Through petition, in 1655, her case was sent to the Virginia General Assembly. Key was ultimately freed.

Sarah Fulton contributed in different ways to the freedoms and rights that we enjoy today. In 1773, on one of her trips to visit her brother in Boston, "Mother of the Boston Tea Party" Fulton helped her husband and her brother disguise themselves as Mohawk Indians. They then boarded the tea ships in Boston Harbor, and dumped 342 casks of the tea into the water. Fulton is credited with the idea of disguising the men in Native American clothing and painting their



Mum Bett

faces. After the Battle of Bunker Hill in 1775, Fulton was on hand with bandages and was placed in charge of care for the wounded soldiers. In 1776, Fulton agreed to carry a message through enemy lines to General George Washington. Today, Fulton Street in Medford, Massachusetts memorializes the contributions of this patriot. At one point in our history, there was also a Sarah Bradlee Fulton Chapter of the DAR; today there is a Boston Tea Party Chapter.



Esther DeBerdt Reed

Another woman who contributed to the Revolutionary War was Esther DeBerdt Reed. In 1780, during the bleakest part of the war, "Daughter of Liberty" Reed organized a women's committee in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to raise money for General Washington's troops. Her committee of 39 women raised the equivalent of \$7,500 in specie (coin money of that time). Reed's group also cut and sewed two thousand linen shirts for Washington's army. In addition, she encouraged women in other Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Maryland towns to support this type of effort.

Separation from England and the emancipation of all slaves were among the steps that needed to be taken to actualize life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Mum Bett (later Elizabeth Freeman) helped in these efforts. Although an illiterate slave, Mum Bett heard a reading of the Declaration of Independence and discussions of the new Massachusetts Constitution and the Bill of Rights around the dinner table at the home of her owner. She went to attorney Theodore Sedgwick to obtain the equality promised in those documents and to claim her liberty under the law. At the conclusion of the 1781 trial of *Brom & Bett v. J. Ashley Esq.*, the jury in the Great Barrington Court of Common Pleas set Freeman free and ordered her owner, Colonel John Ashley, to pay her thirty shillings and court costs. She became one of the first slaves freed under the 1780 Massachusetts Constitution. A great grandchild of Freeman, born many years later, was the famous writer W.E.B. Du Bois.

We are proud to continue bringing you information about the amazing women

on whose shoulders we stand and we are delighted to be receiving the DAR
History Award Medal!

Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America
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