

OLD TRADITION PROVES UNTRUE

Body Buried Was Not That of Molly Pitcher

Down in Highland Falls on the estate of the late J. Pierpont Morgan is an unmarked grave. Who is buried there has been a matter of speculation for the last hundred years, but tradition has it that the grave contains the remains of Molly Pitcher, famous Revolutionary heroine of the battle of Monmouth. This tradition has grown so that it is generally accepted as fact with the result that historians and those interested in Revolutionary history have invariably associated the locality with Molly Pitcher because she was supposed to have spent her last days there.

But all this is mere tradition, according to Arthur E. Abbott of Highland Falls, writer of historical books, who is an authority on the chronology of the Hudson river. A woman greater than Molly Pitcher lies buried in the unmarked grave on the Morgan estate, and he is trying to get historical societies, including the Newburgh Historical society, to take the lead in doing her honor. This woman was Margaret Corbin, who performed a valorous deed during the Revolution very similar to Molly Pitcher's. Historical data which proves that the grave is that of Margaret Corbin and not Molly Pitcher's, and hence explodes the tradition of the latter's burial in Highland Falls, has been collected by Mr. Abbott after an arduous search.

When the Revolutionary war broke out, John Corbin and John Haines enlisted in the First artillery regiment of Pennsylvania. The American army was sadly in need of nurses, so the wives of these men, Margaret Corbin and Molly Pitcher (Haines), accompanied them and assisted about the camps in caring for the wounded and looking after the welfare of the soldiers.

The exploit of Molly Pitcher has been celebrated so much that it is scarcely necessary to recount it. The story goes and the story is true, that during the battle of Monmouth in which the American army under General Washington narrowly escaped disaster, Molly Pitcher's husband was shot down while serving his gun at an important point in the battle line. Stepping into the breach at the critical moment, Molly grasped the ramrod from the hand of her wounded husband and continued firing the field piece with deadly effect on the enemy. For this act she became famous.

During the battle of Fort Washington on Manhattan subsequent to the battle of Long Island, in which the American army had been defeated, Margaret Corbin found herself in a position much the same as Molly Pitcher's. While serving his gun, John Corbin, a matross, was shot dead at his wife's feet. Undismayed by the tragedy, Margaret Corbin took her husband's place at the cannon and maintained the fire of the battery. So effective was her fire that the British concentrated their guns on her battery. She was wounded by three grapeshot which nearly severed her arm at the shoulder and tore part of her breast away.

After the war Margaret Corbin went to live with a friend just south of West Point. She died about 1800, and the grandfather of Captain Fraut, who now lives in Highland Falls, helped to bury her. Each generation of the Frauts kept track of the spot where the heroic soldier woman was buried.

Careless talk of Margaret Corbin's exploit and its similarity to the one of Molly Pitcher is believed responsible for the theory that the heroine of Monmouth died in Highland Falls. Lossing's Field Book of the American Revolution, which is generally accepted as an authoritative work, tells of Molly Pitcher's death and burial at Highland Falls. It is now supposed that the author was misinformed by natives of the place, who had grown up with the tradition and believed it implicitly.

According to Mr. Abbott, the fame of Margaret Corbin should be greater than that of Molly Pitcher for two reasons. One is that Margaret Corbin was the first woman pensioned by the government of the United States. The pension was in recognition of her heroism in the battle of Fort Washington. Another reason is that Margaret Corbin's husband was killed, whereas Molly Pitcher's husband was only wounded.

To prove to his own satisfaction that the tale of the Pitcher woman's burial in Highland Falls was a hoax, Mr. Abbott tried to look up the pension records in Washington, but the record of Margaret Corbin's army pension was destroyed along with the government archives when the British invaded the city in the war of 1812 and burned the capitol. Mr. Abbott was referred to Albany, but he could get no information there.

Next he went to the archives of Pennsylvania and found all the information about Margaret Corbin that he wanted. Mr. Abbott unearthed one important fact showing that the two heroines of the army have been confounded. The fact is that the maiden name of Molly Pitcher was Ludwig; she was of Holland-Dutch ancestry. The maiden name of Margaret Corbin was Cochrane, and her

ancestry was Irish. The legends of Molly Pitcher's life in Highland Falls say that she was an Irish woman.

Remaining persistent in his search, Mr. Abbott went to West Point where he dug up more information about Margaret Corbin. This consisted of three entries in the records of Captain Price, quarter-master at West Point after the Revolution, showing that he had made purchases for one Margaret Corbin out of her stipend from the government.

Nothing whatever has been done to preserve the memory of the heroine of Fort Washington, who has lain in an obscure grave at Highland Falls for more than a century, while her friend, Molly Pitcher, enjoys the distinction of a rare niche in Revolutionary history.

Mr. Abbott would like to see the remains of Margaret Corbin disinterred and reburied in Bear Mountain Park. He says this would be peculiarly fitting because of the historic associations of the region. A movement is on foot to have the American Society for Scenic Preservation collect funds for a memorial to Margaret Corbin so that her deeds may not fall into total obscurity and be lost sight of. To this end Mr. Abbott is trying to interest the Newburgh Historical society, which may take up the matter.