

DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION MAGAZINE

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Top—The flag covered casket of Margaret Corbin being placed in the hearse for removal to the U. S. Military Cemetery at West Point, N. Y. Four army officers acted as pall bearers, Capt. George S. Andrew, Capt. W. R. Moore, Capt. W. D. Love and Lieut. W. R. Fleming. *Bottom*—At the opening of the original grave of Margaret Corbin (left to right), Captain George S. Andrew and Lieutenant W. R. Fleming on duty at the U. S. Military Academy at West Point; Mrs. Alton Brooks Parker, State Historian, and Mrs. Charles White Nash, New York State Regent.



PHOTOGRAPH OF ORIGINAL GRAVE NEAR HIGHLAND FALLS, NEW YORK, OF MARGARET CORBIN, WITH IDENTIFYING CEDAR STUMP AT HEAD

Revolutionary Heroine Interred in West Point Cemetery

BY AMELIA CAMPBELL PARKER

State Historian of New York

FOR many years residents of Highland Falls, New York, have had handed down to them the tradition of a woman known to their ancestors as "Captain Molly." Perhaps they knew her real name, but thus was she known because of her distinguished martial bearing, enhanced by the semi-military garb she usually wore, and because they knew she had a right to military distinction.

The research, which has authentically connected this "Captain Molly," buried in the Highlands of the Hudson River about the year 1800, with the famous Margaret Corbin whose burial place was hitherto unknown, is of great historical interest.

The monument which the Daughters of the American Revolution recently placed at her grave at West Point gives to our Nation another important Revolutionary Shrine.

In the archives of the library of the West Point Military Academy is the book in which William Price, Commissary of Military Stores, copied the letters sent to Major General Knox (Secretary of War), from 1783 to 1790, in which he asks for supplies for the maintenance of "Captain Molly." These letters show that she was *entitled* to receive the support of the Government of the United States, from which we draw the definite

conclusion that she was a pensioned soldier. Commissary Price was very zealous in providing proper boarding places, food and clothing for his charge, for in 1785 he wrote:

"I have procured a place for 'Captain 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."

Many times he must have been at his wits' end to reconcile this dominant woman with those in whose home she lived. Undoubtedly her bodily afflictions received in battle had affected her temper, for, to quote from Commissary Price's letter of January 31, 1786:

"I am at a loss what to do with 'Captain Molly'.

She is such an offensive person that people are unwilling to take her in charge. This woman informs me 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 persons to keep her." And again in 1788: "Mr. Garrison for the last winter's wood and Mrs. Randall for the maintenance of 'Captain Molly' are very anxious for their money, the accounts for which is lodged in the War Office."

Commissary Price made no entries in his book after 1790 and there is no record of "Captain Molly" after that time. Because of the care received by "Captain Molly" from the Government through its army post at West Point, the assumption is a certainty that she must have been in the Revolution, and wounded,

and that a grateful Government was showing its appreciation by supporting her. There have been many conjectures as to who she really was. Evidently interest was not strong enough to unearth or record her identity, or perhaps the fact being so well known to people at that time, it was assumed that the coming generations would be familiar with her history. At any rate, after a lapse of nearly a

century and a quarter, the matter was brought to the attention of the Daughters of the American Revolution. Amos D. Faurot, of Highland Falls, a former Hudson River captain, is authority for the fact that his grandfather assisted in the burial of "Captain Molly," and pointed out the grave to his son. The son in turn pointed it out to interested persons, among whom was Mr. Arthur P. Abbott. Mr. Abbott was probably the first to ex-



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press the belief that "Captain Molly" was in reality Margaret Corbin. So firm was this belief that he persuaded the historian, Mr. Reginald P. Bolton, of its probability, and Mr. Bolton so records it in his *History of Manhattan*. Dr. Edward Hagaman Hall, secretary of the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society, has also made much of these arguments and has noted it in an able article on Margaret Corbin, besides publishing Mr. Abbott's data in the Annual Reports of his Society. Col. Herbert L. Satterlee, son-in-law of Mr. J. P. Morgan, Sr., also firmly believed "Captain Molly" and Margaret Corbin to be one and the same. These gentlemen, each in his own way and own time, took up the matter with the Daughters of the American Revolution. The present State Historian, Dr. Alexander C. Flick, asked the New York State Conference, Daughters of the American Revolution, to undertake the research.

The then New York State Regent, Mrs. Charles White Nash, proceeded at once to appoint a committee to carry on the work to completion. Her appointees were:

Mrs. Alton Brooks Parker, State Historian, whom she made State Chairman of this research work; Mrs. Frank H. Parcells, State Chairman of Genealogical Research; Mrs. Theodore de LaPorte, State Chairman of Historic Research and Preservation of Records; Mr. Peter Nelson, State Department of History, and Dr. Dixon Ryan Fox, Professor of History at Columbia University.

Some fifty years ago J. Pierrepont Morgan, Sr., purchased a large estate near Highland Falls (about three miles from

West Point), which he called *Cragston*. On it were two or three graves, one of which was that of "Captain Molly." The grave has remained undisturbed, except for the care given it by the superintendent, who rounded the mound and cov-



PHOTO FROM PLASTER MODEL, BRYTHON JONES
 PLASTER CAST OF BRONZE TABLET FOR MONUMENT OF MARGARET CORBIN, WITH INSCRIPTION

ered it with periwinkle. It is said that when "Captain Molly" was buried, a cedar tree was planted at the head of her grave and a rough stone or bronze tablet bearing merely the two words, "Captain Molly." The stump of an old cedar tree was one of the means of convincing the Research Committee that it *was* indeed the grave of "Captain Molly."

Margaret Corbin was an orphan when she married John Corbin of Virginia, in 1772, perhaps in Pennsylvania, for she had been born there in 1751. Her father, Robert Cochran, had been killed by the Indians in 1756, and her mother was carried off a prisoner by them, so at the tender age of five she was parentless.

History does not record that the battle of Fort Washington was the only one in which she took part, but it does tell us that John Corbin was with the Maryland and Virginia regiments when, on November 16th, 1776, he was killed while firing his cannon. His young wife had been with her husband in camp, a privilege permitted women by the Government during the Revolution. She had endeared herself to the soldiers by cooking and mending for them and bringing water to the wounded. For this sacrificing work the soldiers, as a term of endearment, called her "Moll."

Although Margaret Corbin was constantly doing a woman's work in camp, yet she loved the big field-piece and watched her husband clean and load it with such interest that he taught her how to fire it. When he was killed and the order was given to remove the cannon, she sprang forward and asked permission to fire it as "Jack" had taught her. She was so earnest in her appeal that she was allowed to do so, and she continued to load and fire until three grape shot from

the enemy's charge wounded her in the shoulder and breast. The loss of the battle made the American soldiers prisoners, but the victorious British army recognized Margaret's unparalleled bravery and treated her as a non-combatant. It is said she was paroled in the custody of General Greene at Fort Lee. Later she was with the Corps of Invalids, and hers is the only woman's name on that list, in Blair and Egle's *Pennsylvania in the Revolution*.

For this deed of bravery and heroism, Margaret Corbin was recognized by the United States Government. In the *Journal of Continental Congress*, July 6, 1779, it was recorded:

"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 compleat suit of cloaths, or the value thereof in money."

The following year, 1780, the Board of War:

"Having information that Margaret Corbin 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."

Pennsylvania, her native State, also honored Margaret Corbin, for the "Pennsylvania Colonial Records" of 1779 read:

"The two following orders were drawn on the Treasurer, viz: In favour 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 galleys 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 grapeshot 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 of the Board of War, this Council being of opinion that notwithstanding the rations which have been allowed her, she is not provided for as her helpless situation really requires."

The Corps of Invalids was discharged by the Government in 1783, but that the disabled soldiers continued to be provided for is shown in the following quotation from the *Journal of Continental Congress*, 1783:

"Resolved, that the Corps of Invalids be reduced, such officers as have lost a limb or been completely disabled in service to retire on full pay for life; such officers as may not be included in this description to retire on the same principles with other officers of the army, such non-commissioned officers and soldiers as being strangers in the country and have been disabled in service are incapable of providing for their own subsistence and are proper subjects for a hospital, to be received into some field hospital to be appropriated for the purpose, and their support on such provisions as may be hereafter determined, to be entitled in the meantime to their usual rations and clothing, and such non-commissioned officers and soldiers in service as may have homes to which they can retire to be discharged on the principles of the resolution of the 23rd of April last."

This important information was obtained through research in the Journals of the Continental Congress, the library archives of the United States Military Academy at West Point, and the cooperation of Mr. Arthur P. Abbott, Dr. Edward Hagaman Hall and Mr. Peter

Nelson, a valued member of our Research Committee. However, this was not sufficient to merge the identity of the two names in one person, and we recognized the necessity of this missing link being found if our task was to be satisfactorily done.

The librarian of the Massachusetts Historical Society sent me the following information copied from the original papers of General Knox:

"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 rations allowed her since the 1st of Jany., 1782.

(Signed)

JOHN^a PUGH,
L^c Invalids."

This showed that Margaret Corbin had been at West Point in 1782, and as the Invalid Regiment was mustered out in 1783, no doubt she had been one of the invalids sent there after the Revolution. An orphan since childhood, and her husband killed by her side, and without near relatives elsewhere, what more natural than that she should remain in the vicinity of her benefactors—the dispensers of the bounties of the United States Government.

With this important evidence, Mr. Nelson gave his deciding vote that the missing link connecting the two women had been found, which made the findings of our Research Committee unanimous.

Having established the identity of Margaret Corbin with that of "Captain Molly," the next step was to obtain permission to have her remains re-interred in the United States Military Cemetery at West Point. Our proofs were submitted to the superintendent, Maj. Gen. Frederick W. Sladen through Capt. George

S. Andrew, and with their acceptance of the authenticity of our claim, went the permission to bury the remains of Margaret Corbin in the Military Cemetery.

The opening of the grave at Highland Falls took place on March 16, 1926. When the grave was uncovered, the bones lay in perfect position with the right arm at her side and the left hand on the breast. They were imbedded in the earth, as the coffin and garments in which she had originally been buried were rotted away. The skeleton was removed piecemeal and reverently placed in the silk-lined casket, until nearly the entire frame of the body had been so assembled.

The surgeon of the West Point Hospital gave the information that the skeleton was that of a female, and that the left shoulder bones bore evidence that they had been injured, verifying history that her shoulder and breast were badly bruised and battered. The surgeon dentist found most of the teeth on both upper and lower jaw on the left side missing, while on the right side they seemed to be worn, which might verify the tradition that Margaret Corbin smoked a clay pipe.

The remains were borne to West Point and placed in the grave, on the lawn between the mortuary chapel and the Storm King Highway, where it can be plainly seen by passersby. The committal service was read by the Rev. Roland J. Buntten, as the snow came down and placed its blanket of white on the grave of this heroine.

The handsome granite memorial monument erected at her grave bears a bronze tablet with the figure in relief of a woman firing a cannon, with the following inscription:

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 half the pay and allowances of
'A Soldier in Service.'

She lived, died and was buried on the Hudson River bank, near the village now called Highland Falls, N. Y.
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
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IN NEW YORK STATE
1926

The dedication took place on April 14, 1926, with full military honors. The present superintendent of the United States Military Academy at West Point, Brigadier General Merch B. Stewart, made the address of acceptance, after the monument had been presented by Mrs. Alton Brooks Parker, in behalf of the Committee, to the State. An address of acceptance and presentation in behalf of the State to West Point was made by Mrs. Charles White Nash, State Regent. A volley was fired over the grave and taps concluded the service by Chaplain Clayton E. Wheat.

As Margaret Corbin lived in the vicinity of Highland Falls for so many years, it seemed appropriate that there should be a memorial to her there also. So, on the same date, a tablet was placed in the Patriots' Corner of the Church of the Holy Innocents, Highland Falls, N. Y.