

Molly Pitcher:

Who Was She?

by Constance M. McDonald



This article is an abbreviated version of a larger, carefully documented college research paper on the same subject. Based on Mrs. McDonald's and others' research, the US Field Artillery Association plans to change the name of "Molly Pitcher," now listed as Mary Ludwig Hays, to Mary Hays McCauly in the next printing of its various publications referring to Molly Pitcher if no evidence to the contrary surfaces as a result of this article.

The story of Molly Pitcher of American Revolution fame gives pride to her community of Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and the United States Field Artillery that claim her as its heroine. Her battleground in New Jersey boasts of a Molly Pitcher Well and a monument dedicated to her contributions during the Battle of Monmouth. The flesh and blood woman who fought at Monmouth, Mary Hays McCauly, served her country well.

Because her tale has been retold many times, details conflict in different versions. In addition, assumptions in a few historical documents have led to controversy over whether the famed Molly Pitcher's real name was Mary Hays McCauly or Mary Ludwig Hays. Though many disagree, I only can conclude from research and historical documentation that the heroine Molly Pitcher was Mary Hays McCauly.

The Battle of Monmouth

Molly Pitcher's fame began two years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence

by the American Colonies. The fight for independence had yet to take a favorable turn toward the Colonials. As the war continued, 28 June 1778 proved to be another day of fighting with stories of **b r a v e r y**.

Monmouth rocked with musket and gun fire. The Colonial cannon line under General Stirling aimed the barrels of its guns straight down on the British Redcoats as they attempted to cross a causeway. Stirling's left-wing cannons bought time for General Washington to take command and regroup General Lee's scattered forces. The gun line met the demands of its mission.

The heat of June 1778 soared to 96 degrees as the guns barked at the British. The cannon barrels smoked, and men fell from heatstroke. In the heat, a woman walked back and forth from a well (or possibly a nearby creek) carrying water to the hot men and smoldering guns. Her husband manned one of the valuable cannons. They were making a difference by holding the causeway.

As American men fell from wounds and heat, the woman's bucket of water (or "pitcher") became more precious. The men among the cannons began to call her Molly Pitcher. A large woman, she reportedly carried wounded men away from the line to shade trees as she made her trip back to the well.

During one of her many returns to the line, she saw her husband fall. A Colonial officer ordered his gun moved to the rear to make room on the line; he had no one left to man it. But Molly Pitcher stepped

forward to keep her husband's gun roaring—every cannon was important.

As if she had been trained for the task, Molly kept the cannon booming. The artillerymen around her noticed her swift, accurate action in keeping the gun firing. No longer were they asking for water from her; she had become one of them—a gunner. The tale of her efforts passed among the men that evening, and as each gunner spoke, the story's details changed.

Memories of Molly

Carlisle holds the memories and remains of Molly Pitcher. The "Old Graveyard" in Carlisle is where she was laid to rest with a military parade but with no stone marker for her grave. All that was left of her story lived in the memories of those who had known her and a few diaries describing the Battle of Monmouth.

The citizens of Carlisle knew their heroine as Molly Pitcher, a woman who could neither read nor write. Therefore, the written accounts of Molly's contributions at Monmouth weren't by her. The written story depended on the people of Carlisle.

One such citizen recorded some of his memories of Molly Pitcher six weeks before the centennial of the Declaration of Independence. Wesley Miles recounted his time as the charge of Molly Pitcher in an article that appeared in *The Carlisle Herald*.

Miles' mother died when he was small. Molly had nursed his ailing mother and

