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Revolutionary Mothers: British Officer's Wives

During the course of the American Revolution, thousands of women took active roles as camp followers, labeled as such because they became an almost constant presence at military encampments. Most of these women, from both the American and British sides, were wives or daughters of officers or soldiers. The duties of these camp followers varied greatly, many served the army by cooking, mending, laundry or nursing ill or wounded soldiers (Courtney)

Wives of officers often took on other more glamorous tasks such as entertaining their husbands and other officers. As far as the British were concerned, many chose not to bring their wives with them to the camps. Opting instead for mistresses, British officers even took on the wives of junior officers to become their mistresses in the camps. Through journal and diary entries we have accounts of the plight of these women during the war. No story is quite as impressive as that of Frederika Riedesel, wife of Hessian general, Friedrich Adolf Riedesel. After waiting over a year to join her husband in America, she became an example of strength for other women in the camp. Hiding her own feelings of despair, she managed to keep many women and children calm during horrific campaigns. In addition, she worked to help the sick and wounded soldiers recover after the barrage at Saratoga. Taking on an unlikely position of women in her time, she even criticized General Burgoyne's leadership recounting, "it was impossible to keep silent, when I saw so many brave men in want of everything..."(Berkin, 86). From camp follower to prisoner of war, the baroness kept her head held high and her spirits up. Her situation continued to worsen as disease spread throughout the prisoners of war and she was forced to care for many sick and debilitated people including her children and husband. In

the end, however, she was heavily revered among the British army as being a wonderful asset to their war effort and was set in a class of women that included Martha Washington.

Liberty's Children: Francis Slocum

The Revolutionary War made an impact on every level of society. Although many children were not involved in camp life, the conflict had long-reaching effects on children all over America. The story of Francis Slocum was unique in the sense that it isn't a story that's usually told or remembered with regards to the Revolution. The daughter of a hard-working Quaker family, Francis relocated from Rhode Island to Wyoming at the start of the war. Her father believed they would be safer if they separated themselves from the conflict. Although they placed themselves in territory that was frequently disrupted by Native American attacks and had a history of conflicts between these tribes and colonists, as Quakers, it was believed they would be safe so long as they remained neutral. Soon after the big move, disputes arose between Natives that supported the British and colonists living in the territory. Francis' brother involved himself in retaliation against the Natives and sealed the fate of the Slocum family. A group of Delaware came to the Slocum residence to scalp Francis' brother and in the process kidnapped Francis and Wareham Kingsley, a boy that was taken in by the Slocum family. Fortunately for Francis and Wareham, children taken in by this tribe were treated well and eventually adopted into a family that had lost a child. Francis grew to love her captors and assimilated well into Native American culture. Even as the war came to a close, she chose not to reunite herself with the Slocum family as she did not want to be torn away from her new family. Eventually, after marrying and bearing children with a Miami Chief, she was reunited with her brother and sister and grew to accept them into her new lifestyle. Roughly 750 English

people were recorded as being captured by Native Americans since their arrival on the North American continent (Slotkin). Most of these people were not known to be murdered by their captors. From these events, however, a popular style of literature, the captivity narrative, came to light, showcasing the plight of the captured and often the disdain of the Native American tribes.

Works Cited

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Teaching Strategies

Women in the Revolutionary War: Have students read primary/secondary source accounts of different women during the war. Assign students various roles held by women during the war and have them create something (diary entry, poem) that describes the plight and contribution of that person during the war.

Children in the Revolutionary War: Have students research the role of children in various wars throughout history. Write a paper that compares the impact war has had on children and include a piece on how war impacts children today (in U.S and abroad).