

The War at Home

Despite deprivation and hardship, Manchester's people persevered during the Revolution through tenacity, hard work, and hope.

Between fearing for the safety of the Manchester men at war, the constant fear of British attack from the sea, and the almost total destruction of the maritime and fishing interests, many of Manchester's residents fell onto extremely difficult times during the Revolutionary War. Despite this, the women, children, and elderly of Manchester maintained the homefront with perseverance, bravery, and hope. Fear of a British attack by sea was constant, and in times of an imminent threat, many Manchester families in the easterly part of town would go to a temporary settlement known as "The Old Garden" near today's Magnolia Avenue. Patriotism nevertheless flourished, and the Declaration of Independence was entered into in the Records of the Town of Manchester at the time it was made and introduced to the public.

Though optimism was often clouded with struggles, throughout the war nearly every nerve was strained and every resource was exhausted in order to support the cause for independence. The town called in, and spent in the war, all the money that was intended for the support of the ministry, and all that could be collected from taxation. The town even dismissed its school. Whatever little spare money the people of Manchester had went to supporting the Continental Army, or it went to buy materials that could be made into supplies for the troops like shoes, clothing, and other material items. There are a few stories about Manchester during the Revolution that have accumulated through various accounts and historical narratives over the years, and though not totally verifiable, still provide glimpses into the spirit and resolve those at the home front showed during the tumultuous years during the War for Independence.

Elizabeth Allen Samples Crafts, often referred to as "Sally Samples," was a hero of the Manchester homefront through her tenacious service as storekeeper. Elizabeth Allen married Samuel Samples in 1755, and the couple purchased land at today 22 Sea Street where they built a house that is still standing as a private residence. Accounts of Mrs. Samples write that as the house was being built, she walked many times to and from Salem to get glass, nails, and bricks. Samuel Samples died young at sea, leaving Elizabeth and their four young children alone. In the wake of her misfortune, Elizabeth Samples opened up one of the first stores in Manchester, highlighting her tenacity and determination; these characteristics would serve the town well during the coming war. By the time hostilities broke out, Elizabeth had remarried to militia leader Eleazar Crafts and had moved her family and her store to his house on Union St. During the Revolutionary War, Elizabeth Crafts made shirts for the soldiers, being assisted by her young daughter Nabby. With all major ports under British occupation, vital supplies for the women of Manchester dwindled, including the needles, threads, and pins necessary to make and mend clothing. In light of this shortage, about 1775, the story goes that Mrs. Crafts went on foot to Boston to get a supply. She was ferried across rivers and streams, and at the Boston limits was confronted by the guard who allowed her to pass on the pretext of visiting a friend, and she successfully obtained the coveted items. Mrs. Crafts then returned to Manchester to much joy and relief. The story of Elizabeth Craft's business sense and determination is a precedent (and likely inspiration) to the later success of her storekeeping granddaughter, Abigail Hooper (whose house is now occupied by the Manchester-by-the-Sea Museum).

Benjamin Crafts not only served as a soldier but supplied shoes for the men at war from his Manchester shop. At the start of the Revolution, this Manchester shoemaker enlisted and was made a sergeant, marching with the company from Manchester when hostilities broke out in Lexington on April 19, 1775. He was afterward second lieutenant in Capt. Benjamin Kimball's company, Cols. Mansfield and Hutchinson, in the 19th regiment of the Continental Army. He was stationed at Winter Hill during the Siege of Boston. On account of being needed at home by his family, Crafts successfully petitioned George Washington for his discharge and returned to Manchester. Back at home, Benjamin Crafts at once engaged in the manufacture of shoes for the war effort, it is said personally furnishing one hundred pairs a month for the Continental Army.

Revolutionary
Manchester