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Biography  
Gaunett, Deborah Sampson

"The One Woman of the Revolution" by Helen Louise Jackson, Washington  
Courthouse Chapter, DAR, Ohio, 1933.

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## DEBORAH SAMPSON GAUNETT

### The One Woman of the Revolution

In a peaceful little graveyard at Sharon, Massachusetts, is a spot marked by a simple white stone and a weeping willow. Very few who pass that spot know that beneath that stone lies the bravest woman of the Revolution. No Monument stands to tell the world of her deeds and no history holds her name, yet the Deborah Gaunett, whose name is graven upon the stone, deserves a monument to tell the generations of what she did. For one day's fearless action Molly Pitcher and Barbara Frischle have had their deeds sung in song and told in story, yet Deborah Sampson, such was her maiden name, who served three years in the Revolutionary War with a bravery so fine and courage so dauntless as to win the praise of General Washington, passes unnoticed.

She was born in Plympton, Mass., Dec. 17, 1760. A granddaughter of William Bradford and a descendant of Miles Standish and John Alden, Deborah Sampson came rightly by her heritage of bravery, determination, and force of character. Her father was lost at sea and her mother was forced to put her children out to the neighbors. Deborah was adopted by Mrs. Fuller and when five years of age but she died in a few years and Deborah was taken into the family of Jeremiah Thomas, where she was treated with every kindness and allowed to indulge her passion for study.

At the age of sixteen she became her own mistress and engaged to work half of her time in a family and spend the remainder in school. She was a remarkable student and everything deep and profound interested her. At this time the Colonies began to be greatly disturbed and from the age of sixteen to twenty-two Deborah

felt the general unrest and acquired a thorough knowledge of all that was said and done. From the time war was declared Deborah's whole attention was absorbed.

After hearing the news of the battle of Bunker Hill Deborah's decision was made to become a soldier and in her imagination she could hear the sound of guns. She revealed her plans to none but had decided she would give her life and efforts to her country and would fling herself into the very midst of the fight for liberty. With a small sum of money which she had saved from selling chickens, she bought wool and wove her suit and other clothes in secret. When all was finished she told her employer she was going to seek employment in Boston and set off with her clothes in a bundle.

Deborah changed her garments in the woods and came forth a man to all appearances. She made her way to Billingham where she at once enlisted in a recruiting party under the name of Robert Shurtleff and the party went at once to Worcester where it joined the Company of Captain Thayer. The Captain took a deep interest in Robert Shurtleff and gave her a home in his own family. Here Deborah experienced the first sensation at playing the part of a man as a young lady in the family fell in love with her.

The company was ordered from Worcester to West Point where it was divided and Robert Shurtleff was assigned to the "Old Ninth Mass. Regiment" commanded by Colonel Henry Jackson of Boston.

She now received her equipment and her duty was to clean her gun and exercise once each morning in the drill and at four each afternoon in the grand parade. An infantry uniform took the place of the home spun suit and a gun and bayonet, cartridge box and a hanger

completed the military outfit. The girl soldier made a singularly attractive youth in her handsome uniform. She was tall and carried herself superbly with erect shoulders and finely poised head. She had strong regular features, clear, penetrating eyes and a fresh complexion. She was full of life and vigor and had great distinction of bearing. She learned her manual quickly and won the immediate admiration and praise of her superior officers.

In the first battle a soldier next to her was shot and she escaped with two shots through her coat and one through her cap. Still she felt no fear and found fighting an agreeable employment. When for several weeks the army would be employed throwing up breast-works in anticipation of a great battle the labor proved nearly too much for the woman soldier. Still she never complained. She led many scouting parties, always inspiring the others by her utter fearlessness.

On <sup>one</sup> of these expeditions she was wounded twice. She begged her comrades to leave her as she preferred to die rather than enter a hospital for fear her secret would be discovered. They refused, however, and carried her back on a horse. When the surgeon came to dress her wounds she pointed to the one on her head but said nothing about the other. After he left she extracted the bullet from her hip with a pen knife. This wound never healed entirely and she felt the effects of it the remainder of her life.

After her recovery General Patterson chose her for his attendant and aide, which honor was conferred upon her as a reward for her heroism and fidelity. She inspired the General's deepest admiration and accompanied him wherever he went. In Philadelphia she fell ill with an epidemic that was among the troops. She was

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womanly gentleness and peacefulness from this time on. She taught school four years. Then she married Benjamin Gaunett of Sharon, Massachusetts, and had three children. After General Washington became president, he wrote and invited Robert Shurtleff to visit him. She accepted and was treated with the greatest honors by the President and residents of Washington.

She lived to be sixty-seven years of age and died in Sharon in 1827. She received a pension from the government throughout her life and her husband who survived her many years was voted a pension by Congress after her death. Her grandson, Benjamin Gaunett, now lives or did until a few years ago in Sharon in the old estate which was Deborah's home. In the yard stands an old tree which she planted, having brought it from Plymouth at the time of her marriage.

Few remember Deborah Gaunett but her influence is still felt and nothing but praise has come down through the generations since she was laid to rest in the little graveyard where the sun still shines and the snow still rests on her simple grave.

Helen Louise Jackson

Washington Court House Chapter, DAR

Ohio, 1933