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America's Founding Patriots



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Special Interest Articles:

- **REMEMBERING OUR PAST**, an introduction by J. S. Smithies.
- **HANNAH ERWIN ISRAEL** by Elizabeth F. Ellet, 1856.
- The Vocabulary of Moral Character, **NOAH WEBSTER'S 1828 DICTIONARY**.

HONORING OUR PAST

During 2011, Intrepid Books is proud to continue the series on America's Founding Patriots. These reprints of historical documents and books provide us with the stories of our national's hero's and heroine's.

With the American social structure coming under fire from many areas of the modern world, we need to pause and remember our past; not only the noble deeds done, but the people who helped to form our nation.

The lives of these individuals should inspire us today and allow us to realize that each of us are unique and have the capacity to change the world around us. We each have the power to change our lives internally with our thoughts and externally with our actions and deeds.

We have the power to change our families through the choices we make.

We have the power to change our schools and business by living the principles that our Founding Patriots believed it.

We have the power to change our communities, states, and nation by accepting the great responsibilities that come with living in the greatest nation known. To those that much has been given, much is expected.

We hope you enjoy learning about our Founding Patriots.

THE WOMEN OF THE REVOLUTION

In this newsletter, we will be presenting a reprint of **HANNAH ERWIN ISRAEL** by Elizabeth F. Ellet, **WOMEN OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION**, New York, 1856.


Many women during the American Revolution took actions that normally would not have occurred to them. They risked their lives for their families and homesteads. What might have seemed like a small action on their part would become a portion of the story of the founding of our nations. Hannah's bravery, though small, placed its part and is today remembered. It reminds us that we can each take part in a greater cause through our individual actions.



HANNAH ERWIN ISRAEL

By Elizabeth F. Ellet, 1848.

About the close of the year 1777, while the commander-in-chief of the British forces was in possession of Philadelphia, a foot passenger might have been seen on the road leading from Wilmington to that city. He was a young man of tall figure and powerful frame giving evidence of great muscular strength, to which a walk of over thirty miles, under ordinary circumstances, would be a trifle. But the features of the traveler were darkened by anxiety and apprehension; and it was more the over tasking of the mind than the body, which occasioned the weariness and lassitude under which he was plainly laboring. His dress was that of a simple citizen, and he was enveloped in a large cloak, affording ample protection against the severity of the weather, as well as serving to conceal sundry parcels of provisions, and a bag of money, with which he was laden. It was long after dark before he reached the ferry; but renewed hope and confidence filled his heart as he approached the termination of his journey.



Sir William Howe, it will be remembered, had entered the capital towards the end of September, after much maneuvering and several battles--Washington having made ineffectual efforts to prevent the accomplishment of his object. He was received with a welcome, apparently cordial by the timid or interested citizens.

His first care was to reduce the fortifications on the Delaware, and remove the obstructions prepared by the Americans to prevent the British fleet from ascending the river. While Fort Mifflin at Mud Island and Fort Mercer at Red Bank were occupied by their garrisons, he could have no communication with his fleet, and was in danger of being speedily compelled to evacuate the city. Count Donop, detached with the Hessian troops to take possession of the fort at Red Bank, was repulsed and mortally wounded. The invader's fortune, however, triumphed; and the Americans were finally driven from their posts. Their water force was compelled to retire from the fire of the batteries; and the British at length gained free communication, by way of the Delaware, between their army and the shipping.

Thus the reverses in New Jersey and Pennsylvania had cast a gloom over the country, which could not be altogether dispelled even by the brilliant victories of Saratoga and the capture of Burgoyne and his army.

The condition of the American army, when it retired into winter quarters at Valley Forge, was deplorable enough to change hope into despair, and presented truly a spectacle unparalleled in history. *"Absolute destitution held high court; and never was the chivalric heroism of patriotic suffering more tangibly manifested than by that patriot-band within those frail log huts that barely covered them from the falling snow, or sheltered them from the keen wintry blasts."*

"I can go no further; if I do I shall fall off the log."

HANNAH ERWIN ISRAEL

by Elizabeth F. Ellet, 1848, continues:



This privation of necessary food and clothing during one of the most rigorous winters ever experienced in the country--this misery--the detail of which is too familiar to need repetition, was endured by the continental soldiers at the same time that the English in the metropolis were reveling in unrestrained luxury and indulgence.¹ Many Whig families, meanwhile, who remained in Philadelphia, plundered and insulted by the soldiers, wanted the comforts of life and received assistance clandestinely from their friends at a distance.

To return to our narrative. When the traveler arrived at the ferry, he was promptly hailed by the sentinel, with "*Who goes there?*"

"*A friend,*" was the reply.

"*The countersign!*"

The countersign for the night was promptly given.

"*Pass, friend!*" said the soldier; and the other went on quickly. Israel Israel was a native of Pennsylvania. He had left America at twenty-one, for the island of Barbados; and by nine or ten years of patient industry had amassed considerable property. He returned rich to his native country; but in a few months after his marriage the war broke out, and his whole fortune was lost or sacrificed by agents. He had resolved, with his brother, at the commencement of the struggle, to take up arms in the cause of freedom. But the necessity was imperative that one should remain for the protection of the helpless females of the family; and their entreaties not to be left exposed to a merciless enemy without a brother's aid, at last prevailed.

Israel and Joseph drew lots to determine which should become a soldier. The lot fell upon the younger and unmarried one. At this period the residence of Israel was on a small farm near Wilmington, Delaware. His mother had removed with her family to Philadelphia, her house at Newcastle being thought too much exposed in the vicissitudes of war. After the occupation of the capital by the British, they endured severe hardships, sometimes suffering the want of actual necessaries. Israel watched over their welfare with incessant anxiety.

The knowledge that his beloved ones were in want of supplies, and that his presence was needed, determined him to enter the city at this time, notwithstanding the personal hazard it involved. One of his Tory neighbors, who professed the deepest sympathy for his feelings, procured for him the countersign for the night. He had thus been enabled to elude the vigilance of the sentinel.

"Israel and Joseph drew lots to determine which should become a soldier."




HANNAH ERWIN ISRAEL

by Elizabeth F. Ellet, 1848, continues:

*“We have caught him
at last—the rebel
rascal !”*

When arrived at his mother’s dwelling, Mr. Israel found that it was in the possession of several soldiers, quartered upon the family. Among them was a savage-looking Hessian, with aspect of itself quite enough to terrify timid women. But all annoyances, and the fatigues of his long walk, were forgotten in the joyful meeting. A still more pleasing surprise was reserved for him; his young brother, Joseph, was that very hour on a secret visit to the family. For some hours of the evening the household circle was once more complete.

But such happiness, in those times of peril, was doomed to be short-lived. At eleven o’clock, while the family was seated at supper, the tramp of horses was heard without; and the rough voices of soldiers clamored at the door. Within, all was confusion; and the terrified women entreated the brothers to fly. They followed the younger with frantic haste up the stairs, where he left his uniform, and made his escape from the roof of the house. The knocking and shouting continued below; Israel descended, accompanied by the pale and trembling females, and himself opened the door. The intruders rushed in. At their head was the Hessian sergeant, who instantly seized the young man’s arm, exclaiming, *“We have caught him at last--the rebel rascal!”*



Mr. Israel's presence of mind never forsook him under the most appalling circumstances. He was sensible of the imminence of his own danger, and that his brother’s safety could be secured only by delay. He shook off the grasp of the officer, and calmly demanded what was meant, and who it was that accused him of being a rebel.

“There he is!” replied the Hessian, pointing to Caesar, a slave Mr. Israel had brought from the West Indies, and given his mother for a guard. The master fixed upon the Negro his stern and penetrating look so steadfastly, that Caesar trembled and hung his head. *“Dare you, Caesar, call me rebel?”* he exclaimed. *“Gentlemen--the muscles of his mouth worked into a sneer as he pronounced the word--there is some mistake here. My brother Joe is the person meant, I presume. Let me fetch the uniform; and then you can judge for yourselves. Caesar, come with me.”*

So saying, and taking the black by the arm with a vice-like grasp, he led him up stairs. *“Not one word, you rascal,”* was whispered in his ear, *“or I kill you upon the spot.”* The Negro drew his breath hard and convulsively, but dared not speak. The uniform was produced and exhibited; and Israel made efforts to put it on before his captors. The person whom it fitted being short and slight in figure, its ludicrous disproportion to the towering height and robust form of the elder brother, convinced the soldiers of their mistake; and the sergeant made awkward apologies, shaking the hand of the man he had so lately called a rebel, assuring him he had no doubt he was an honest and loyal subject; and that he would take care his fidelity should be mentioned in the proper quarter.

HANNAH ERWIN ISRAEL

by Elizabeth F. Ellet, 1848, continues:



“And now,” he said, *“as your supper is ready, we will sit down.”* He seated himself beside his host, whose resentment at the familiarity was tempered by the thought that his brother was saved by the well-timed deceit. The ladies also were compelled to take their places, and to listen in silence to the coarse remarks of their unwelcome guest. With rude protestations of good will, and promises of patronage, he mingled boastful details of his exploits in slaughtering the *“rebels,”* that caused his auditors to shudder with horror. Mr. Israel used to relate afterwards that he grasped the knife he was using, and raised it to strike down the savage; but that his mother’s look of agonized entreaty withheld the blow. The Hessian continued his recital, accompanied by many bitter oaths.

“That Paoli affair,” cried he, *“was capital! I was with General Grey in that attack. It was just after midnight when we forced the outposts, and not a noise was heard so loud as the dropping of a musket. How the fellows turned out of their encampment when they heard us! What a running about--barefoot and half clothed--and in the light of their own fires! These showed us where to chase them, while they could not see us. We killed three hundred of the rebels with the bayonet; I stuck them myself like so many pigs—one, after another--till the blood ran out of the touchhole of my musket.”*

The details of the Hessian were interrupted by Mr. Israel’s starting to his feet, with face pale with rage, convulsed lips, and clenched hands. The catastrophe that might have ensued was prevented by a faint shriek from his young sister, who fell into his arms in a swoon.

The sergeant’s horrible boastings thus silenced, and the whole room in confusion, he bade the family good night, saying he was on duty, and presently quitted the house. The parting of those who had just gone through so agitating a scene was now to take place. Caesar was sternly questioned, and reprimanded for his perfidy; but the black excused himself by pleading that he had been compelled to do as he had done. For the future, with streaming eyes, he promised the strictest fidelity; and to his credit be it said, remained steadfast in the performance of this promise.

Having bidden adieu to his family, Mr. Israel set forth on his journey homeward. He arrived only to be made a prisoner. The loyalist, who had given him the countersign, had betrayed the secret of his expedition. He and his wife’s brother were immediately seized and carried on board the frigate *Roebuck*, lying in the Delaware, a few miles from the then borough of Wilmington--and directly opposite his farm--in order to be tried as spies.

Being one of the *“Committee of Safety,”* the position of Mr. Israel, under such an accusation, was extremely critical. On board the ship he was treated with the utmost severity. His watch, silver shoe-buckles, and various articles of clothing were taken from him; his bed was a coil of ropes on deck, without covering from the bitter cold of the night air; and to all appearances his fate was already decided.

HANNAH ERWIN ISRAEL

by Elizabeth F. Ellet, 1848, continues:

The testimony of his Tory neighbors was strong against him. Several were ready to swear to the fact, that while the loyal population of the country had willingly furnished their share of the provisions needed by the ships of war, he had been heard to say repeatedly, that he *"would sooner drive his cattle as a present to General Washington, than receive thousands of dollars in British gold for them."*

On being informed of this speech, the commander gave orders that a detachment of soldiers should proceed to drive the rebel's cattle, then grazing in a meadow in full view, down to the river, and slaughter them in the face of the prisoners.

What, meanwhile, must have been the feelings of the young wife herself about to become a mother--when her husband and brother were led away in her very sight? The farm was a mile or more from the river; but there was nothing to intercept the view--the ground from the meadow sloping down to the water. Mrs. Israel was at this period about nineteen years of age; and is described as of middle height and slight but symmetrical figure; of fair complexion, with clear blue eyes and dark hair; her manners modest and retiring. She was devoted to her family and her domestic concerns. It needed the trying scenes by which she was surrounded, to develop the heroism which, in times more peaceful, might have been unmarked by those who knew her most intimately.

From her position on the lookout, she saw the soldiers land from the ships, shoulder arms, and advance towards the meadow. In an instant she divined their purpose; and her resolution was taken. With a boy eight years old, whom she bade follow her at his utmost speed, she started off determined to battle the enemy, and save the cattle at the peril of her life. Down went the bars, and followed by the little boy, she ran to

drive the herd to the opening. The soldiers called out repeatedly to her to desist, and threatened, if she did not, to fire upon her.

"Fire away!" cried the heroic woman. They fired!

The balls flew thickly around her. The frightened cattle ran in every direction over the field.

"This way!" she called to the boy, nothing daunted; *"go this way, Joe! Head them there! Stop them, Joe! Do not let one escape!"*

And not one did escape! The bullets fired by the cowardly British soldiers continued to whistle around her person. The little boy, paralyzed by terror, fell to the ground. She seized him by the arm, lifted him over the fence, and herself drove the cattle into the barnyard. The assailants, baffled by the courage of a woman and probably not daring, for fear of the neighbors, to invade the farmhouses, retraced their steps, and returned disappointed to the ship.

As this scene passed in sight of the officers of the *"Roebuck"* and the two prisoners, the agony of suspense and fear endured by the husband and brother, when they saw the danger to which the wife exposed herself may be better imagined than described. It may also be conceived how much they exulted in her triumph.

The trial was held on board the ship. The Tory witnesses were examined in due form; and it was but too evident that the lives of the prisoners were in great danger.

A kind-hearted sailor sought an opportunity of speaking in private with Mr. Israel, and asked him if he were a freemason. The answer was in the affirmative. The sailor then informed him that a lodge was held on shipboard, and the officers, who belonged to it, were to meet that night.

The prisoners were called up before their judges, and permitted to answer to the accusations against them.

Mr. Israel, in bold but respectful language, related his story; and acknowledged his secret visit to Philadelphia, not in the character of a spy, but to carry relief to his suffering parent and her family. He also acknowledged having said, as was testified that "*he would rather give his cattle to Washington, or destroy the whole herd than sell them for British gold.*" This trait of magnanimity might not have been so appreciated by the enemies of his country, as to operate in his favor, but that--watching his opportunity; he made to the commanding officer the secret sign of Masonic brotherhood.

The effect was instantly observable. The officer's stern countenance softened; his change of opinion and that of the other judges became evident; and after some further examination, the court was broken up. The informants, and those who had borne testimony against the prisoners, hung their heads in shame at the severe rebuke of the court, for their cowardly conduct in betraying, and preferring charges against an honorable man bound on a mission of love and duty to his aged mother.

The acquitted prisoners were dismissed loaded with presents of pins, handkerchiefs, and other articles not to be purchased at that time, for the intrepid, wife; and were sent on shore in a splendid barge, as a mark of special honor from the officer in command.

Such was the adventure in which the courage and patriotism of the subject of this notice was displayed.

The records of the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania, of which Mr. Israel was Grand Master for many years, bear testimony to his having been saved from an ignominious death by masonry.

Mrs. Israel's family name was Erwin; her ancestors were Quakers who came with Penn, her parents native Americans; and she herself was born in Wilmington, Delaware. Her first meeting with her husband was romantic enough. Mr. Israel had sailed in a sloop, or packet from Philadelphia, to visit New Castle, where his mother and family resided.

He observed on deck an extremely pretty girl, hardly seventeen years of age, and very neatly and tastefully dressed, with the finest turned foot and ankle in the world. All who went on such voyages were then obliged to furnish themselves with provisions; and his attention was drawn by the young girl's kindly distribution of her little stock, handing it about from one to another, till but little was left for her own portion. In passing him, she modestly hesitated a moment, and then offered him a share. This led to conversation; he learned that she was the daughter of highly respectable parents, and resided in Wilmington.

Love at first sight was as common in those days as now. After seeing his mother, he visited Wilmington; became better acquainted, offered himself and was accepted; and on his marriage, rented the farm above mentioned, and commenced life anew.

It may be proper to mention here--that the *castle* from which the town of New Castle took its name, was in very early days the property and residence of his ancestors. Subsequently he became the purchaser of the old castle; and removed the tiles that covered it, with the vane that graced it, to his country-seat, where part of them, several hundred years old, are still to be seen.

Mr. Israel died in 1021, at the age of seventy-eight. The death of his wife took place at his country-seat near Philadelphia, at the age of fifty-six. She was the mother of thirteen children, many of whom died young. But two are now living and reside in Philadelphia.

One of them is the accomplished lady--herself the wife of a gallant officer thirty-five years engaged in the service of his country--from whom I received these particulars.

To this glance at the condition of some of the citizens of Philadelphia at that time, may be added a description, from a lady's letter to her friend, of the entrance of the British army into the city.

"We had for a neighbor, and an intimate acquaintance, a very amiable English gentleman, who had been in the British army, and had left the service on marrying a rich and excellent lady of Philadelphia some years before. He endeavored to give my mother confidence that the inhabitants would not be ill-treated. He advised that we should be all well-dressed, and that we should keep our houses closed. The army marched in, and took possession of the town in the morning. We were up stairs, and saw them pass to the State House.

They looked well-clean and well-clad; and the contrast between them and our poor barefooted and ragged troops was very great, and caused a feeling of despair. It was a solemn and impressive day; but I saw no exultation in the enemy, nor indeed in those who were reckoned favorable to their success.

Early in the afternoon Lord Cornwallis's suite arrived, and took possession of my mother's dwelling. But my mother was appalled by the numerous train in her house and shrank from having such inmates; for a guard was mounted at the door, and the yard filled with soldiers and baggage of every description; and I well remember what we thought of the haughty looks of Lord Rawdon and the other aid-de-camp, as they traversed the apartments.

My mother desired to speak with Lord

Cornwallis, and he attended her in the front parlor. She told him of her situation, and how impossible it would be for her to stay in her own house with such a train as composed his lordship's establishment. He behaved with great politeness to her; said he should be sorry to give trouble and would have other quarters looked out for him.

They withdrew that very afternoon, and we felt glad of the exemption. But it did not last long; for directly the quartermasters were employed in billeting the troops and we had to find room for two officers of artillery; and afterwards in addition, for two gentlemen secretaries of Lord Howe.

"General Howe during the time he stayed in Philadelphia seized and kept for his own use Mary Pemberton's coach and horses, in which he used to ride about the town.

"My wife," says Marshall in his manuscript diary, February 14th, 1778; "looks upon every Philadelphian who comes to see us as a person suffering in a righteous cause, and entitled to partake of our hospitality."

Tradition has preserved in several families, anecdotes illustrative of the strait to which even women and children were then reduced. One of Mary Redmond may be mentioned. She was the daughter of a patriot somewhat distinguished among his neighbors in Philadelphia.

Many of her relatives were loyalists; and she was playfully called among them "*the little black-eyed rebel*." She was accustomed to assist several women whose husbands were in the American army to procure intelligence. The dispatches were usually sent from their friends by a boy, who carried them stitched in the back of his coat. He came into the city bringing provisions to market.

One morning, when there was some reason to fear he was suspected and his movements watched by the enemy, Mary undertook to get the papers in safety from him. She went, as usual to the market, and in a pretended game of romps, threw her shawl over the boy's head, and thus secured the prize. She hastened with the papers to her anxious friends, who read them by stealth, after the windows had been carefully closed.

When the news came of Burgoyne's surrender and the Whig women were secretly rejoicing, the sprightly girl, not daring to give vent openly to her exultation, put her head up the chimney and gave a shout for Gates.

Finis.

Footnotes:

¹ Marshall's MS. Journal says,--December 28th, 1777, "Our affairs wear a very gloomy aspect. Great part of our army gone into winter quarters; those in camp wanting breeches, shoes, stockings [and] blankets, and by accounts brought yesterday, were in want of flour." * * * * "Our enemies reveling in balls, attended with every degree of luxury and excess in the city; rioting and wantonly using our houses, utensils and furniture; all this [and] a numberless number of other abuses, we endure from that handful of banditti, to the amount of six or seven thousand men, headed by that monster of rapine, General Howe."



Portrait of Israel Israel



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The definitions of moral character are from Noah Webster's **1828 DICTIONARY**:

character — a mark made by cutting or engraving, as on stone, metal or other hard material...a mark or figure made by stamping or impression...the peculiar qualities, impressed by nature or habit on a person, which distinguish him from others.

charity — love, benevolence, good will.

chastity — purity of the body,...freedom from obscenity, as in language or conversation.

civility — the state of being civilized; refinement of manners; good breeding; politeness; complaisance; courtesy,...civilities denote acts of politeness.

complaisance — a pleasing deportment; courtesy; that manner of address and behavior in social intercourse which gives pleasure; civility.

complaisant — pleasing in manners; courteous; obliging.

courtesy — elegance or politeness of manners; especially, politeness connected with kindness; civility...to treat with civility.

ethics — the doctrines of morality or social manners...a system of moral principles.

evil — having bad qualities of a moral kind; wicked; corrupt; perverse; wrong...moral evil is any deviation of a moral agent from the rules of conduct prescribed to him by God, or by legitimate human authority.

felicity — happiness; blessedness.

fidelity — faithfulness; careful and exact observance of duty,...honesty; veracity.

humble — lowly, modest; meek.

humility — in ethics, freedom from pride and arrogance; humbleness of mind.

industry — habitual diligence in any employment, either bodily or mental.

justice — the virtue which consists in giving everyone what is his due...honesty and integrity in commerce or mutual intercourse.

manner — form; method; way of performing or executing; custom; habitual practice.

mannerly — with civility; respectfully; without rudeness.

manners — deportment; carriage; behavior; conduct; course of life; in a moral sense.

modesty — that lowly temper which accompanies a moderate estimate of one's own worth and importance.

moral — relating to the practice, manners or conduct of men as social beings in relation to each other, and with reference to right and wrong. The word moral is applicable to actions that are good or evil, virtuous, or vicious, and has reference to the law of God as the standard by which their character is to be determined.

morality — the doctrine or system of moral duties, or duties of men in their social character; ethics.

polite — literally, smooth, glossy, and used in this sense till within a century. Being polished or elegant in manners; refined in behavior; well bred; courteous; complaisant; obliging.

precept — in a general sense, any commandment or order intended as an authoritative rule of action; but applied particularly to commands respecting moral conduct. The Ten Commandments are so many precepts for the regulation of our moral conduct.

principle — in a general sense, the cause, source or origin of anything; that from which a thing proceeds; as the principle of motion; the principles of actions;...ground; foundation; that which supports an assertion, an action, or a series of actions or of reasoning....a general truth; a law comprehending many subordinate truths; as the principles of morality, of law, of government, etc.

quality — property; that which belongs to a body or substance, or can be predicated of it...virtue or particular power of producing certain effects...disposition; temper...virtue or vice as good qualities, or bad qualities...character.

refinement — the act of purifying by separating from a substance all extraneous matter;...polish of language; elegance; purity,...purity of heart; the state of the heart purified from sensual and evil affections.

rule — government,...control; supreme command or authority;...that which is established as a principle, standard or directory; that by which anything is to be adjusted or regulated, or to which it is to be conformed...established mode or course of proceeding prescribed in private life. Every man should have some fixed rules for managing his own affairs.

strength — firmness; solidity or toughness...power of resisting attacks; fastness.

temperance — moderation; particularly, habitual, moderation in regard to the indulgence of the natural appetites and passions.

truth — conformity to fact or reality; true state of facts.

valor — strength of mind in regard to danger; that quality which enables a man to encounter danger with firmness; person bravery.

veracity — habitual observance of truth.

vice — properly, a spot or defect; a fault; a blemish...in ethics, any voluntary action or course of conduct which deviates from the rules of moral rectitude, or from the plain rules of propriety...corruption of manners.

virtue — strength, the practice of moral duties and abstaining from vice...the practice of moral duties from sincere love to God and His laws, is virtue and religion.