



A Sampling of Stories

Sharing the Story!

The next few pages contain stories of American History. These stories were once included in Grammar School textbooks throughout America. Although the stories were well documented, they have been removed from most history books because they contain religious or other content not desirable by textbook manufacturers today. These stories, however, are an important part of our American history and should be shared with our children and taught in our homes if we are to preserve the Story of America. We hope you enjoy the stories. If you would like more stories like these, we highly recommend you order a copy of Mara Pratt's "American History Stories" through Libraries of Hope and sign up for their Book-a-Month club where you can receive a new treasure of stories each month.



A Miracle at Boston

In October 1746, French Duke of d'Anville sailed for New England, commanding the most powerful fleet of the time. He had 70 ships with 13,000 troops. In fact, it was "the largest fleet ever to be sighted from American soil." They started for Boston. The Duke intended that they avenge themselves for the loss they had suffered in Louisburg. They planned to recapture Louisburg, Nova Scotia, and destroy [all the English Colonies] from Boston to Georgia.

The situation was bleak for the Colonists. They had no chance of matching the power of the huge fleet on their own. Massachusetts Governor William Shirley gathered all the men, ammunitions and supplies he could find. He then turned the situation over to the Lord by declaring the 16th of October, 1746 a Universal Day of Fasting. He would have everyone pray and fast for deliverance.

Everywhere men observed it, thronging to the churches. In Boston the Reverend Thomas Prince from the high pulpit of the Old South Meetinghouse, prayed before hundreds. The morning was clear and calm, people had walked to church through sunshine. 'Deliver us from our enemy!' the minister implored. 'Send thy tempest, Lord, upon the waters to the eastward! Raise thy right hand. Scatter the ships of our tormentors and drive them hence. Sink their proud frigates beneath the power of thy winds!'

He had scarcely pronounced the words when the sun was gone and the morning darkened. All the church was in a shadow. A wind shrieked around the walls, sudden, violent, hammering at the windows with a giant hand. No man was in the steeple — afterward the sexton swore it — yet the great bell struck twice, a wild, uneven sound. Thomas Prince paused in his prayer, both arms raised. 'We hear thy voice, O Lord!' he thundered triumphantly. 'We hear it! Thy breath is upon the waters to the eastward, even upon the deep. Thy bell tolls for the death of our enemies!' He bowed his head; when he looked up, tears streamed down his face. 'Thine be the glory, Lord. Amen and amen!'

... All the Province heard of this prayer and this answering tempest. Governor Shirley sent a sloop, the Rising Son, northward for news ... she brought news so good it was miraculous — if one could believe it ... the whole fleet was nearly lost, the men very sick with scurvy, or some pestilential fever. Their great admiral, the Duc d'Anville, was dead.

A week later the news was confirmed by other vessels entering Boston from the northeastward. D'Anville was indeed dead; it was said he had poisoned himself in grief and despair when he saw his men dying round him. Two thousand were already buried, four thousand were sick, and not above a thousand of the land forces remained of their fleet. Vice-Admiral d'Estournelle had run himself through the heart with his sword. The few remaining ships, half-manned, were limping off to the southwestward, headed it was thought for the West Indies.

Pestilence, storm and sudden death — how directly and with what extraordinary vigor the Lord had answered New England prayers! The country fell on its knees.... A paper with d'Anville's orders had been found, instructing him to take Cape Breton Island, then proceed to Boston — 'lay that town in ashes and destroy all he could upon the Coast of North America; then proceed to the West Indies and distress the Islands.'"

Ten year old John Adams was in the church during this famous prayer and later declared, "That day, I became a patriot."

*Story from Catherine Drinker Bowen, *John Adams*, Grosset & Dunlap, N.Y., 1950, pp. 5, 10-11



Oh Say Can You See...

In 1814, Great Britain was again at war with America. Although the United States had won their independence 29 years earlier, Great Britain was enraged at America's demands for an independent Canada, and America's continued friendship and free trade with France galled them. In April, 1814 the London Times reported, "There is no public feeling in this country stronger than that of indignation against the Americans," Conflict between the two nations had erupted into full-scale war. The defeat of Napoleon's "Grand Army" had freed an additional 14,000 veteran British soldiers to join in the battle against America. By April, Great Britain was well entrenched in America and was winning the war.

The newly arriving soldiers pillaged the East coast of the United States, burning ships at anchor, razing manufacturing plants, torching private homes, and taking what property they could carry away. On August 24th, after a short battle, British forces set fire to Washington D.C., plundered the city and burned the White House, most of the public buildings, and many private homes. The British next set their sights on Baltimore, some 30 miles northeast of the nation's capital.

Baltimore is situated on a beautiful natural harbor on the Patapsco River, which flows into Chesapeake Bay. Because of its location, Baltimore was a major port city which carried on extensive trade with France—which is why the British particularly disliked the people of Baltimore. The rag-tag American militia, shopkeepers and farmers built trenches and defended the city from a land invasion. Fort McHenry guarded the city from a waterborne attack. Flying above the fort was a huge American Flag. The flag was 30 feet tall, 42 feet long, and made of 400 yards of cloth. The 2 foot tall stars were "spangled" (off-set at different angles so they would appear to twinkle when the flag was blown). It had been specially made so large that the British would have no difficulty in seeing it from a distance.

On Sunday, September 11th, the first ship in the British fleet arrived at the mouth of the Patapsco River as the people of Baltimore were attending church. On hearing that the British had arrived, church services adjourned all over the city. The Reverend John Gruber concluded his services with the prayer, *"May the Lord bless King George, convert him and take him to heaven, as we want no more of him."*

At 5:46 AM on September 13th, most of the fleet of 50 British ships opened fire on Fort McHenry. Their long-range cannons could fire 400 pound cannon balls a distance of 2½ miles with accuracy. But because the cannons from the fort drove the fleet back to a 4-mile circumference, their cannons were less than accurate. British gunners hoped to make each shrapnel-filled bomb explode shortly before impact by correctly trimming the length of each fuse. British cannons shot over 3,000 cannon balls towards Fort McHenry throughout the day, and continued until early the next morning. Many bombs exploded in midair, far from the fort, others continued burning after impact and were doused with water to keep them from exploding. Miraculously, four inches of heavy rain also extinguished many of the bombs. At 1:00 AM, all grew silent.

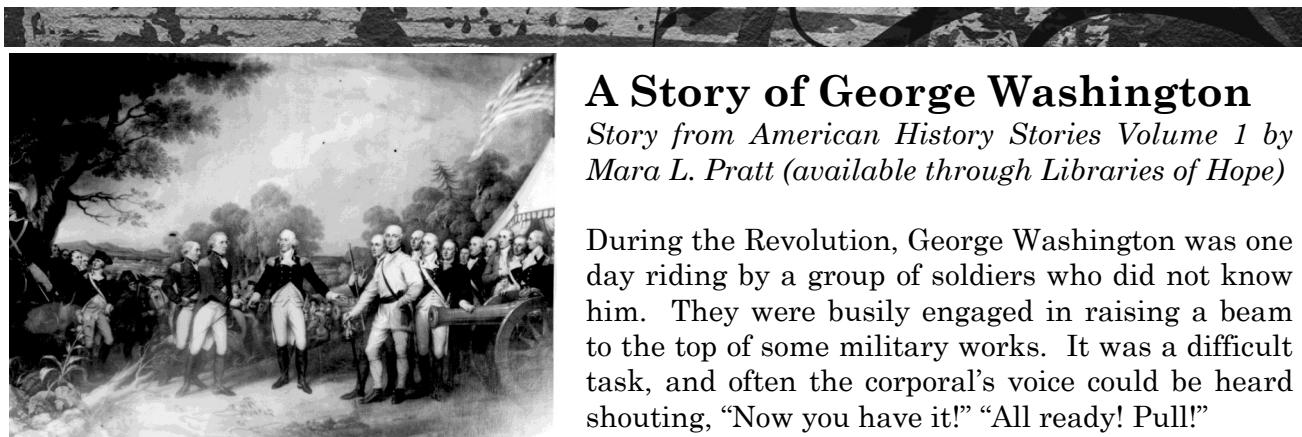
From the deck of the Minden, Francis Scott Key watched the bombardment of Fort McHenry. As a young attorney, he was aboard to negotiate the release of prisoners. From his vantage point, the silence was worse than the bombardment. An amphibious nighttime assault was ordered and the troops rowed for shore.

The city of Baltimore, as well as the British fleet waited through the long night to see whose flag would be flying. At day break, a single cannon shot was heard from the fort, signifying that the fort was occupied, but by whom? Finally, as the early morning mist and smoke

began to clear, Key saw through the distance the stars and stripes still flying over the fort and the British rowboats in retreat. Now confident of a complete American victory, Key took an old letter from his pocket and began to write on the back of the words of The Star-Spangled Banner. Only four Americans had been killed in the long assault, yet the battle was the turning point of the war.

“Oh, say can you see by the dawn's early light; What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming? Whose broad stripes and bright stars thru the perilous fight; O'er the ramparts we watched were so gallantly streaming? And the rocket's red glare, the bombs bursting in air; Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there. Oh, say does that star-spangled banner yet wave; O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?”

In 1931, President Herbert Hoover signed a bill declaring this as our national anthem. Long let it wave!



A Story of George Washington

Story from American History Stories Volume 1 by Mara L. Pratt (available through Libraries of Hope)

During the Revolution, George Washington was one day riding by a group of soldiers who did not know him. They were busily engaged in raising a beam to the top of some military works. It was a difficult task, and often the corporal's voice could be heard shouting, “Now you have it!” “All ready! Pull!”

Washington quietly asked the corporal why he didn't help them. “Sir,” corporal angrily replied, “do you not realize that *I* am a corporal?”

Washington politely raised his hat saying, “I did not realize it. Beg your pardon, Mr. corporal.”

Then dismounting his horse, General Washington himself fell to work and helped the men till the beam was raised. Before leaving he turned to the corporal, and, wiping the perspiration from his face, said, “If ever you need assistance like this again, call upon Washington, your commander-in-chief, and I will come.”

The confused corporal turned red, and then white, as he realized that this was Washington himself to whom he had been so pompous; and we hope he learned a lesson of true greatness.

The decline of literature indicates the decline of a nation.

~Johann Wolfgang von Goethe



The Faith of Columbus

On August 3, 1492 a small fleet set sail from Spain. The entire fleet consisted of three small ships, the *Nina*, *Pinta*, and *Santa Maria*. The ships were small in size (less than seventy-five feet long and twenty-five across) and were typical of ships that sailed the Mediterranean Sea at the time. The three vessels were manned by a combined crew of eighty-eight men.

Instead of turning west, they travelled 700 miles south to the Canary Islands off the Northwestern coast of Africa. In that way they were able to catch the northeast trade winds, which would propel them all the way to the Americas. On September 6th, after restocking provisions and making repairs, they left the safety of the civilized world and headed west.

In order to convince the Queen Isabella of Spain to invest in the expedition, Christopher Columbus had promised the trip from the Canaries to the Indies would be a "few days". He believed that Asia was only 2,400 miles away. But after the few days had past and they traveled further (as they believed) than man had ever sailed, the crew became increasing uncomfortable. To lessen their fears, Columbus purposely reported the length of each day's voyage as shorter than they had actually traveled. Numerous false sightings of land also caused morale to suffer. By last week of September, the men could see their supplies diminish and it clear signs of mutiny were appearing among the crew. The spirit of adventure and the promise of shared wealth soon turned to whispered threats and grumbling.

On October 8th, the captains of the *Nina* and *Pinta* demanded a meeting. They insisted that the search for land be abandoned. Columbus agreed they would turn homeward if land was not found within 3 days. He also avoided complete mutiny of his own crew by agreeing to turn back after 2 or 3 days.

Columbus was resolute! Later, in a letter to the Spanish hierarchy, wrote, "Our Lord unlocked my mind, sent me upon the sea, and gave me fire for the deed. Those who heard of my emprise called it foolish, mocked me, and laughed. But who can doubt but that the Holy Ghost inspired me?" His quest for the voyage was also explained in his writings, "The fact that the gospel must be preached in so many lands in such a short time – this is what convinces me." Unwavering, yet running out of time, Columbus went to his cabin and, in his words, "prayed mightily to the Lord."

Finally, on October 11th, a little after midnight, crew members found a sprig of green with a tiny white flower floating in the water. Later a piece of floating board was discovered, then a little stick which appeared to have been carved into the shape of a man. Finally, at 2:00 AM on October 12th, under a moon slightly past full, a sailor called out, "Land! Land on the horizon!" The expedition, led by Christopher Columbus had discovered America.

Years later, when alone and frustrated, Columbus told of hearing a "Compassionate voice" that addressed him saying, "O fool, and slow to believe and to serve thy God . . what did He do more for Moses, or for David his servant, than He has done for thee?"

Columbus had opened the doors to the most phenomenal spread of Christianity since the time of the early apostles and set the stage for the greatest nation in the history of the world. To us and generations to come, the words of Columbus continue to encourage us, "No one should fear to undertake any task in the name of our Savior, if it is just and the intention is purely for His holy service."

1. Quoted in Mark E. Petersen; *The Great Prologue*, Deseret Book Co., 1975, p. 26/

2. Don Ferdinand Columbus; *History of the Life and Actions of Admiral Christopher Columbus and of his Discovery of the West Indies, called the New World*.

3. N. Eldon Tanner, If They Will But Serve the God of the Land, *Ensign*, May 1976, 48



A Gunpowder Story

By John Esten Cooke

The following short story is an adapted version by author Frances Jenkins Olcott in her book Good Stories for Great Holidays (1914). It is a story about a young girl whose courage saves several patriot families and protects an important fort in the Revolutionary War.

In the autumn of 1777 the English decided to attack Fort Henry, at Wheeling, in north-western Virginia. This was an important border fort named in honor of Patrick Henry, and around which had grown up a small village of about twenty-five log houses.

A band of Indians, under the leadership of one Simon Girty, was supplied by the English with muskets and ammunition, and sent against the fort. This Girty was a white man, who, when a boy, had been captured by Indians, and brought up by them. He had joined their tribes, and was a ferocious and bloodthirsty leader of savage bands.

When the settlers at Wheeling heard that Simon Girty and his Indians were advancing on the town, they left their homes and hastened into the fort. Scarcely had they done so when the savages made their appearance.

The defenders of the fort knew that a desperate fight must now take place, and there seemed little probability that they would be able to hold out against their assailants. They had only forty-two fighting men, including old men and boys, while the Indian force numbered about five hundred.

What was worse they had but a small amount of gunpowder. A keg containing the main supply had been left by accident in one of the village houses. This misfortune, as you will soon see, brought about the brave action of a young girl.

After several encounters with the savages, which took place in the village, the defenders withdrew to the fort. Then a number of Indians advanced with loud yells, firing as they came. The fire was returned by the defenders, each of whom had picked out his man, and taken deadly aim. Most of the attacking party were killed, and the whole body of Indians fell back into the near-by woods, and there awaited a more favorable opportunity to renew hostilities.

The men in the fort now discovered, to their great dismay, that their gunpowder was nearly gone. What was to be done? Unless they could get another supply, they would not be able to hold the fort, and they and their women and children would either be massacred or carried into captivity.

Colonel Shepherd, who was in command, explained to the settlers exactly how matters stood. He also told them of the forgotten keg of powder which was in a house standing about sixty yards from the gate of the fort.

It was plain to all that if any man should attempt to procure the keg, he would almost surely be shot by the lurking Indians. In spite of this three or four young men volunteered to go on the dangerous mission.

Colonel Shepherd replied that he could not spare three or four strong men, as there were already too few for the defense. Only one man should make the attempt and they might decide who was to go. This caused a dispute.



Just then a young girl stepped forward and said that she was ready to go. Her name was Elizabeth Zane, and she had just returned from a boarding-school in Philadelphia. This made her brave offer all the more remarkable, since she had not been bred up to the fearless life of the border.

At first the men would not hear of her running such a risk. She was told that it meant certain death. But she urged that they could not spare a man from the defense, and that the loss of one girl would not be an important matter. So after some discussion the settlers agreed that she should go for the powder.

The house, as has already been stated, stood about sixty yards from the fort, and Elizabeth hoped to run thither and bring back the powder in a few minutes. The gate was opened, and she passed through, running like a deer.

A few straggling Indians were dodging about the log houses of the town; they saw the fleeing girl, but for some reason they did not fire upon her. They may have supposed that she was returning to her home to rescue her clothes. Possibly they thought it a waste of good ammunition to fire at a woman, when they were so sure of taking the fort before long. So they looked on quietly while, with flying skirts, Elizabeth ran across the open, and entered the house.

She found the keg of powder, which was not large. She lifted it with both arms, and, holding the precious burden close to her chest, she darted out of the house and ran in the direction of the fort.

When the Indians saw what she was carrying they uttered fierce yells and fired. The bullets fell like hail about her, but not one so much as touched her garments. With the keg hugged to her bosom, she ran on, and reached the fort in safety. The gate closed upon her just as the bullets of the Indians buried themselves in its thick panels.

The rescued gunpowder enabled the little garrison to hold out until help arrived from the other settlements near Wheeling. And Girty, seeing that there were no further hopes of taking Fort Henry, withdrew his band.

Thus a weak but brave girl was the means of saving strong men with their wives and children. It was a heroic act, and Americans should never forget to honor the name of Elizabeth Zane.



When the world is in chaos, and not able to locate its identity, its the storytellers that bring it back to center. Because storytellers are the keepers of the culture.

~Michael Meade