

HISTORIC ROOTS

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ANN STORY: A VERMONT PIONEER

By MICHAEL T. HAHN

For many of us the word “frontier” makes us think of pioneers heading west in covered wagons. But Vermont once was a wilderness on the frontier, and the people who came here were also pioneers. Many brave women helped settle the American frontier. Ann Story stands out because of her contributions to the creation of Vermont and the birth of the United States of America.

Ann and Amos Story married in Connecticut in 1755. They were poor. He “worked out” for other farmers to support his family. During the pioneer period of a state’s history, a family’s fortune depended on farming enough land to raise crops and livestock. This was easy to do when there were few people and land was cheap. By the time Ann and Amos Story married, the population of Connecticut had grown, and land there was too expensive for them to buy. They decided to move north to Vermont. There land was cheap, and they could start their own farm.

They faced many difficulties. The dispute between New York and New Hampshire over who had the right to sell land in Vermont was



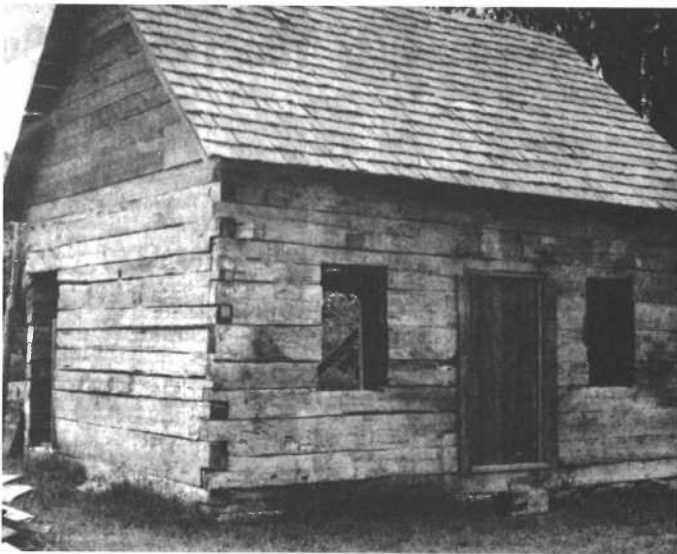
National Life Insurance Company

This drawing of Ann Story was made long after she lived. It shows both the wilderness she lived in and her own strength of character.

becoming more bitter. There was the growing dispute with Great Britain over how the colonies should be governed and taxed. The Storys' most immediate concern, however, was the need to build a house and clear land for farming.

The Story family moved to Rutland in 1774. That summer, Amos and the oldest son, Solomon, left the others and went to their land—100 acres in the wilderness near Salisbury. The area was so wild that only one other family, Joshua Graves and his son, had settled there.

By the spring of 1775, a log cabin was ready for the family to move in. Amos and Solomon still needed to clear land to grow crops.



Addison Independent

A replica of Ann Story's cabin. It stands behind Shard Villa, in Salisbury, Vermont.

One day, a terrible accident occurred. Amos was crushed under a large maple tree he had been cutting. Solomon watched in horror, but there was nothing he could do. With the help of Benjamin Smalley, a neighbor across the creek in Middlebury, Solomon buried his father. He then walked to Rutland to tell his mother what had happened.

Ann Story decided to settle down on the farm that Amos and Solomon had started. With a pack horse carrying their few belongings, Ann and her five children walked into the wilderness to Salisbury. They moved into the house and planted crops. They fished and shot game for food.

By 1775, the battle for independence from Great Britain had begun. Vermonters like Ann Story, who had settled on land granted by New Hampshire, wanted independence. The British king, George III, sided with New York in disputes over the right to grant land in Vermont. Ann Story, like so many others, feared losing the land she had settled and cleared. She was eager to help the Green Mountain Boys defend Vermonters' land against the claims of New York and British rule.

By early 1776, the war was not going well for the colonists. The British remained in control of Canada. They encouraged Indians to cross the border to drive Vermonters out of

their homes. Many settlers left, but Ann Story decided to stay.

Before there were roads, lakes and streams were the best “highways” in Vermont. The Story cabin was on Otter Creek, an important route between Lake Champlain and the Green Mountains. Ann became a spy. She kept the Green Mountain Boys informed about traffic on the creek and events in the woods. Her home became a place where they could find shelter, leave messages, and keep supplies.

One day in the spring of 1776, Indian raiders burned the Graves’ cabin. When Ann saw the smoke, she loaded everything she could into a canoe. She paddled the canoe into a flooded swamp on the Cornwall side of Otter Creek. From there she watched as the Indians burned her home too.

She and the children rebuilt the cabin. They used poles, as they were not strong enough to cut down heavy trees for logs. She built a trap door leading into the rocks and from there into the woods, so they could escape unseen.

She and the children also dug a tunnel into the bank of the Otter Creek. They dug it deep enough to hold the canoe. A large shelf in the tunnel held food and other supplies. The whole family slept in there at night. During the daytime, they worked their land.

Ann’s bravery and quickness of mind helped

her survive in the wilderness. One day, they also helped her turn what might have been a disaster, for her and for Vermont, into a triumph.

One of her sons had come across a pregnant woman crying in the woods. She had been captured by Indian raiders and left behind when she could not keep up with them. The Storys took her in. When her baby was born, its cries attracted the attention of Ezekiel Jenny, one of a band of Tory spies.¹ He had heard of Ann Story, but until then had not been able to find her. He decided to try to get information from her about the Green Mountain Boys and pass it on to the British. Even when he pointed his rifle at her and threatened to shoot, Ann Story refused to tell him anything. He left none the wiser than when he had come.

After he left, Ann wanted to warn the Green Mountain Boys. She wrote them a note on the only paper she had, a page from her family Bible. Solomon delivered the message and stayed to help track down the Tory spies. They were captured in Monkton. After a trial in Neshobe (where Brandon is today), the spies were sent to prison at Fort Ticonderoga.

Until after the battle of Saratoga, in October 1777, Ann Story’s farm was behind enemy

¹ Tories sided with Great Britain and did not want independence.

Ann Story (The Vermont Society of Colonial Daughters 1905, opposite p. 43.)



Ann Story's gravestone, in Farmingdale Cemetery in Middlebury. Ann was often a nickname for Hannah. Goodrich is the name of her third husband. It is no longer possible to read the original stone.



Ann E. Cooper

A newer stone is attached to the back of the older one, giving Ann Story's name and dates.

lines. She and her sons continued to help the Green Mountain Boys and to expand the farm. Eventually, the country gained its independence and, in 1791, Vermont became a state.²

The next year, Ann Story married Benjamin Smalley, the man who had helped Solomon bury Amos. He died in 1808, leaving Ann in debt. In 1812, when the United States was again at war with Great Britain, Ann married Stephen Goodrich. They lived on his farm in Middlebury, and she died there in 1817.

Ann Story never planned to be a hero. She moved to Vermont to create a better life for her family. Her story has lasted because her courage and resourcefulness made a difference—to her family and to the development of our state and nation.

² After independence was declared, in 1776, New York still claimed that it owned the land in Vermont and refused to allow it to become a state. In 1777, Vermont declared itself a republic, with its own constitution. It became a state in 1791.

Rooting Around

Michael Hahn has written a book about Ann Story, *Ann Story, Vermont's Heroine of Independence*. Your library probably has a copy.

You can visit Ann Story's grave in Middlebury and her cabin in Salisbury. Call the Salisbury Library for more information at 802-352-1047.