

Martha Moulton

Concord Widow: Her petition for a pension to the General Court of
Massachusetts, February 4, 1776

“That on the 19th day of April, 1775, in the forenoon, the town of Concord, wherein I dwell, was beset with an army of regulars, who, in a hostile manner, entered the town, and drew up in form[ation] before the door of the house where I live; and there they continued on the green, feeding their horses within five feet of the door; and about fifty or sixty of them was in and out the house, calling for water and what they wanted, for about three hours. At the same time, all our near neighbors, in the greatest consternation, were drawn off to places far from the thickest part of the town, where I live, and had taken with them their families and what of their best effects they could carry, some to a neighboring wood, and others to remote houses, for security.

Your petitioner, being left to the mercy of six or seven hundred armed men, and no person near but an old man of eighty-five years, and myself seventy –one years old, and both very infirm. It may easily be imagined what a sad condition your petitioner must be in. Under these circumstances, your petitioner committed herself...to the Divine Protection, and was very remarkably helpt with so much fortitude of mind, as to wait on them, as they called, with water, or what we had, chairs for Major Pitcairn and four or five more officers, who sat at the door viewing their men. At length your petitioner had, by degrees, cultivated so much favor as to talk a little with them. When all on a sudden they had set fire to the great gun carriages just by the house, and while they were in flames your petitioner saw smoke arise out of the Town House higher than the ridge of the house. Then your petitioner did put her life, as it were, in her hand, and ventured to beg of the officers to send some of their men to put out the fire; but they took no notice, only sneered. Your petitioner, seeing the Town House on fire, and must in a few minutes be past recovery, did yet venture to expostulate with the officers just by her, as she stood with a pail of water in her hand, begging of them to send, etc. When they only said, “O, mother, we won’t do you any harm!” “Don’t be concerned, mother,” and such like talk. The house still burning, and knowing that all the row of four or five houses, as well as the school house, was in certain danger, your petitioner (not knowing but she might provoke them by her insufficient pleading) yet ventured to put as much strength to her arguments as an unfortunate widow could think of; and so your petitioner can safely say that, under Divine Providence, she was an instrument in saving the Court House, and how many more is not certain, from being consumed, with a great deal of valuable furniture, and at great risk of her life. At last, by one pail of water after another, they sent and did extinguish the fire.

And now, may it please this honored Court, as several people of note in the town have advised your petitioner thus to inform the public of what she had done, and as no notice has been taken of her for the same, she begs leave to lay this her case before your honors, and to let this honored Court also know that the petitioner is not only so old as to be not able to earn wherewith to support herself, is very poor, and shall think her highly honored in the favorable notice of this honored Court. As what the petitioner has done was of a public as well as a private good, and as your honors are in a public capacity, your petitioner begs that it may not be taken ill, in this way to ask in the most humble manner something, as a fatherly bounty, such as to your great wisdom and compassion

shall seem meet; and your petitioner, as in duty bound, for the peace and prosperity of this our American Israel, shall ever pray.”

The committee reported a resolve in favor of paying this heroine three pounds for her good services in so boldly and successfully preventing the army from burning the Town House in Concord, as set forth in her petition.