A More Perfect Union

The character of a nation is not defined by its wealth or strength. It is not ordered by law or reserved for a privileged few. Instead, the character of a nation is tested and refined by the collective achievements of its people – ordinary people of extraordinary faith and vision who overcome great trials and difficulties to give beyond themselves for the greater good. It is a story of people…We, the people….

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

America will forever be indebted to the architect of those great words, a patriot and nationalist named Gouverneur Morris. While most people associated citizenship with their state of residence, Morris heartily believed in citizenship of the union we know as the United States.

Morris was appointed in 1787 as the Pennsylvania representative to the Constitutional Convention. He claimed he was there not just on behalf of his state, but "as a representative of the whole human race." At the convention, Morris had the opportunity to champion the causes he held dear including his opposition to slavery and his belief in freedom of religion, freedom of speech, the right to bear arms, and the right to government by the people.

He addressed the Convention 173 times, more than any other delegate. Even when an argument did not go Morris' way, he took his lumps gracefully. He won the

respect of his peers and was selected as part of a five-man committee to revise the initial articles of the Constitution. Noted for his concise editing and fluid writing style, Morris based his Preamble on the Articles of Confederation, our nation's first governing document. But unlike the earlier document, his masterfully crafted Preamble did not name the states as the source of power and governance. "This magistrate is not the king," Morris declared. "The people are the king." His words – We, the People – reinforced this belief.

Morris' career continued after the Constitutional Convention. He became a diplomat to England and replaced Thomas Jefferson as the ambassador to France as well as serving at home for a brief time in the United States Senate and as the chairman of the Erie Canal Commission.

Near the end of his life, Morris wrote, "Looking back, I can reflect that I have not lived in vain." He died on November 6, 1816 as a man reconciled to his faith in the Catholic Church and dedicated to a passionate vision of a unified government by the people and for the people. His message has endured and the Preamble has stood as a treasured and storied prose in our nation's history.

If there was ever an underrated hero in American history, perhaps that honor belongs to Henry Knox. According to *Legend of Sleepy Hollow* author Washington Irving, "Henry Knox was one of those providential characters which spring up in emergencies as if formed by and for the occasion."

Knox grew up in Boston, a hotbed of revolutionary activity. He was a participant or eyewitness to some of the most famous events in early American history including the Boston Massacre, the Boston Tea Party, and the Battle of Bunker Hill. As an adviser to

General George Washington, Knox orchestrated the move of the cannons captured at Fort Ticonderoga from New York to Boston to counter further attacks.

One of Knox's greatest moments came at the Battle of Trenton, where he was charged with orchestrating Washington's Christmas Day crossing of the Delaware River to surprise the Hessian troops.

Jennifer April (Museum Educator, Washington's Crossing, PA):

The night of December 25th, 1776 was cold and blustery, there was lots of snow and ice on the ground, there was a blizzard actually occurring. And Washington wanted to go for the surprise attack on Trenton.

One legendary story, told over the years, places Knox in the boat with Washington, although there is no evidence to support this.

Soldier:

We were facing the unknown that night as we crossed the Delaware. It was cold, and dark, and I don't mind telling you I was more than a little scared. The boats were small, and the river so icy. My duty was to role the General Washington across the river and Colonel Knox was with us. Colonel Knox was always a portly man, and when he sat in the boat he sat to one side, causing it to tip towards the river. General Washington laughed and looked back at him and said, "Shift your tail and trim the boat!" We all laughed, including Colonel Knox.

The crossing was a success, but it was just the beginning. A fiery conflict ensued between Washington's men and the Hessian soldiers.

Soldier:

Most of us had never seen battle before. Colonel Knox was a brave man, and a godly one at that. His courage in the face of fire gave us confidence. And his faith gave us comfort. At times he was more of a preacher than a patriot. I remember him saying that Trenton, with all of its 'hurry, and fright and confusion of the enemy was not unlike that which will be when the last trump shall sound.'

General Washington rewarded Knox for the success of Battle at Trenton by promoting him to the rank of Brigadier General. From there, Knox's military resume includes the major remaining encampments and battles of the Revolution: Valley Forge, Princeton, Brandywine, Germantown, Monmouth, and Yorktown.

It was Knox who encouraged Washington to attend the Constitutional Congress in 1787 and to run for president. And it was Knox who first referred to Washington as the *Father of our Nation* in a letter to the General dated March 19, 1787. His faithful service was rewarded when he was appointed the first United States Secretary of War in Washington's Cabinet. Knox counted the founding of the Navy and the establishment of a national militia as part of his legacy.

After he ended his career in public service, Knox and his family settled in Montpelier, Maine and helped establish a town church that was used by congregants from

various religious denominations. He presented the church in 1797 with a special gift of a bell purchased from legendary Bostonian Paul Revere.

Oddly, it was not a bullet or musket ball that felled the great military hero, but an ordinary chicken bone that had caused a blockage in his intestines. When Henry Knox died in October of 1806, his son wrote that, "my best of fathers is no more…He is gone, I trust, to a happier and better place." Such is a fitting reward for an unsung hero of the Revolution and a champion of that more perfect union prescribed by the Constitution.

Several spies and conspirators, both male and female, aided the colonies' struggle for independence undertaken by Washington, Knox, and other heroes of the Revolution. Patience Lovell Wright was an unlikely addition to this illustrious band of rebels.

Born in Bordentown, New Jersey in 1725, Wright was one of ten children of a wealthy Quaker farming family. She grew up in an austerely religious home, where meat was forbidden, wooden shoes were favored over leather varieties, and plain white dresses, including a white veil, was to be worn whenever the young girl appeared in public. Wright and her eight sisters took up art as an escape to their well-ordered existence. The girls mixed paints and began painting pictures. Soon Patience tried her hand at modeling, using clay or dough to make figures of neighbors and relatives.

As a young woman, Wright married and moved to Philadelphia. When her husband's death left her as a widow with four children and a fifth on the way, Wright needed a way to support her family. Her sister Rachel Lovell Wells suggested that Patience should follow in her footsteps and earn her living as an artist. Patience embraced the idea. Her first wax likenesses were of neighbor and Declaration of Independence signer Francis Hopkinson and his wife, Ann. Wright's work was met with

favorable reviews, except for that of John Adams, who wrote to his wife Abigail, "Wax is much fitter to represent dead bodies, than living ones."

In Boston, Wright met Jane Mecom, a sister of Benjamin Franklin, who wrote a letter on the artist's behalf to her famous brother. Franklin welcomed Wright to London in 1772, promising to promote her work in exchange for his portrait. With his help, she soon attracted an elite clientele. By the summer of 1773, Wright had moved into Buckingham House, which was the royal residence of the reigning King George III. She made portraits of the King and Queen, whom she called "George and "Charlotte."

Patience Wright was in the Parliament gallery on that fateful day in March of 1774 when the British declared that Massachusetts would be subject to military rule as a consequence of the Boston Tea Party. Wright felt it was her duty to assist Franklin and other American revolutionaries by passing on any information that would help their cause, and so Wright began to send letters hidden in wax busts to the Continental Congress at Philadelphia by way of her sister, Rachel Wells.

Wright moved from England to France, where she met a young merchant from Plymouth, Massachusetts named Elkanah Watson, who fondly recalls Wright and her bust of Franklin.

> Elkanah:
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> I remember one time when Mrs. W. was walking home carrying a parcel when she was stopped by some officers looking for contraband. They were shocked when they opened the package and find what appeared to be the head of a dead man. Unable to speak the language, Mrs. W. couldn't explain that it was merely

the bust of Benjamin Franklin. It was quite funny, the officers had thought they had caught themselves a murderer. And, well funny for everyone else but Mrs. W.

The finished bust of Franklin was held up to its model and found to have an amazing likeness.

Elkanah:

When it was finished, she held it up next to Dr. Franklin himself and declared, "We have twin brothers." It even fooled the public, many thinking they'd seen Dr. Franklin in London looking at papers and maps when really it was only his likeness. When Dr. Franklin saw it he said he once noted that "If your head is wax, don't walk in the sun." Now, more than ever, his words rang true.

Upon her death, Wright was immortalized as "a warm and sincere friend" to America. Ironically, the artist and patriot was buried on English soil and her only work to survive in its original form is that of Parliament's William Pitt, currently displayed in London's Westminster Abbey.

Just as Patience Wright emerged from obscurity as a contributor to the war effort, so a slave born in Fredericksburg, Virginia rose from a life of bondage to create a legacy as a pioneer and participant in historical events from Revolutionary times through the beginning of the Civil War.

There is little information about Richard Stanhope or his early life. What we do know is that he and his family were servants of the Washington family and that Richard became the property of young George Washington as part of an inheritance of ten slaves he received after the death of his father. It is believed that Washington gave his slave the first name Richard and influenced his last name also.

Dr Jan Ebert (Regent, *Daughters of the American Revolution*):

Here he was known as Richard Stanhope, although he was called Richard Stanup, previously and on many of the maps and in the deeds that still refer to him as Stanup, or in one case, Standup. And the history of that reportedly is that when he was working for the Washington family as a slave that he was told by his mother repeatedly that he should stand up in the presence of the Washingtons. And so, he evidently heard it enough times, Stanup! Stanup! That he thought it was his name.

The ledgers containing the inventory of Washington's slaves reveal that Stanhope was a laborer at one of the Mount Vernon plantations. He also accompanied General Washington to various Revolutionary War battles.

Dr. Jan Ebert:

He is reputed, and we believe him to have been an aide-de-camp to Washington during the Revolutionary War. We find it remarkable that in a deposition he gave at a later time in his life that he remembered being at the Battle of Long Island

and the Battle of Stony Point and the evacuation of the army from New York. And later, at Brandywine, he was in the battle. He fought in those battles as an aide-de-camp of Washington's. He suffered two major injuries during those times. First, in the New England battles as I understand it, he received a cut on the hand, a gash actually from a British saber, and then he also took a ball through his leg above the knee, which is amazing that he survived both of those terrible injuries.

After the war, Stanhope is reported to have become Washington's personal valet, and it is a part of the oral tradition passed down through his family that Stanhope assumed a place beside Washington's bed as he passed away at Mount Vernon in 1799.

Washington only freed one slave in his will, stipulating that the rest should be emancipated upon his wife Martha's death. Mrs. Washington freed her husband's 123 slaves living at Mount Vernon, including Stanhope, on January 1, 1801. Stanhope ventured west, becoming one of the pioneers of the land that is today Urbana, Ohio, a city that is also home to other historic Americans including Simon Kenton and Johnny Appleseed. Stanhope settled on a 400-acre parcel of land given for his service in the Revolutionary War. In his life as a free man, he engaged in three main professions: well digging, preaching, and fatherhood. He also had a brief foray back into military service as a property master. Stanhope was over sixty years old when he drove a four-horse wagon team that accompanied General William Hull to Detroit. He was there for the humiliating surrender at the hands of the British after the capture of Fort Mackinac.

Charles Virts (Curator, Champaign County Historical Museum):

When you realize the age that he was, and the years that he lived through, he must have had some really magnificent stories to tell people, especially in the War in 1812 when he supposedly got upset when Hull gave up his troops, grabbed his wagon, and headed South.

As for his faith, the former slave was converted "on the banks of the Potomac" and at some point in his life became a Baptist . Stanhope ministered to mostly white congregations and served as pastor of the Kings Creek Baptist Church, founded in 1805 as the third Baptist church in Ohio.

The other important aspect of Richard Stanhope's life was family. He was married three times and fathered twenty-eight children. Amazingly, he was still raising young children into his nineties, instilling them with a thirst for justice, especially for the abolitionist cause. Two of his sons, David and Levi Stanhope, were arrested and jailed for creating a diversion that allowed area conductors of the Underground Railroad to move escaped slaves from Urbana to their next step in Bellefontaine, Ohio. Another son named George actively aided the Underground Railroad in Pickaway County, Ohio.

Stanhope's life work made a significant contribution to his community and his nation.

Dr. Jan Ebert:

He was able to assist the Father of our Country. He was able to make a pronounced impact on persons in Ohio. And I think, moreover, he provided a

wonderful role model, and that role model extends not only to persons of color, but to all of us, because of his dedication to his country, his dedication to his faith, and his dedication to humanity.

Another African-American minister to make a great impact upon the society of his day was the Reverend Henry Highland Garnet. Like Stanhope, he was born into slavery. His family escaped their bonds and settled with the help of Quakers in Pennsylvania. Eventually they relocated to New York City, where Garnet's father opened his own cobbler shop and acquired the means for his son to receive a formal education at the African Free School.

As a young man, Garnet became a Presbyterian minister and was said to be a great preacher. It was his revolutionary message, and not the eloquence of his speech, however, that won him fame. Unlike other well-known abolitionists of his day such as Frederick Douglass and William Lloyd Garrison, Garnet issued a famous "call to rebellion" to the slaves of his day. His speech attracted the attention of the nation when he issued his rallying cry at the National Negro Convention in Buffalo, New York in August of 1843.

Garnet: "Let your motto be resistance, resistance, resistance! If you must bleed, let it all come at once--rather die freemen, than live to be the slaves."

Garnet continued his activism through the next two decades, until the advent of the Civil War marked a new chapter in Garnet's life. The Union suffered heavy losses

and needed replacements, which led to the resolution on August 25, 1862 to authorize the use of black troops. The African-American regiments would give the Union a great advantage over the Confederacy, who did not recruit blacks until the last days of the war. Reverend Garnet helped with the recruitment effort for the United States Colored Troops, and for his part, his home would have been destroyed in the draft riots of 1863, had his daughter not had the foresight to chop the family's nameplate off the their door before the angry mob arrived.

As for Reverend Garnet, his shining moment came not on a battlefield, but in a packed gallery of politicians. On February 12, 1865, at the invitation of President Lincoln, the preacher stood proudly in the House of Representatives as the first African-American to address the legislators. He capitalized upon this opportunity, advocating once more for the abolitionist cause.

After the war, Garnet served as president of Avery College in Pittsburgh. As his health declined, his final wish was to see his ancestral home.

In December of 1881, Reverend Garnet was appointed the Ambassador to Liberia in West Africa. His last dream fulfilled, he died two months later and received a state burial. The "Apostle of Liberty" as he was known lived and died with honor, leaving an indelible mark upon our "more perfect union."

There is a Native American saying that it takes a thousand voices to tell a single story. For women at the turn of the century, it took many more – nine thousand more voices, to be exact - to make their cry for the right to vote heard. Their journey, as recounted by Storyteller of the Heartland Rick Sowash, proves that with a sign, an

umbrella, and an elephant or two, a group of ordinary women can band together to change the course of history.

Do you know that for a very long time, women were not allowed to vote in America? That's half the population, not allowed to vote, just because they're women! Do you think that's fair? Do you think someone should not be allowed to choose their leaders just because they happen to be a woman?

Well, Elizabeth Hauser didn't think it was fair. She did all she could to try to get women the right to vote. She wrote articles in the newspapers. She made speeches at picnics. She gathered women from meetings to try to think what to do to try to get that right to vote. All over the country, thousands of women felt that way and thousands of women were trying to get the right to vote.

In 1916, 10,000 women gathered in the city of Chicago. Now the occasion was the Republican National Convention. All the important Republican leaders had come to Chicago to make their plans for America. And the women had gathered. They had planned a great parade. They had gotten elephants from the zoo to come and be a part of the parade. And they had gotten marching bands to be a part of the parade. And they had signs and banners saying, "Women should be allowed to vote!"

Then, the morning of the parade, the weather turned really bad. It was June. The women had come thinking it would be like summertime. But the weather began to…well, there was thunder, there was lightning, there was rain and howling winds coming off Lake Michigan. How could you have a parade in such terrible weather? It was like March! The women weren't ready for this. What to do? The leaders of the

women gathered together. They discussed it. Maybe they should cancel the parade, some said. Many of the women were elderly and frail and weak, and unprepared for such a thing. Such a development! Such terrible bad weather!

Then, one of the women leaders stood up, and she said something that made all the others listen. We don't know which woman it was who said this…I like to think it was Elizabeth Hauser, but the newspaper articles don't really say who it was, but one of the women stood up and she said this: "When we get the right to vote, which we will do someday, do you think we're going to sit home and not vote just because it happens to be a rainy day?"

Well, that did it! All the others said, "She's right! Let's do this parade, rain or no rain." And so the decision was made, and the women scattered over the city, buying up every umbrella and raincoat they could find. At four o'clock, everything was ready and the parade began. The parade in the rain. The strangest parade ever seen in the streets of Chicago. Marching bands playing, the elephants walking along, and 10,000 carrying their signs and their umbrellas through the streets of Chicago. Up in their warm, cozy, dry hotel rooms, many of the Republican leaders, men, were looking out the windows and seeing this strange parade in the streets below. 10,000 women walking through the howling winds, the lightning, the thunder, the rain. And those men looked down and they said, "If those women want to vote that badly that they'll even march on a day like this, maybe we should think it over again. Maybe we should be on there side."

The women arrived at the convention center, and there they presented their ideas to the leaders of the convention. "Let women vote!" they said. "We pay taxes. We're good Americans. We should be allowed to vote." Well, the Republicans made up their

mind that if they were elected, they would try to help women get the right to vote. And a week later, the Democrats made the same decision at their national convention. It still took four long years. It takes a long time to pass a law like that one. But in 1920, women were given the right to vote! Elizabeth Hauser and the others who had struggled long and hard finally won their victory.

Constitutional Convention delegate James Madison wrote that "whatever may be the judgment pronounced on the competency of the architects of the Constitution…there never was an assembly of men…who were more pure in their motives, or more exclusively or anxiously devoted to the object committed to them." This dedication extends beyond the Constitutional delegates to those ordinary Americans, men and women, who have worked tirelessly throughout our nation's history to preserve "our more perfect union."