

Martha Washington on life after the Revolution, 1784

Introduction

The Revolutionary War disrupted the home life of Americans for eight years. Battles between the British and American armies, as well as tensions between loyalists and patriots, created difficulties that people met with strength and perseverance. As men went into battle, women endured the strains of maintaining households in their absence, traveling long distances to join them at various winter camps, and worrying about them constantly.

This letter from Martha Washington to Hannah Boudinot (whose husband, Elias, had been president under the Articles of Confederation from 1782 to 1783) was written shortly after the end of the war, when the Washingtons had returned to Mount Vernon. Martha's happiness and relief are apparent as she looked forward to resuming her pre-war life:

The difficulties, and distresses to which we have been exposed during the war must not be forgotten. We must endeavor to let our ways be the ways of pleasantness and all our paths Peace.

Questions for Discussion

Read the introduction, view the image of the letter, and read the transcript. Then apply your knowledge of American history to answer the following questions:

1. According to information provided in the introduction as well as from the text of the letter, what "difficulties and distresses" were faced by women during the Revolutionary War?
2. When Martha Washington wrote this letter, how did she imagine she and "the General" would spend their future?
3. With evidence from this letter as well as from your knowledge of wartime conditions, submit proof to support the following statement. (Be prepared to present an example other than Martha Washington): Female American patriots often assumed important responsibilities and experienced the burdens and tragedies of the Revolutionary War.

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Image

Mount Vernon 15th Jan 84

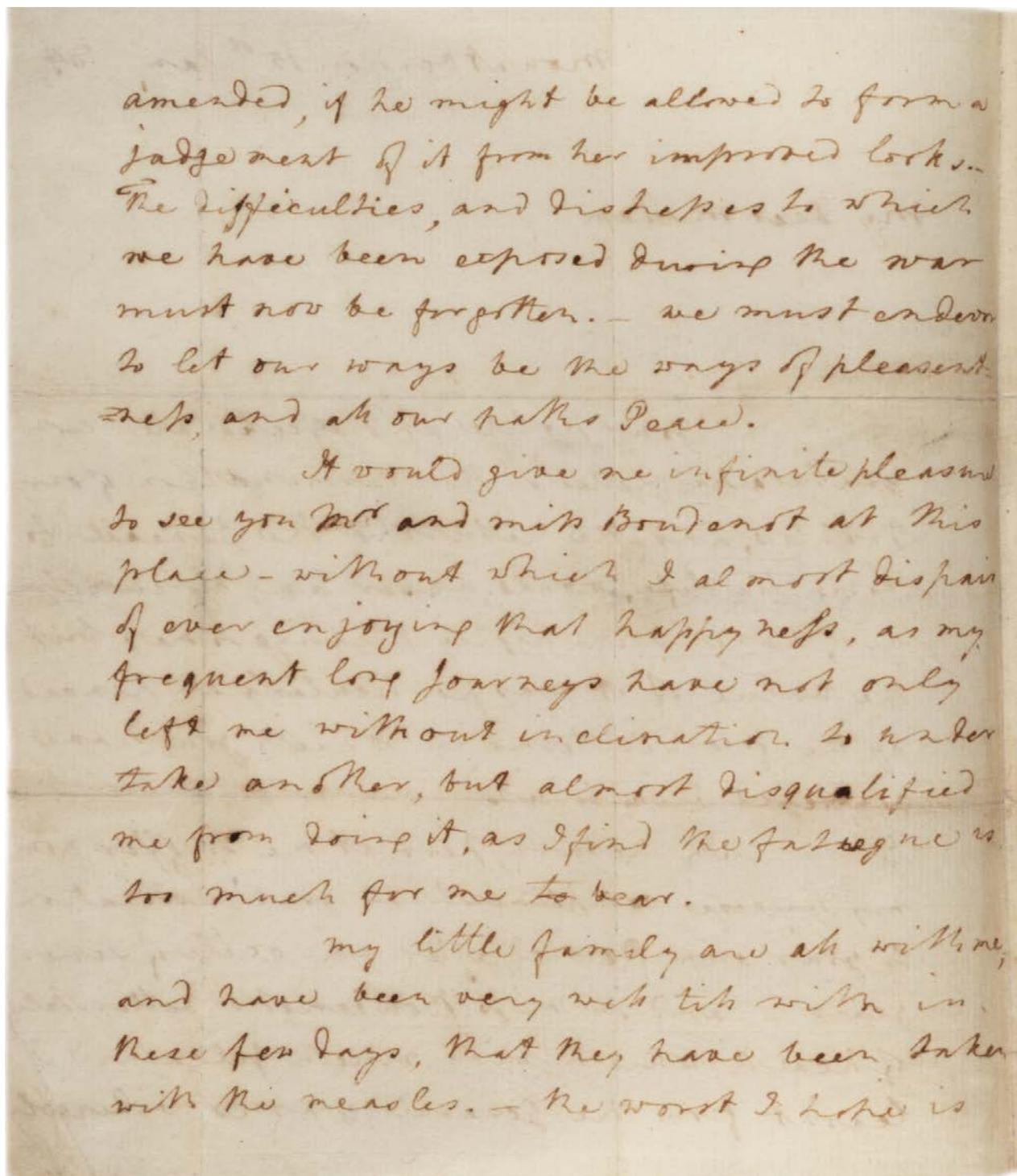
my Dear Madam

Your polite and affectionate congratulatory letter on the termination of our troubles, and the return of the General to domestic life, would, under any circumstances, have been highly pleasing to me; but the value of it was particularly enhanced by the friendly terms in which you have conveyed them to us.

In return, permit me to offer you my sincere compliments on your restoration to your own House, after an exile of seven years - and on Miss Boudinot's better state of health, which, with much pleasure I learnt from the General was considerably

Martha Washington to Hannah Boudinot, January 15, 1784, page 1. (Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC03909)

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Martha Washington to Hannah Boudinot, January 15, 1784, page 2. (Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC03909)

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is over, and that I shall soon have them
 rattling about me again. — with best
 respects to Mr Boudinot, and love to Miss
 Susan and your self — in which the
 General joins — I am my dear madam
 with much esteem

your most affectionate
 Friend —

Martha Washington

Martha Washington to Hannah Boudinot, January 15, 1784, page 3. (Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC03909)

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Transcript

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My Dear Madam

Your polite and affectionate congratulatory Letter on the termination of our troubles, and the return of the General to domestic life, would, under any circumstances, have been highly pleasing to me; but the value of it was particularly enhanced by the friendly terms in which you have conveyed them to us.

In return, permit me to offer you my sincere compliments on your restoration to your own House, after an exile of seven years – and on Miss Boudenots better state of health; which, with much pleasure I learnt from the General was considerably [2] amended, if he might be allowed to form a judgement of it from her improved looks. – The difficulties, and distresses to which we have been exposed during the war must not be forgotten. We must endeavor to let our ways be the ways of pleasantness and all our paths Peace.

It would give me infinite pleasure to see you M^r and miss Boudenot at this place – without which I almost despair of ever enjoying that happiness, as my frequent long Journeys have not only left me without inclination to undertake another, but almost disqualified me from doing it, as I find the fatigue is too much for me to bear.

My little family are all with me; and have been very well till with in these few days, that they have been taken with the measles. – The worst I hope is [3] is over, and that I shall soon have them prattling about me again. – with best respects to M^r Boudenot, and love to miss Susan and your self – in which the General joins – I am my dear Madam with much esteem

Your most affectionate

Friend –

Martha Washington