

Feminine Paul Revere: Sybil Ludington (1761-1839) was the oldest of Colonel Henry and Abigail Ludington's 12 children. Together in Kent, New York, Henry and Abigail owned and operated a mill. During the Revolutionary War the colonel formed the 7th Dutchess County Militia, a volunteer regiment of local men who enlisted for periods of time between planting and harvesting their crops. Training took place on the Ludington's Parade Grounds opposite their manor house.

When Sybil was 16, her mother expected her to be responsible and act lady-like. As the oldest she had numerous duties such as making butter, soap and candles, baking bread, mending clothes, washing dishes, spinning, knitting, weaving, sewing, tending to her younger siblings, as well as outdoor work in the fields and mill. Still she found time to watch her father train tired farmers into soldiers and she knew where each one lived. She wanted to be in the militia because as everyone else she wanted to be free and independent and was tired of being ruled by Great Britain.

In April of 1777 the Continental Army transferred its supplies to Danbury, Connecticut where it was deemed they would be safe and require little guard. Hospital cots and tents were stored there along with clothing and shoes and cooking utensils. Supplies included flour, beef, pork, sugar, coffee, molasses, rice, wheat, corn, and several hundred cases of wine and rum.

On April 26, a 2,000 man British force moved into Danbury and destroyed the supplies save for the wine and rum, which they drank and then drunkenly began burning settlers' homes. Danbury messengers were speedily dispatched in all directions to announce the British arrival and news of the fires. Late that evening, a tired messenger reached Col. Ludington and told him the British were burning Danbury and pleaded Ludington to muster his men to come fight the British back to Long Island Sound.

The colonel had just returned from a long session of guarding the Hudson Highlands and was exhausted. It was well into the night. The messenger also was exhausted, unfamiliar with the area, and unable to locate all of the militia volunteers in their homes scattered throughout the area.

Sybil had recently received a horse for her 16th birthday whom she named Star. She was very familiar with the area, knew the men would believe her warning and told her father that she would go alert the men. She mounted Star around 9 PM that rainy night and left for her now-famous ride.

It is unclear whether she volunteered or whether she was asked by her father. Some accounts indicate that an exhausted Col. Ludington needing to muster the men, was unable to leave and had planned the route Sybil would take, despite knowing the dangers for a young girl. The woods and swamps were full of bushwackers, cowboys and Army deserters. On her ride Sybil would need to avoid them as well as British soldiers, British loyalists, and "Skinners" who were outlaws with no allegiance to either side in the War.

At each house she reached, she warned the men: "The British are burning Danbury, the colonel is mustering the troops," and she cautioned the families be ready to abandon their homes if the enemy should come their way. Some accounts indicate that a church bell was rung in Carmel after she gave the alarm.

It was dawn when Sybil arrived back home soaked with rain and she too, now exhausted. Colonel Ludington was already mustering the men who had come. He stopped to help his daughter from her horse with a great deal of pride and a silent prayer of

thanksgiving for her safe return. She had traveled 40 miles, twice as long as the famous mid-night ride of Paul Revere.

Sybil was congratulated for her heroism by friends and neighbors and was later recognized by General George Washington for her service to the war. An excerpt from Col. Ludington's memoirs reads: "There is no extravagance in comparing her ride with that of Paul Revere and its midnight message. Nor was her errand less efficient than his. By daybreak, thanks to her daring, nearly the whole regiment was mustered before her father's house at Fredericksburgh, and an hour or two later was on the march for vengeance on the raiders."

A bronze statue of Sybil riding her horse that depicts the spirit and determination of the girl and the strength of the horse, is located on the eastern shore of Lake Gleneida in New York state and is illuminated at night. It continues to be a beacon of freedom, strength and the will to win. The plaque reads: Sybil Ludington Revolutionary War Hero April 26, 1777.

Several smaller originals of the statue also exist. One is on the grounds of the Daughters of the American Revolution Headquarters in Washington, DC. A 1975 commemorative postage stamp in the "Contributors to the Cause" United States Bicentennial series honored Sybil Ludington. A Sybil Ludington 50K footrace is held annually in Carmel, New York. Its course on hilly roads approximates Sybil's historic ride and finishes near her statue at Lake Gleneida.

Sources: http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~nyeccdar/sybil_ludington.htm;
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sybil_Ludington;
<http://www.ahsd25.k12.il.us/womenshistory/ludington.html>