

*Annie Henry*  
and the Redcoats



*Adventures in the American Revolution*

*Annie Henry and the Secret Mission*

*Annie Henry and the Birth of Liberty*

*Annie Henry and the Mysterious Stranger*

*Annie Henry and the Redcoats*

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SUSAN OLASKY



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For Mom and Dad



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# *A Dangerous Journey*

“I sure wish that baby would stop crying,” Elizabeth complained. “Why doesn’t Dolly feed her?” She tucked a few stray pieces of hair back under her blue gingham sunbonnet and scowled at the howls coming from the wagon behind.

Next to her on the seat at the front of the big Conestoga wagon, her older sister Annie smiled. “At least we know the baby has good, strong lungs. She’s been crying for the past hour and doesn’t seem at all tired of it.”

“But I’m tired of it,” twelve-year-old Elizabeth grumbled under her breath.

Annie pulled her sister’s bonnet down over her eyes, letting her own laughter drown out the younger girl’s complaints. “I’ll make you switch wagons if all you do is complain,” she warned. “Perhaps you should go sit with the cooking pots. They won’t mind your grumbling.”

Next to them on the seat, Joseph, one of Patrick Henry’s many slaves, yawned. They had already been on the trail for two days, and he was used to listening to the girls’ mild bickering. He wiped a handkerchief across his sweaty brow and pulled his tricornered hat lower over his eyes. The afternoon sun was bright.

"I don't know why we couldn't travel in a more comfortable coach," Elizabeth complained as she vainly fanned herself. "It's hotter'n blazes. I can hardly breathe."

"We couldn't bring a nice city coach out on this trail," Annie answered. "Just look at the ruts and rocks. Why, we'd never get to Leatherwood. Already it's going to take nearly seven days."

Elizabeth groaned. "Why couldn't Father have stayed in Richmond? Aunt Anne said he could make a fortune as a lawyer, and if Dolly keeps having babies, he'll need a fortune. I don't know why we have to go out to the frontier."

Annie closed her eyes and let the sun warm her face. Her own bonnet hung down her back despite her sister's constant reminders that the sun would bring out unsightly freckles. At nearly sixteen, Annie was still small. Although not beautiful, she had lively gray eyes and a quick smile that was attractive. She wore her wiry dark hair in a plain style, away from her face, because she wouldn't spend hours every day having her hair styled as many women did.

Letting the rhythm of the wagon lull her into near sleep, she thought about the changes in store for her family. It wasn't easy to leave the luxury of the Governor's Palace for a house on the frontier. But that's what her father, the famous patriot Patrick Henry, had wanted.

He had always loved the land. From the time he bought Scotchtown in Hanover County, he had dreamed about going farther west where the land was good and neighbors were far away. Politics and duty had kept him in the city. But now, having finished two terms as governor, he had sold Scotchtown and bought 16,000 acres in Henry County, Virginia, right on the frontier. She smiled as she thought about living in a county named after her own father.

It wouldn't be an easy life. After all, it was 1779, and the Revolutionary War still raged. For two years the British had been stirring up the Indians all along the frontier and encouraging them to raid the white settlements. Things were worse on the other side of the mountains, especially in Kentucky, but her father said that all settlers had to be constantly alert.

Annie's thoughts were interrupted by a yelp and the sound of hooves against the sun-baked ground. Sitting up, she caught sight of her nine-year-old brother Edward charging toward the wagon on his pony.

"Whoa, Master Edward," Joseph shouted as he steadied his own team of skittish horses. "Slow down before you cause an accident."

The sweating boy brought his horse under control. "You can't get the horse all lathered up like that on a hot day like today," Annie scolded. "I don't know when we'll find water." She stopped scolding, though, when she saw the frightened look on his face.

"Something scare you?" Elizabeth teased. "Maybe Indians," she added. "You've been telling us you've seen Indians all day."

The boy blushed. "It wasn't Indians," he said. "It was a rattler, fatter than my fist. Lying smack in the middle of the trail. I thought at first it was dead, and so I pulled up close. Then I heard the rattling. The snake raised its head and looked at me. Lightning didn't wait to see what would happen next. He just bolted out of there. Nearly knocked me from the saddle." The boy gulped for air as the words tumbled out of his mouth.

"A rattlesnake?" Annie looked skeptical. "I've never seen one. Are you sure it wasn't just an old grass snake?"

"Do you think I can't tell the difference?" the boy said scornfully. "I'll tell Father. Maybe he'll let me shoot it."

Without waiting to hear more from his sisters, Edward rode off in search of his father. Just finding him would be a job. There were ten wagons carrying household furnishings for Patrick Henry, his second wife, Dolly, and their new baby, also named Dolly. In addition, the caravan included Annie, Elizabeth, Edward, and their older sister Patsy, all of them Patrick Henry's children from his first marriage. Patsy traveled with her husband, John Fontaine, and their three small children. The Henry household also included many slaves. Livestock brought up the rear of the caravan. There were cows, oxen, horses, and even pigs.

From her place in the first wagon, Elizabeth shuddered. "I don't like snakes," she said.

"Don't be silly," Annie admonished her. "A snake would have to have wings to get up on this old wagon."

For the next few minutes the girls were silent as the wagon bumped its way along the rocky trail. Next to them, Joseph pulled up on the reins. Annie saw that the trail led down to a creek about fifteen feet across and then resumed on the other side. Behind them the other wagons creaked to a stop.

Joseph hopped down from his seat and helped the girls down. Annie stretched. She felt stiff from riding all day, and the tight corset that she wore under her dress bit into her side. "I'd give anything to be ten again," she whispered to Elizabeth.

But the younger girl shook her head scornfully. "Not me. I love looking all grown up," she said, smoothing out her own hoopskirt.

Next to her sister, Annie felt rumpled and hot. Her dress hung limply at her side while Elizabeth's looked cool and crisp. Though four years separated them, she sometimes felt Elizabeth was the older one.

While the horses and cattle were watered, the girls wandered back to the second wagon where Dolly, their stepmother, had managed to coax the baby to sleep. Annie thought back to when she had first met Dolly; she had known the woman then as Miss Dandridge. Then she was Dorothea, and now Dolly.

Dolly smiled wanly at the girls, and Annie felt a twinge of worry for her new mother. "You must be awfully tired," she said, offering her a drink from a jug of cider. "Father shouldn't have made you travel when the baby is still so young."

Dolly laughed. "Do you think I would let your father move to Leatherwood without me? I'm tired, but otherwise I'm perfectly well, and I'm strong as an ox. You just have to stop worrying about me," she said, with a smile that told Annie she was grateful for the concern.

"Well, I don't know why you couldn't convince Father to stay in Richmond," Elizabeth said, still not happy with the idea of being a frontier girl.

"I could no more keep your father in Richmond than you could keep Annie looking properly dressed," Dolly answered. "They both just go their own way."

"Annie looks wonderful," a new voice rang out.

The three turned to see Patrick Henry walking toward them with a spring in his step. He was a tall man but stoop-shouldered, and his balding head was hidden under a tie-back wig. He wore leather breeches and a stained leather vest that Annie knew was at least twenty years old.

"I think we'll camp here for the night," he said, looking around him. Annie's eyes followed his, and she could see that it was a good spot. The ground was level, with plenty of grass and water and a good view of the trail behind them. It would be hard for a stranger to sneak up on them.

“Are we almost there?” Elizabeth whined.

“Now, Elizabeth, you know I said the trip would take seven days if all went well. And we’ve been on the trail for only two. By my reckoning, that means five more days.”

Elizabeth scowled. “Couldn’t I have stayed with Aunt Anne?” she said.

The others exchanged glances, but Patrick Henry looked annoyed. “You’re becoming tiresome, Elizabeth. I don’t want to hear any more complaints.”

Just then Annie remembered that she hadn’t seen Edward for a while. “Did Edward ever find you?” she asked. “He saw a snake and wanted permission to shoot it.”

Her father frowned. “I never saw him,” he said. “How far back was that?”

Annie and Elizabeth looked at each other. The younger girl shrugged. “I wasn’t paying much attention,” she said.

Annie bit her lip. “He came riding hard out of a gully on the right. Maybe a mile back, but maybe not that far. Do you want me to go look for him?”

Patrick Henry shook his head. “He’ll turn up. If he doesn’t after a bit, I’ll look for him.” He bent over and kissed his wife. “There’s plenty of work to do here.”

For the next half hour everyone was busy pulling the wagons into a circle, unhitching the teams of horses, gathering wood for the fire, and spreading out blankets for beds. Soon an aromatic stew bubbled in a big iron pot over the fire, and Annie felt her stomach grumble. Still, Edward hadn’t returned; so Patrick Henry set out to look for him.

By looking at the sun, which hovered over the tree line to the west, Annie could tell it wasn’t long until nightfall. She worried about her father and Edward. Before long Annie grew impatient

with the wait and began to search among the wagons for her little brother. From one wagon to the next she looked, but there was no sign of him. Someone thought he had seen him get a musket, but no one could remember when that was. Annie wasn't worried that her brother had the gun. At nine he was a good shot and had hunted often with his father. But that was at Scotchtown, where everything was familiar. Here there were unfamiliar hills and gorges. A boy could easily get lost. Worse still, he could have been captured by Indians. The thought made Annie shiver and raised her determination to find him.

She retraced the trail that the wagons had traveled, hoping to catch sight of her father, until she had gone a mile or so. With the deepening shadows, it was hard to guess where the snake had been, so Annie looked for evidence of her brother. Eventually her sharp eyes saw where branches had been broken. She turned off the trail, thinking that this must be the spot where Edward had come charging out of the gully.

"Edward," she called, while searching the brush for more clues. Her eye caught a glimpse of something white hanging from a tree branch. Scrambling off the path, her feet slipping on the loose gravel and her long dress catching on the branches as she brushed by them, she reached and grabbed hold of a piece of cloth. It was a piece of white muslin like the shirt that Edward had been wearing.

Annie knew her brother had been this way, but was it recently or earlier in the afternoon? Should she go forward or back to the wagons? Glancing up at the darkening sky, she knew that it would be night very soon. If she didn't find Edward, she would be alone with only wild animals to keep her company. That thought almost sent her scurrying up the path to the wagons.

"I can't leave him out here alone," she told herself. "I know Father is looking, but he didn't even know where to start. I don't

want them to worry about me, but what can I do?" So she plunged on down the slope where she had found the piece of muslin. The dense brush caught at her skirt and scratched her arms. "Edward!" she called again.

By now, evidence of Edward was everywhere. Even Annie could see hoofprints in the wet soil near the creek at the bottom of the hill. How he had ever brought the horse into such deep brush, Annie couldn't tell.

All this time she had put fear out of her mind. She had to find her brother. But as the shadows deepened, Annie grew less confident, and tears welled up in her eyes.

In the dimming light, Annie strained to see in front of her. "Edward, Edward," she yelled. When she paused to listen, she heard the first sounds of the night. There was the hooting of an owl. Fireflies flickered, but her tears blurred their light. Had she been wrong to go after Edward? It certainly seemed so now.

Wiping her eyes on the back of her hand, she pushed forward through the trees. Desperately, she called out her brother's name and paused to listen. Was that a whimper? Again she called, this time more loudly.

At first it sounded like the cry of an injured animal, but as Annie listened, she heard her own name being called in response. Try as she might, though, she couldn't see her brother.

"I can't see you," she yelled. "It's too dark. Yell louder."

The boy let go an awful cry that startled Annie with its closeness. She stumbled in the direction of the noise, fighting back tears of relief as she drew closer. Finally she saw him propped against a tree, his leg twisted awkwardly behind him. With a sob, she threw herself on her brother, letting her tears spill onto his head. That was enough to stop his noisy crying. He pulled away, wiping his hand across his shaggy hair. "Stop crying on me," he grumbled.



"All right," Annie agreed, wiping her eyes, but she didn't take her arm away from her brother's shoulder, nor did he try to move it.

"Whatever happened to you?" she asked when he had dried his own tears.

Sniffing noisily, Edward said, "I went back to shoot that snake. Thought I had killed him, but when I rode Lightning up to take a look, the snake struck him on the shank. The horse reared back and threw me. I must have rolled down that hill. And then I tried to crawl to a safe place, but my leg is twisted. It hurts awful bad. I don't know where the horse went." His lip trembled as he thought about the wounded animal.

"Poor Edward," Annie sympathized, patting him on the back, not wanting to think about the horse's fate.

The boy seemed to be watching the shadows. "You aren't alone, are you, Annie?"

She smiled ruefully. "I'm afraid I am. Father was out looking for you, but he didn't come back, and I couldn't bear to think of you out here alone, and so I tried to find you myself. Problem is, night came too soon. I guess we'll have to spend it here together."

"No," Edward screamed. "I can't be out here alone. Have you heard all the sounds?"

Annie hadn't been paying attention, but suddenly in the silence, she heard a distant howl.

"That's wolves," Edward whispered. "There could be panthers, foxes, bears. We can't stay here alone."

"Well, we can't go back," she said matter-of-factly, though the thought of the wild beasts terrified her. "And there isn't any use in crying. That won't protect us. We're going to have to build a fire. A big one. Only problem is, I don't know how."

Edward sat up straighter. "I have a flint. I can build a fire, but I can't get the wood. Not with this leg."

“Well, that’s easy,” Annie said. “I’ll gather some wood. First, though, I’ll have to move you.” Annie pulled the boy up and let him lean against her, and they were able to shuffle off into the clearing. Being careful to keep her brother in sight, she filled her long skirt with twigs, which she carried in several trips to the site of the fire. Although there was no way of cutting larger pieces of wood, she found plenty of short pieces, which she dragged over.

Meanwhile, Edward stacked the wood, placing twigs and dry leaves at the bottom. When he was satisfied, he pulled his flint out of his pocket and scraped it against a rock. It was hard work, but finally a spark flashed in the dark, setting fire to the dry leaves and twigs. Soon the small pile of wood began burning. Annie gathered another skirt load, venturing a little farther this time since now she had the fire to help her see. Sparks spun their way into the night sky. Annie wondered whether anyone could see them.

By the time she had gathered enough dry wood, Edward had slipped off into sleep. Annie huddled near him, musket at her side, and listened to the strange sounds that came from the dark forest. She knew her family would be worrying about them, but she also knew that it would be foolish for anyone to go out at night to find them. *In the morning*, she reassured herself. *We’ll be safe in the morning*. As the fire crackled, she drifted off to sleep.