

TWO famous women Privateers of the American War of Independence...

Rachell Wall and Fanny Campbell

Rachel Wall

Rachel Wall may have been the first true American woman who became a pirate. She was born in 1760 in Carlisle, Pennsylvania to devout Presbyterians. A runaway, she eloped with George Wall, a fisherman and former privateer who had served during the Revolutionary War. Soon after they arrived in Boston, Wall deserted Rachel and she earned a living as a servant. Several months later, her husband returned, showed her his plundered treasure, and convinced her to join him in his piracy.

Their modus operandi was somewhat unique amongst pirates and resembled the boy who cried wolf so many times that when he really saw a wolf, no one came. They anchored near an island during a storm. After it ended, they made the vessel appear as if she would founder, then set her adrift. When another ship was sighted, Rachel screamed for help. Once the rescuers came aboard, the pirates murdered them, stole all the valuables, and sank the ship. Those ashore just assumed the victimized ship sank during the storm.

Rachel, George, and their cohorts became quite adept at piracy. Between 1781 and 1782 they captured twelve boats, murdered twenty-four sailors, and appropriated \$6,000 worth of cash and merchandise.

Trouble came in September 1782 when a storm really did batter their sloop and broke the mast. George and the other pirates were washed overboard and drowned, leaving only Rachel on board. She was soon rescued and returned to Boston where she became a maid. Seven years later Rachel was accused of robbing a woman on the streets of Boston. In spite of her innocent pleas, Rachel was found guilty of the crime. She confessed to being a pirate, but not to being a thief. Even so, she was the last woman hanged in Massachusetts.

Source: <http://www.cindyvallar.com/womenpirates.html>

Fanny Campbell

Fanny Campbell, sailor, freed her fiancé from pirates and captured two British ships. She was one of the first women privateers to fight the British.

Fanny Campbell lived in eighteenth century Lynn, Massachusetts, at a time when women were supposed to be traditional wives, mothers, and helpmates. Fanny did not meet the expectations of her society. She shot sharpshooter style, rode horseback exceedingly well and she dreamed of going to sea.

Fanny's Childhood Sweetheart, William Lovell, is a Sailor

In one respect, Fanny Campbell did follow tradition. She had a childhood sweetheart named William Lovell, who loved the sea as much as she did. William became sailor and after his first voyage, he asked Fanny to marry him, even promising to give up the sea for her sake. Fanny didn't want William to give up the sea. In fact, she enjoyed hearing his seafaring tales so much that she constantly dreamed of going to sea herself. She told William that she would marry him when he returned from his second voyage.

Fanny Becomes a Sailor and Leads a Mutiny

William's second voyage didn't go smoothly. In fact, he almost didn't return from his second voyage. In 1775, the Captain and crew of the British ship the Constance seized William Lovell and ten other Americans, put them in irons, and set sail for Cuba. Instead of weeping and wringing her hands, William's fiancé Fanny Campbell decided to get her William out of prison. She disguised herself as a man, calling herself Channing, and signed on the Constance as a deckhand.

Channing soon discovered that the Captain and his first mate weren't very popular with the crew. When Channing heard the rumor that the Captain was planning to take the entire crew to England to be impressed into the British Navy, she did everything she could to spread that rumor. Channing led a successful mutiny and became commander of the Constance. Now she and her crew were pirates.

Fanny Rescues William and Captures the British Bark George

A few days later as the Constance continued her voyage to Cuba, she ran into the British bark the George. The captain of the George sensed undertones of something wrong aboard the Constance, and opened fire on her. However, the British captain greatly underestimated Channing's leadership abilities. Despite the superior fire power of the George, he lost the battle. The George became the prize of the Constance and the two ships sailed on to Cuba together.

Fanny, alias Channing, freed her fiancé William and ten other jailed Americans. The engaged couple enjoyed a happy reunion at sea, but Fanny made William promise not to tell anyone else that "Captain Channing" would be married when they went ashore.

The Constance and George Turn Privateer

Back on the high seas after their stop in Cuba, Captain Channing and her two ships, the Constance and the George, captured a British sloop-of-war and the British sailors informed them that Great Britain and the American colonies were at war.

Now the Constance and the George and her sailors had the chance to become privateers in the service of the Americans. Led by the brave Captain Channing, all but four sailors from the Constance and the George cast their lots with the Americans. Only a few of the sailors, including William, knew about Captain Channing's real gender.

Privateers, Including Fanny Campbell, Helped Win the American Revolution

Privateers were licensed by their governments to attack enemy shipping and women were occasionally in command or in the crew. Privateers in the American Revolution tended to do better than the American Navy. Figures from *Pirates & Patriots of the Revolution* and *America's Maritime Heritage* indicate that 1,697 ships were privateers during the American Revolution. Privateers captured 2,283 enemy ships and enemy ships captured 1,323 privateers. Fanny Campbell was one of the few women privateers and one of the first to fight against the British during the American Revolution.

Fanny Marries William, but Still Shoots, Rides, and Sails

The Constance and the George sailed back to Massachusetts, but they had to put in at Marblehead because British troops had occupied Boston. Fanny Campbell and William Lovell traveled home to Lynn. They were married there and also had the papers drawn up that commissioned them as privateers.

William privateered throughout the Revolutionary War, but Fanny stayed home to care for their children. Between her domestic duties, she continued to shoot, ride, and practice her sailing. Legend has it that some of her children ignored the cutlass in their mother's closet and others pointed it out with pride.

References

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