

WHEN WOMEN LOST THE VOTE

A Revolutionary Story, 1776–1807

AUDIO
TOUR



208 CHOOSING SIDES

Not all women chose to side with the Revolution. And for many, loyalty to their communities and families was more important than higher causes. In a nearby theater, you can listen as men and women of the Oneida Indian Nation debate whether to ally themselves with the United States or with Great Britain. The Oneida people were one of many indigenous societies in the Revolutionary era in which women held positions of great political influence. Among the figures here is a woman known to English speakers as Two Kettles Together, who eventually fought in battle alongside her family for the Revolutionary cause at Oriskany, in 1777. The Baroness von Riedesel, on the other hand, joined her husband to oppose the Revolution. He was a commander of German forces (known as “Hessians”) who served with the British, and she crossed the Atlantic Ocean with children in tow to be with him. She was taken prisoner along with the rest of the British army defeated at the Battle of Saratoga in October 1777. Here is how she described the harsh conditions of their new life as prisoners:

[A woman’s voice begins in German and fades to English]

“...our cook had remained in town with my husband’s baggage, all of which was lost on the second night after our arrival, though it was under the guard of ten or twenty American soldiers. I preserved only my bed and that of my children, and the little I had kept with me for daily use. This was the more unfortunate, as it was at a time when we were in pressing want of many things which we could not have procured even had we been furnished with plenty of money. Each of the English officers — or, as I should rather call them, our friends, for such they proved themselves to be during the whole time that we were together in America — supplied something for our relief. One gave plates, another spoons, etc., and from these supplies we were obliged to keep up our establishment for three years. I am not sure that my vehicle excited much curiosity, though really the wagon looked more like a cart in which wild animals are conveyed than anything else. But we were frequently stopped and inquiries were made for the German general’s wife and children. To prevent them from tearing the oilcloth cover, I often alighted myself immediately, and did well in doing so. But I must say, in justice, that the Americans were civil and seemed much pleased that I spoke their language, the English.”

The Riedesels were eventually released, and they returned to Germany in 1783 along with a fourth daughter, born in 1779, whom they named America.