

# About Hannah Hendee

Background information prepared by Rachel DeMille  
for use with the  
Young Stateswomen Society

## Overview on Royalton

1) "The surface of this township is somewhat broken and hilly, but the soil is good, particularly along White River and its branches, where it is of a superior quality. White River runs through the town in an easterly direction . . .

"Royalton Village is pleasantly situated on the bank of White River, about half way between the mouths of the first and second branches, and near the centre of the town . . .

"The first permanent settlement was made in 1771, by Mr. Robert Havens, who this year moved his family into the town. The next year he was joined in the settlement by Mr. Elisha Kent and family, and the inhabitants were so much increased in the course of a few years, that the town was organized."

~Gazetteer of Vermont, Hayward, 1849.

2) "ROYALTON was chartered by New York in 1770 and again by Vermont in 1781. Early on the morning of October 16, 1780 a band of 300 Iroquois and Tories (led by a British Lieutenant) raided Royalton - killing two, burning 21 houses and 16 barns and destroying 150 head of cattle.

"The raiders took 25 captives to Canada and sold them for \$8 each."

~Text from auction of a commemorative glass paperweight, "Revolutionary Raid on Royalton, VT" 2004 Spring Historical Americana, May 20, 21  
<http://cowanauctions.com/auctions/item.aspx?id=2928>

## About Hannah Hendee:

### 1) From the blog, "Deeds of God," by Daniel Curry

[<http://www.deedsofgod.com/index.php/57-1780-ad-no-greater-love-hannah-handy-takes-on-300-raiders-mainmenu-446>]

**"1780 A.D.: No Greater Love: Mrs. Handy Takes On The Tribe!"**

© 2015 by Rachel DeMille  
Young Stateswomen Society, TJEEd.org/YSS



**"1780 A.D.: Hannah Handy Risks It All**

"I wish to thank the people of Royalton, Vermont and especially Mr. John Dumville, Historic Sites Operation Chief for the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation, for sending a good amount of competently preserved detail concerning this event, a raid by Native American Indians from Canada under British instigation, which took place in their town in 1780 A.D.

"The portion of the event I wanted to feature concerns a woman named Hannah Handy (or some have spelled her name Hendee, though land records reportedly show 'Handy'.) During the raid Mrs. Handy's young son Michael was captured. But she proved herself a woman of quite notable courage and determination by the way she remedied that.

"There is a city park monument which relates to this event in the town of Royalton, and it is worth a visit, I understand. From the appearance of the town scenery it might make a nice day trip for readers living near or passing through that area.

"Mrs. Handy's actions aren't singular among womankind by any means, but they were certainly noteworthy. Not only did Mrs. Hendee, brave though probably terrified, wade across a dangerous portion of the White River to an island where the captives were being temporarily kept to demand her child back, but she also was just as adamant that the youngest boys from her neighbor's families be returned as well. She couldn't save all the male captives (the British only paid bounties for the males as I understand it) but she shamed them into returning the ones that were probably too young to survive the trip north to be sold to the British for the bounty price.



"I believe her actions constitute a useful example both of the love for one's neighbor exceeding a person's regard for their own life, but also yet another example of what courageous acts history has shown seemingly ordinary wives and mothers to be fully capable of when the situation requires it. Hannah Handy did not die, but she probably should have. And it was not a quick and unthinking act of bravery. It was a sustained effort lasting quite a few hours altogether - including the time she spent, cold and wet in October, guarding the saved children after obtaining them - in order to accomplish what she apparently felt in her heart that God would expect.

"God granted her extraordinary courage. She used it admirably and to great and important effect. Who knows how many people are now descended from the children she saved? I hope you'll enjoy the account of it that has been graciously provided by Royalton's experts on the matter. And to begin, here is a present day picture of Royalton, which is near the White River. In front of the tall steepled white church in the center is a park where the Mrs. Handy (Hendee) Memorial monument is.

"Royalton is also the birthplace of Joseph Smith, who founded the Church of the Latter Day Saints, also known as the Mormon Church. I found that out accidentally when researching this account!



"The White River near South Royalton Vermont.



“The river looks pretty tame at this time of year. I don't know how close this is to the scene of the actual hostage staging.

### “Hannah Hendee

On 16 October 1780, about the time that Peter was routing the British at the Burkeville tavern, Robert Havens was awakened by the barking of a neighbor's dog; something was after the sheep. Partially clothed, he left his house near the White River in South Royalton, Vermont, and ascended the hill. He found the sheep safe. He stood pensively looking back as the first light of dawn touched his frontier home. Something was wrong!

As he turned to retrace his steps, he saw a large company of Indians move from the forest and push in the front door of his home. Two teenage boys who had been aroused to help with the sheep were getting dressed. One was his son Daniel Havens. The other, Thomas Pimber, was courting a neighbor girl and had stayed overnight with the Havens family.

The boys burst through the back door and ran for their lives. Daniel stumbled as he reached the stream, rolled down the bank under a log, and was not discovered. Thomas Pimber was not so fortunate. In a few minutes the Indians were roaring with delight. His scalp had a

double cowlick. Cut in two, it would fetch a double bounty from the British.

The Indians—three hundred of them from Canada—and a few Tories were commanded by a British captain named Horton. The British had offered the Indians eight dollars each for live captive men, something less for boys, and a lesser amount for scalps. The British had placed no bounty on women and girls, who were therefore immune to captivity and subject to something less than death.

During that long-forgotten burning of South Royalton, Vermont, the Indians moved downriver capturing the men and boys, killing those who resisted. They killed all the livestock and burned the houses and barns holding the harvest upon which the colonists depended for survival during the long New England winter.

Some distance downstream, the Hendee family had been warned. The husband set out on foot to warn others further downstream. Hannah Hendee grabbed her seven-year-old son, Michael, and a younger daughter and ran for the woods. Just when she thought she had reached safety a band of Indians stepped from the shadows and wrested her boy from her. One of them spoke English. She demanded to know what they were going to do to her boy. The Indian replied, "Make a soldier of him."

As the Indians dragged her sobbing boy away, she made her way toward the road along the river carrying her little girl, who screamed in panic for her mother to keep the Indians away.

Near the river she met Captain Horton and asked what they intended to do with the little boys. She was told that they would be marched to Canada with the men. She said the youngsters could not endure such a march, and was told, "In that case, they will be killed."

She headed down the road toward Lebanon, sixteen miles away, carrying her little girl. She had not gone far when she was filled with a



surge of uncommon resolve, a fierce determination. They should not keep her little boy!

She returned upriver and found the British and the Indians gathering their captives on the opposite bank. She started across and would have drowned had not an old Indian helped her to shore.

Oblivious of the danger, she demanded her little boy. Captain Horton said he could not control the Indians; it was none of his concern what they did. She threatened him: "You are their commander, and they must and will obey you. The curse will fall upon you for whatever crime they may commit, and all the innocent blood they shall here shed will be found in your skirts when the secrets of men's hearts are made known, and it will cry for vengeance upon your head!"

When her little son was brought in she took him by the hand and refused to let go. An Indian threatened her with a cutlass and jerked her son away. She defiantly took him back and said that she would follow them every step of the way to Canada, she would never give up, they would not have her little boy!

Finally, intimidated by her determination, Captain Horton told her to take her son and leave. He could face an army of men, but not a mother driven by the strongest of emotions. She had gone but a few rods when she was made to return. Captain Horton said she must wait in camp until all the captives were assembled and the march north began.

During the day other little boys were brought into camp. Desperately they clung to Mrs. Hendee. With uncommon courage she interceded for them as vigorously as she had for her own.

Finally, when the captives were assembled for the long march to Canada, Mrs. Hendee somehow crossed the river with her daughter and nine small boys: her son, Michael, Roswell Parkurst, Andrew and Sheldon Durkey, Joseph Rix, Rufus Fish and his brother, Nathaniel



Evans, and Daniel Downer. Two of them she carried across. The others waded through the water with their arms around each other's necks, clinging to her skirts. As the cold October night closed in, Mrs. Hendee huddled in the woods with the soaking-wet little brood she had rescued from certain death.

One of the boys, Daniel Downer, "received such an affright from the horrid crew, that he was ever afterwards unable to take care of himself, wholly unfit for business and lived for many years, wandering from place to place, a solemn, tho' silent witness of the distress and horror of that dreadful scene." (Evelyn Wood Love-joy, History of Royalton, Vermont [Burlington, Vermont: Free Press Printing Co., 1911].)

They talk about a woman's sphere,  
As though it has a limit;  
There's not a place in earth or heaven,  
There's not a task to mankind given,  
There's not a blessing nor a woe,  
There's not a whispered yes or no,  
There's not a life, or death, or birth,  
That has a feather's weight of worth . . .  
Without a woman in it.  
-Author unknown

Well, that's the account. Praise to God for His show of mercy for these small children, by placing such courage in the heart of this worthy woman, Hannah Handy. It really would be interesting to know which people have descended from the children that Hannah waded across the river with, wouldn't it? There was a little more information about her in some of the accounts. She ended up remarrying sometime in her life. Her husband probably died. And one source said that it was believed that she went to live in the west as an old woman. I could see her being an old woman with enough courage to go be a western pioneer! She spoke out fearlessly to power, reminding the British officer that God would judge him too.



The officer was not without some decency, and the Native American warrior were also not without some restraint, and God also would certainly have been in the situation, bringing thoughts of mercy to the minds of the invaders. But the combined result was that the woman's courage paid off preciously, and all those little lives were spared through her brave and risky protests.

Well done, Hannah Handy! Well done. You took faith in an all powerful God, and that faith was rewarded!”

[End of Curry blog post]

## 2) From *Woman as a Pioneer*, William W. Fowler

“In the early days of the settlement of Royalton, Vermont, a sudden attack was made upon it by the Indians. Mrs. Hendee, the wife of one of the settlers, was working alone in the field, her husband being absent on military duty, when the Indians entered her house and capturing her children carried them across the White river, at that place a hundred yards wide and quite deep for fording, and placed them under keepers who had some other persons, thirty or forty in number, in charge.

“Returning from the field Mrs. Hendee discovered the fate of her children. Her first outburst of grief was heart-rending to behold, but this was only transient; she ceased her lamentations, and like the lioness who has been robbed of her litter, she bounded on the trail of her plunderers.

“Resolutely dashing into the river, she stemmed the current, planting her feet firmly on the bottom and pushed across. With pallid face, flashing eyes, and lips compressed, maternal love dominating every fear, she strode into the Indian camp, regardless of the tomahawks menacingly flourished round her head, boldly demanded the release of her little ones, and persevered in her alternate upbraidings and supplications, till her request was granted. She then carried her children back through the river and landed them in safety on the other bank.

“Not content with what she had done, like a patriot as she was, she immediately returned, begged for the release of the children of others, again was rewarded with success, and brought two or three more away; again returned, and again succeeded, till she had rescued the whole fifteen of her neighbors' children who had been thus snatched away from their distracted parents. On her last visit to the camp of the enemy, the Indians were so struck with her conduct that one of them declared that so brave a squaw deserved to be carried across the river, and offered





to take her on his back and carry her over. She, in the same spirit, accepted the offer, mounted the back of the gallant savage, was carried to the opposite bank, where she collected her rescued troop of children, and hastened away to restore them to their overjoyed parents.

3) From *Biographical Review: This Volume Contains Biographical Sketches of the Leading Citizens of Delaware County, New York*

“Another incident relates to the burning of Royalton, Vt., on October 16, 1780. Dr. Ira Hunter's father's name was William Hunter, and he had a sister who married a man by the name of Hendee. At the time of this Indian raid Royalton had but a few houses, and they were far between. The intent of the Indians was to kill every white man they found, so the men fled for their lives.

“When the Indians had secured all the valuables they cared for, they set fire to the houses, captured nine boys from nine to twelve years old, and left. When Mrs. Hendee, who had been away, returned to her home and found what had been done, she took the Indian trail, and went on, overtaking them just as they had crossed the river, a branch of the White, and entered their camp.

“She plunged into the water, swimming where wading was impossible, reached the other side and, braving the tomahawk and the threatening aspect of the savages, rushed into the camp, seized a boy, and bore him to the opposite shore. In like manner she took another and another, until eight were carried over.

“While taking the last one, her strength began to fail. An Indian, seeing this and admiring her heroism, said, ‘White woman brave; me help white woman.’ and stepping forward, kindly aided her across the river.

“He then left her and her boys, one of them being her own son, to go on their way rejoicing; while the Indians looked on with mingled emotions of astonishment and admiration.”

