



Women Make History:

Stories we should have learned in school



Listen, my children, and you shall hear

Of a lovely feminine Paul Revere

Who rode an equally famous ride

Through a different part of the countryside,

Where Sybil Ludington's name recalls

A ride as daring as that of Paul's."

by [Berton Bradley](#)

Meet Sybil Ludington—Revolutionary War Hero

In 1777, 16 year-old [Sybil Ludington](#), galloped into history as she rode through the night and the pouring rain, dodging British troops and marauding bandits to warn that the British were attacking Danbury, Connecticut. She covered a distance of almost 40 miles, nearly triple that of Paul Revere.

[Born](#) April 5, 1761, in Kent, New York, Ludington was the oldest of 12 children. Her father had served as an officer in the British military, but when the American Revolution began, he joined the Continental army. The family's farm was located in an area between Connecticut and Long Island Sound, especially vulnerable to British attack.

On April 26, two weeks after her 16th birthday, a messenger arrived at her home to warn her father, commander of the local militia, that the town of Danbury, Connecticut, was under attack. In addition to a colonial stronghold, Danbury had an important munitions' depot. Ludington's father needed to assemble his forces, but having released his men to

their farms for planting season, his soldiers were scattered widely about the countryside.

The story goes that Ludington jumped on her horse and rode into the night sounding the alarm. Some accounts claim that she volunteered, while others say that her father asked for help. In either case, she risked capture as she galloped through the dark and the woods in a heavy storm. Ludington covered about 40 miles. She knew the countryside and where her father's men lived. By daybreak when she arrived home, many of her father's soldiers were assembled. They were too late to defend Danbury, but they engaged the departing British and successfully drove them back to Long Island Sound.

Ludington's heroic efforts were allegedly widely praised with even George Washington personally thanking the young woman.

After the war, at the age of 23, Ludington married Edmund Ogden and moved to Catskill, New York. They had one child, Henry. When her husband died in 1799, Ludington worked at a tavern to fund her son's education. He became a prominent lawyer and was later elected to the New York State Assembly.

Ludington died in 1839. She was 77 years-old.

Today, according to a 2022 [article](#) in *Smithsonian* by Abigail Tucker, some scholars doubt the authenticity of Ludington's story citing the fact that there are no official accounts of her ride and also discrepancies in the spelling of her name. However, Tucker also mentions that the earliest known reference to Ludington occurs in an 1854 letter by her nephew, Charles, who sought recognition for his aunt's bravery. Regardless, the story has captured the public's imagination over time.

Ludington was included in an 1880 book by historian Martha Lamb and then largely forgotten until 1907 when her great-nephew, Louis S. Patrick, published an account of her exploits. In 1935, the State of New York [erected](#) historic markers along the trail of her famous ride. Five years later, Berton Bradley [penned](#) a twist on the poem, "*Paul Revere's Ride*," by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

In 1961, the Daughter's of the American Revolution [commissioned](#) sculptor Anna Hyatt Huntington to create a bronze statue of Ludington in Carmel, New York. Ludington sits astride her horse, Star, galloping and waving a stick that she used to pound on people's doors. Ludington was also honored in 1975 on a U.S. bi-centennial [stamp](#) and since April 1979, she has been remembered with the annual [Sybil Ludington 50K Run](#), an ultramarathon approximating her historic path.



Ask a friend: Have you ever risked your life to save others?

Ask yourself: What would you be willing to risk your life for?



[Sharon Spaulding](#) is a feminist historian and researcher who specializes in the life and times of Mary Ware Dennett (1872-1947). The curator of Dennett's family archives, Spaulding is at work on a book about Dennett. In 2020, Time magazine included Dennett as one of the most important women in American history.

Spaulding received a grant from Radcliffe College's Schlesinger Library to support her work. Her journalism has appeared in [Ms. Magazine](#), [Smithsonian](#), [New Hampshire Magazine](#), BOLD, and others. She lives near Salt Lake City with her husband and two dogs.

Sharon is available to delight audiences with the forgotten stories of remarkable women and the history of the suffrage and reproductive rights movements of the early 20th century. Contact her at:

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