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Women Make History: Stories We Should Have Learned in School

"We have experienced your love, strong as the oak, and your fidelity, unchangeable as truth...While the sun and moon...give light to the world...we shall love and respect you...protect you; and shall at all times consider your welfare as our own."



Leaders of the Continental Congress, A. Tholey, 1894, LOC

[Continental Congress](#), 1777

Promise to Indigenous Fighters in the Revolutionary War

Tyonajanegan, aka Two Kettles Together: A Revolutionary Woman

Brandishing two pistols on horseback, on August 6, 1777, an [Oneida](#) woman named [Tyonajanegan](#) rode into battle alongside her husband and son to fight the British at the [Battle of Oriskany](#), one of the bloodiest of the Revolutionary War. When her husband, Chief of the Wolf clan, was shot in the wrist, Tyonajanegan stayed at his side, firing at the enemy and reloading his gun. Soon after, she became a messenger for the Continental Army,



Two Kettles fighting at the Battle of Oriskany, Oneida Indian Nation, Don Troiani

riding through enemy lines to deliver military secrets to encampments and villages. Later, she was recognized by [General Horatio Gates](#) for her service, a rare occurrence for an Indigenous woman.

Two Kettles Together: Although little is known about her childhood, Tyonajanegan was born around 1738 and was also known as Two Kettles Together. The name reflects the “interconnectedness with European colonists,” as metal cookware was obtained through trade and was “highly valued by the Oneida for cooking and hospitality.” Two Kettles married in the 1750s and had four children.

She and her husband, [Tewahangarahken](#), lived in the [Oneida village of Oriska](#), near what is now Oriskany, New York, where they were prosperous farmers. [According](#) to historians Joseph T. Glatthaar and James Kirby Martin, Two Kettles and her husband “lived in a substantial frame house, had a barn, and owned fifteen horses, a half dozen cattle, sixty hogs, two sheep, six turkeys, and a hundred chickens,” and were among the wealthiest of the Oneida Nation.

At the time, Oneida women held [positions of authority](#) within the tribe and were charged with growing agricultural staples and managing trade and the sale of goods. Some also assumed leadership roles as clan mothers, advising men, and participating in community decisions.

In general, the Oneida Nation had adapted to the presence of the colonists and lived in peace with the Americans. When the Revolution erupted, most Oneidas sided with the colonists, while other Indigenous nations joined forces with the British.

Joining the Fight: It is believed that, a few days before the Battle of Oriskany, Tyonajanegan was at [Fort Schuyler](#), an important American stronghold, when British troops arrived. Escaping, she warned others of their approach. The day before the battle, Two Kettles, her husband, and son joined General [Horatio Herkimer](#)'s militia in an effort to retake the Fort. However, before Herkimer ordered the attack, his militia was ambushed by British forces in a battle that lasted more than six hours. Losses were especially heavy for the colonists and the Indigenous tribes who fought with them. After the battle, as Herkimer's army began to move, Two Kettles rode ahead to warn villages to prepare for the number of wounded.



Old Fort Schuyler

A September 3, 1777, article in the [Pennsylvania Journal and Weekly Advertiser](#) included mention of Two Kettles and her family. “A friendly Indian, with his wife and son, distinguished themselves,” and included that he had killed nine enemy soldiers and that Tyonajanegen fought with pistols for the duration of the six-hour battle.

Two months later, Tyonajanegen and her husband joined American forces at Saratoga, where she became a messenger for the Continental Army. The position reflects her trusted status as she would have carried secret information between military encampments and villages.

acknowledging her service, General Gates ordered that she receive provisions for her family to sustain them through the winter. Although other women were also compensated for their efforts, it was rare for Indigenous women to be included in these records, indicating the respect Tyonajanegen commanded.

The final account of Two Kettles' service occurred at a homestead known as Fort Timmerman (aka Fort Zimmerman) in 1781. It provided a base for colonial militia and Oneida warriors protecting nearby gristmills, critical to food production. While they were away chasing Loyalist raiders, another group of Tories and their Iroquois allies attacked. Two Kettles, together with a small group of Oneida and white women, successfully defended the fort and drove the attackers off.

After the War: Tyonajanegen would have experienced tremendous upheaval. No longer needing their Oneida allies, the newly formed US government encroached on Indigenous lands and disregarded treaties and promises made to Native Americans. The war had also divided Indigenous nations into factions that opposed or supported the colonists. Following the Battle of Oriskany, Mohawk warriors, who sided with the British, destroyed the Oneida village in retaliation. Two Kettles' husband died sometime before 1794.

Accounts of her later years are sparse, but some historians suggest that her health declined and that she may have gone blind. Tyonajanegen is believed to have died around 1822, at about eighty-four.

Legacy: Although Tyonajanegen's life was a demonstration of sacrifice, bravery, and courage, she wasn't alone among Indigenous women who fought for a new nation. Learn more at the [Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian](#).



Tableau, Museum of the American Revolution

Bring it Home: Conversation Starters

Ask yourself and a friend: The American Revolution forever altered the course and relationships of Indigenous nations. Why are we just now learning the stories of these people who sacrificed everything to shape our form of government?

Our WMH Tribe is Growing! It's thrilling to experience our expanding community and see how deeply these stories and the book are resonating. **Stay tuned! Join me at events around the country, or create your own gathering.** Check the [Events Page](#) of my website.

"Remember the Ladies!" as Abigail Adams famously said. [Women Make History: Fifty-Three Stories of Courage, Strength & Resilience](#) is a great way to share the stories of women who have shaped this nation. Available at Indie Bookstores, [Barnes & Noble](#), [Amazon](#), [Kindle](#), [BookShop](#), and on my website.



I'm passionate about all things Mary Ware Deentt, a pivotal leader of the women's suffrage and reproductive rights movement. A grant from the Schlesinger Library forwarded my research on Dennett. My articles about her have been published in [Ms.](#), [Smithsonian](#), [New Hampshire Magazine](#) and more. My new book, [Women Make History: Fifty-Three Stories of](#)

[Courage, Strength & Resilience](#), highlights the stories of remarkable women who, like Dennett, achieved remarkable things only to be swept aside by history or to have their achievements wrongly attributed to men.

If you need a speaker, [reach out!](#) I'd love to speak to your business, school, women's group, book club, or civic organization.

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