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MERCY WARREN: FORGOTTEN PATRIOT

Grace Rowell Phelps

Honors Thesis
May 13, 1963

I am obnoxious to each carping tongue
Who says my hand a needle better fits,
A poets pen all all scorn I should thus wrong,
For such despite they cast on female wits:
If what I do prove wel, it won't advance,
They'l say it's stoln, or else it was by chance.

Let Greeks be Greeks, and women what they are
Men have precedency and still excell,
It is but vain unjustly to wage warre:
Men can do best, and women know it well
Preheminence in all and each is yours;
Yet grant some small acknowledgement of ours. ¹

In colonial days women's place was in the home. ²

Contrary to popular belief, however, that woman's thoughts revolved only around her domestic duties, recent research has discovered that at least a few women of the Revolutionary War period were as much concerned with politics and literature as with cooking, mending and child rearing. Mrs. Mercy Otis Warren of Massachusetts serves as an extraordinary if perhaps forgotten example of a lady of prestige who successfully combined the usual career of devoted wife and gentle mother with a career as a political satirist, pamphleteer, critic, poet, historian, and correspondant of presidents and statesmen.

It is obvious that many men of the eighteenth century did "scorn the poets pen" if it were feminine. Many

1. A peom written by Anne Bradstreet, daughter of Gov. Dudley and wife of Gov. Scheldren, in Arthur W. Calhoun, A Social History of the American Family, (Cleveland, 1917), p.85.

2. Elisabeth Anthony Dexter, Colonial Women of Affairs, (Boston, 1924), p. xvi.

stories passed on by men such as Governor Winthrop of Massachusetts indicate that any woman who tried working on any task other than that of managing a household was hampered by a rigid social and economic code. He described in his letters a certain Mr. Hopkins, the governor of Hartford Conneticut who brought his ailing wife to Boston. The wife had lost her understanding and reason, Winthrop said because she had devoted herself to " reading and writing, and had written many books." ³ He added

For if she had attended her household affairs, and such things as belong to women, and not gone out of her way to meddle with such things as are proper for men, whose minds are stronger, etc., she had kept her wits, and might have improved them usefully and honorably in the place God had set her. ⁴

Not only do modern scholars question the universality of Winthrop's belief that women should not have skills in reading and writing nor views on art, religion and politics, his own contemporaries differed with him as well. The Marquis de Chastellux, one of the forty members of the French Academy and a major-general in the French army serving under the Count de Rochambeau during the Revolution, had travelled in the United States from 1780 to 1782. Apparantly he had formed a hasty opinion that American women read nothing and that a lady of extensive reading and literary taste was quite a phenomenon. His book,

3. Dexter, Women, p,xvii, from the Winthrop letters, vol. II, p. 265.

4. Ibid.

Travels in America indicates, however, that he met intelligent and accomplished females more often than he had anticipated. He commented upon the number of young ladies reading Milton, Addison and Richardson.⁵ He said of two women in particular:

Mrs. Powel has not travelled, but she has read a great deal, and profitable: it would be unjust, perhaps, to say, that in this she differs from the greatest part of the American ladies; but what distinguishes her the most is, her taste, for conversation, and the truly European use she knows how to make of her understanding and information.⁶

I chatted more, particularly with Mrs. Meredith, who appeared to me very amiable and well informed. In the course of an hour we talked of literature, poetry, romances, and above all, history; I found she knew that of France very well; the comparison between Francis I. and Henry IV, between Turenne and Conde, Richelieu and Mazarine, seemed familiar to her, and she made them with much grace, wit and understanding.⁷

Among those who may have been loudest in their protests against the Winthrop viewpoint that women should not use their wits were those who knew Mercy Warren. This remarkable woman had the education, the interest and the social prominence necessary to excel in a man's world and her contributions although now forgotten were important in the age in which she lived.

Mercy Otis was born in Barnstable, Massachusetts on September 14¹⁵, 1728 into the comfortable and refined life of James Otis a Whig and judge of the district court.

⁵. Marquis de Chastellux, Travels in North America, (New York, 1828), p. 159.

6. Ibid., p. 100.

7. Ibid., p. 144.

Her father allowed his precocious daughter to join her brother in instruction preparing him for entrance to Harvard College. ⁸ It is evident that Mercy and her brother James later known as "The Patriot" and remembered for the maxim that taxation without representation is tyranny, were constant and devoted companions and that he encouraged his sister to read and digest as much as possible. ⁹ The tutor of the two Otis children was the Reverend Jonathan Russell, a man of literary as well as theological tastes. He was responsible not only for introducing Mercy to Pope, Dryden, Milton, Shakespeare, and to Raleigh's History of the World, but responsible also for the stilted style which she acquired from observing his art of preparing sermons. ¹⁰

In 1754 Mercy married James Warren a merchant of Plymouth and later an active member ⁱⁿ of Massachusetts politics. Rather than stifling, ^{he} he encouraged her literary pursuits and took as much pride in these accomplishments as in her domestic abilities. ¹¹ He admired a mind "well stocked with learning." ¹²

8. Katherine Anthony, First Lady of the Revolution, (Garden City, 1958), p. 27; Maud Macdonald Hutcheson, "Mercy Warren", William and Mary Quarterly, Third Series, Vol. X, no 3, (July 1953), 380.

9. Anthony, First Lady, p. 34; James Otis to Mercy Warren, April 11, 1766, Boston, in Massachusetts Historical Society, Collections, LXXII, 1743-1777, p. 2.

10. Anthony, First Lady, p. 31-32; Annie Russell Marble, "Mistress Mercy Warren" New England Magazine, XXVIII, (April, 1903), p. 165.

11. Sarah Josepha Hale, Woman's Record, (New York, 1855) p. 546.; Hutcheson, Mercy Warren, 380.

12. Ibid

It is obvious that Mrs. Warren led quite as comfortable a life after her marriage as before. She was painted around 1763 by John Singleton Copley.¹³ It was a mark of distinction and prosperity to be painted by Copley.¹⁴ The artist captured not only the rich gray-green silk and exquisite lace of her gown but captured the warmth and sincerity of her personality. He focused his attention on the plain face marked with gentleness and gentility, on the keenly alert, penetrating yet soft eyes, and the firm mouth with only the slightest suggestion of a smile--all aspects of a face slightly tilted upward.

Mercy Warren was thus well qualified by education and ability and encouraged by both her brother and her husband to contribute to the world of letters. Rather than the brunt of insults as Winthrop had suggested, Mercy found herself praised not only by her family but by generals, statesmen, men of affairs and their wives. Rochefoucauld in his Travels in the United States speaks of her extensive reading.¹⁵ Washington admired her powers of conversation and her verse and her fluency both as a speaker and writer.¹⁶ From letters exchanged between the Washington's and the Warren's it is clear that the two families maintained a close friendship throughout their lives.¹⁷

13. A Massachusetts Historical Society Picture Book, Portraits of Women 1705-1825, (Boston, 1954).

14. Anthony, First Lady, p. 24.

15. Hale, Record, p. 346.

16. Marble, Mistress Mercy, p. 175.

17. Martha Washington to Mercy Warren, Washington, June 9, 1785, in Massachusetts Historical Society Collections, LXXIII, 1778-1814, p. 257.

John Adams wrote to Mercy Warren from Braintree
on January 3, 1774:

Madame I never attempt to write to you but my Pen
conscious of its Inferiority falls out
of my Hand. 18

He encouraged her to continue her work in 1775:

Nature, which does nothing in vain, bestows
no mental Faculties which are not designed
to be cultivated and improved...I know of
none, ancient or modern, which has reached
the tender, the pathetic, the keen and
severe, and at the same time, the Soft, the
Sweet, the amiable and the pure in greater
Perfection. 19

Later after the publication of many of her political satires
he was even more extravagant in his praise of his friend:

What next can I do better than write to a Saint.
What if she has Trembling Nerves and a pal-
pitating Heart. She has good Sense she has
Exalted Virtue and refined Piety...Why then
should I Attempt to Explore the reasons and
to say how it is that a Mind, possessed of a
Masculine Genius well stocked with Learning,
fortified by Phylosophy and Religion, should
be so easily Impressed by the adverse Circumstances
or Inconveniences of this World. 20

Thomas Jefferson wrote Mr. Warren " I pray you to present
the homage of my great respect to Mrs. Warren. I have long
possessed evidences of her high station in the ranks of genius! 21

James Bowdoin said that she was a good judge in politics and
that her home became a rendezvous for political figures and
that " sage deliberations were held at her fireside." 22

18. MHS, Collections, LXXII, p. 21

19. John Adams to Mercy Warren, March 15, 1775, in
MHS, Collections, LXXII, p. 43.

20. John Adams to Mercy Warren, Boston June 6, 1779,
in MHS, Collections, LXXIII, p. 101.

21. Hutcheson, Mercy Warren, p. 378 from a letter of
March 21, 1801.

22. Ibid.

Mercy Warren found in Abigail Adams a very kindred spirit. John Adams admired the good sense of both of them. He wrote to James Warren from Philadelphia on September 26, 1775:

"...I never thought either Politicks or War, or any other Art or Science beyond the Line of her Sex: on the contrary I have ever been convinced that Politicks and War, have in every Age been influenced, and in many, guided and controuled by her Sex. But if I were of opinion that it was best for a general Rule that the fair should be excused from the arduous Cares of War and State, I should certainly think that Marcia and Portia [Mercy and Abigail] ought to be Exceptions, because I have ever ascribed to those Ladies, a Share and no Small one neither; on the Conduct of American Affairs. ²³

She was consulted by Mrs. Adams on matters of household and on other matters as well. Mrs. Adams wrote on December 11, 1773 to ask Mrs. Warren's opinion on the plays of Moliere. Mrs. Adams said that she herself didn't like his work, that the characters were unfinished, that the author "ridicules vice without engaging us to virtue", but feared she might "incur the charge of vanity by thus criticizing upon an author who has met with so much applause."²⁴

The two ladies tried to better themselves by constant communication with each other. Mrs. Adams indicates this fact in her letter from Braintree November 1775:

I am curious to know how you Spend your time? tis very sassy to make this demand upon you, but I know it must be usefully imployd and I am fearful if I do not question you I shall loose some improvement which I might otherways make. ²⁵

23. MHS, Collections, LXXII, p. 115.

24. Ibid. p. 19.

25. Ibid. p. 180.

To understand the compliments paid to Mrs. Warren by the leading statesmen and prominent figures of her day, it is necessary to examine her contributions. To begin with she had a keen and enquiring mind and an extraordinary awareness of the important issues of the day. She was as deeply stirred as the men over constant injustices and the growing tyranny of the British government, and knew as much about the classics, Shakespeare and the nature of government as she did about French cotton, mussle and garlick thread.²⁶ She was a firm disciple of the natural rights theory in the struggle for independence, an advocate of citizen rule, of a democratic government based on the ideals of Jefferson and was opposed to the monarchical and centralizing tendencies of the constitution and the Federalists who advocated its adoption. Her ability coupled with such strong political ideas and a natural inclination to express herself soon led Mrs. Warren to put her training to use in writing drama, pamphlets, poems and books.

The satires or so called dramas of Mrs. Warren have only academic appeal today but they were expressions of opinion highly prevalent in her own time. They were written to foster patriotism and encourage bitter feelings toward the loyalists and certain political figures during the revolution, to enforce lessons of morality and to encourage a continuation of those principles for which the revolution was being fought. Because the plays are propaganda intended

26. Collections of the MHS, Fifth Series, IV, Boston: 1872, p. 317; Alice Morse Earle, Colonial Dames and Good Wives, (Boston, 1895), p. 240-41; MHS Collections, LXXII, 359.

for reading, they lack plot and are limited by time and topic for the most part. Nevertheless, even though the theater was still the "highway to hell" and public dramatic performances were forbidden, Mercy's plays were widely distributed and had wide appeal.²⁷

Perhaps the most effective as well as the most caustic plays were "The Adulateur" written in 1772 and "The Group" published in 1775. These two plays were directed at the Tories and were most effective weapons in the propaganda warfare during the pre-Revolutionary period.²⁸ "The Adulateur" aimed at a castigation of Thomas Hutchinson and his relatives who were monopolizing public Office. Hutchinson became Royal Governor of Massachusetts Bay in 1771.²⁹ He was a native son, a merchant prince, an aristocrat and most historians say, a faithful public servant but according to Mercy Warren, he was "dark, intriguing, insinuating, haughty, and ambitious, while the extreme of avarice marked each feature of his character."³⁰ He was to her a Machiavellian character with mediocre ability and she could not admire even his loyalty to his official oath, an oath which he had taken to remain the servant of the king and not the representative of the people.

"The Group" like "The Adulateur" was a satire directed at the Loyalist party in Massachusetts and at the councillors

27. Harvey Wish, The American Historian, (New York, 1960), p. 54.

28. Arthur Hobson Quinn, The Literature of the American People, (New York, 1951), p. 163.

29. Hutcheson, Mercy, p. 382; Anthony, First Lady, p. 123.

30. Mercy Otis Warren, History of the Revolution, (Boston 1805), p. 79.

who held office at the pleasure of the crown. Her object was to expose the views and deride the characters of these officers of the crown whose ambitions and avarice were greater than their principles or their loyalty even to the crown, which had given them authority. ³¹ Mrs Warren prefaced her farce by saying:

As the great business of the polite world is the eager pursuit of amusement, and as the public diversions of the season have been interrupted by the hostile parade in the capital; the exhibition of a new farce may not be unentertaining. ³²

She goes on to criticize a few of her villains severely:

Collateralis says in "The Group":

Come 'mongst ourselves we'll e'en speak out the truth.
Can you suppose there yet is such a dupe
As still believes that wretch an honest man?
The latter strolles of his serpentine brain
Outvie the arts of Machiavel himself;
His Borgian model here is realized,
And the state tricks of politicians play's
Beneath a vizard fair... ³³

So skillful was she at characterizing her figures that certain public personalities soon found themselves called by new names. Daniel Leonard a Tory lawyer who carried weight in commonwealth politics in Massachusetts was referred to as Beau Trumps. ³⁴ Others became Judge Meagre, Brigadier Hateall and Simple Sapling.

³¹. Worthington Chauncey Ford, "Mrs. Warren's 'The Group'", MHS Proceedings, LXII, (October 1928-June 1929) p. 15.

³². Mercy Otis Warren, "The Group", (1779), in William L. Clements Library, (Ann Arbor, 1953).

³³. EBLd.

³⁴. VernonLouis Parrington, The Colonial Mind 1630-1800, 3. vol, (New York, 1927), p. 207.

Mercy evidently felt that she had gone too far in her censure and wrote to John Adams who had read "The Group" to ask whether she should curb her attack on contemporary figures. She wrote from Plymouth on January 30, 1775:

How far, sir, do you think it justifiable for any individual to hold him up to the object of public derision...Your criticism or countenance, your approbation or censure, may in some particular serve to regulate my future conduct. ³⁵

He answered in a letter dated March 15, 1775:

The faithful Historian delineates Characters truly, let the Censure fall where it will. The public is so interested in public Characters, that they have a Right to know them, and it becomes the Duty of every good Citizen who happens to be acquainted with them to communicate his knowledge. There is no other way of preventing the mischief which may be done by ill men. ³⁶

Adams was to forget this very advice later when the attack was directed towards himself.

In 1790 Mrs. Warren published Poems, Dramatic and Miscellaneous. This work contained as well as the poems, two plays, "The Sack of Rome" and "The Ladies of Castile". In dedicating her work to George Washington, then president, she said:

I only ask the illustrious Washington to permit a lady of his acquaintance, to introduce to the public, under his patronage, a small volume, written as the amusement of solitude, at a period when every active member of society was engaged, either in the field, or the cabinet, to resist the strong hand of foreign domination. ³⁷

³⁵. MHS Coll., LXXII, p. 37-38.

³⁶. Ibid., 42.

³⁷. Mercy Warren, Poems, Dramatic and Miscellaneous, (Boston, 1790), p.?

This collection did not seek to criticize and lay blame on specific personalities but rather to warn those who had just received their right to liberty to preserve the ideals for which they had fought. "The Sack of Rome" was a moral tale illustrative of that which could befall a democracy if the principles on which it was founded were forgotten. She obviously hoped that the new country would take heed to the example of the fall of Rome. She says

Freedom extinguish'd in the fumes of lust
 ...
 Virtue's become the rude barbarian's jest,
 Barter'd for gold, and floating down the tide
 Of foreign vice, stain'd with domestic guilt.. 38

The Epilogue closes the play with a warning to take note of follies before it was too late.

A celebrated, brave, heroick race,
 They'd save, or fill their country, for a place.
 For liberty--a poor unmeaning name,
 They shock the globe, and set the world in flame;
 But, factious, fickle, impious and bold,
 Enervated by luxury and gold,
 Ye've seen extinguish'd... 39

Mrs. Warren was very much concerned with the fact that America was becoming degenerate because of her fondness for luxuries, honor and commerce, and echoed the same sentiments to John Adams in a letter dated July 10, 1814, as she had indicated in her poem "The Sack of Rome". She wrote

Am I mistaken when I observe that the generations of men which have since arisen have been too notoriously negligent in their enquiries relative to the principles and the foundation of the rights and liberties acquired by the labours and blood of their Ancestors, that with few exceptions they appear a very ignorant and narrow minded people. 40

38. Ibid. p. 59.

39. Ibid. Epilogue.

40. MHS, Collections, LXXIII, p. 395.

"The Sack of Rome" obviously had some impact on at least a few people. John Adams commented on the play from London in 1787:

The Sack of Rome, has so much Merit in itself that for the honour of America, I should wish to see it acted on the Stage in London before crowded Audiences. The Dedication of it does so much honour to me, that I should be proud to see it in print even if it could not be acted. ⁴¹

On the other hand, he added that the play would probably not receive acclaim in England for

In short nothing American sells here... There is a universal desire and endeavor to forget America, and an unanimous Resolution to read nothing which shall bring it to their Thoughts. They cannot recollect it, without Pain. ⁴²

"The Ladies of Castile" is like "The Sack of Rome" because it too emphasizes the duty of man to his country. This play however, began to show more dramatic skill than its predecessors for it used Mercy's constant themes of patriotism and the struggle for independence only as a background for a character-hero torn between love of country and love for the sister of his foe. ⁴³

If Mrs. Warren's plays seem a bit harsh for a woman, her poems were more clever and sarcastic and less moralizing and caustic. Her favorite themes were nature, friendship, philosophy and religion but her more important poems were observations on contemporary revolutionary events. Adams

⁴¹. John Adams to Mercy Warren, London, December 25, 1787, in MHS, Col., LXXIII, p. 301.

⁴². Ibid.

⁴³. Warren, Poems, ("The Ladies of Castile"), p. 95.

called on the pen "which has no equal that I know of in this country" of his friend to describe the Boston Tea Party.

By a poetic licensing of the event as a frolic among the Sea Nymphs and Goddesses, Mrs. Warren made so elegant and classical composition out of the crude plot of the arrival of that "bainfull weed" that Adams compared the work favorably with "The Rape of the Lock". ⁴⁴

One of her most delightful poems, "To the Hon. J. Winthrop, Esq. Who, on the American Determination, in 1774, to suspend all Commerce with Britain, (except for the real Necessaries of life) requested a poetical List of the Articles the Ladies might compose under that Head." playfully satirizes the women of America who included among their necessities gauze and tasels, gewgaws, mechlin laces, fringes and jewels, fans, hats, scarfs, ribbons, ruffles and who considered curls, crimping irons, stomachers and hoods their sex's due. She enquires:

But what's the anguish of whold towns in tears,
Or trembling citities groaning out their fears?
The state may totter on proud ruin's brink,
The sword be brandish'd or the bark may sink;
Yet shall Clarissa check her wanton pride,
And lay her female ornaments aside?
Quit all the shining pomp, the gay parade,
The costly trappings that adorn the maid?
What ! all the aid of foreign looms refuse! ⁴⁵

No doubt pride was checked and women learned to content themselves with home-spun linsey-woolsey and domestic tea.

Mrs. Warren continuously reminded her countrymen of the value of that for which they fight and attain and the relative

44. December 5, 1773, in MHS, Col, LXXII, p. 18.

45. Warren, Poems, p. 208.

unimportance of their small complaints

Who, death, in its most hideous forms, can dare,
Rather than live vain fickle for the sport,
Amidst the panders of a tyrant's court;
With a long list of gen'rous, worthy men,
Who spurn the yoke, and servitude disdain,
Who nobly struggle in a vicious age
To stem the torrent of despotic rage.⁴⁶

In her poem "Simplicity", Mercy Warren emphasized in verse the same ideas she expressed in the "Sack of Rome": the depravity of manners as a consequence of war, the relaxation of government, the acquisition of personal fortunes, the depreciation of currency. These same ideas were expanded and incorporated into the greatest of her endeavors, her History of the American Revolution and her "Observations on the Constitution." It is evident that Mercy had the idea of a History at least 25 years before its publication. Abigail Adams had written Mrs. Warren on August 14, 1777:

Many very many memorable events which ought to be handed down to posterity will be buried in oblivion, merely for want of a proper Hand to record them; ...I have always been sorry that a certain person who once put their Hand to the pen, should be discouraged, and give up so important a service...Many things would have been recorded by the penetrating genius of that person which, thro the multiplicity of events and the avocations of the times, will wholly escape the notice of any future Historian.⁴⁷

Without a doubt Mercy was well qualified for an endeavor such as Mrs. Adams suggested she might undertake. Her literary accomplishments in the cause of the revolution had been praised by many important men of her age, she was informed on the

⁴⁶. Warren, Poems, p. 208.

⁴⁷. MHS, Col., LXXII, p. 358.

politics foreign by virtue of a correspondance with Adams who was United States Ambassador abroad, and on politics domestic through her husband James, she had an interest in and to some extent an understanding of events, and most important, she had the leisure time to devote to such a task and the financial resources to see a book through to its publication.

Later letters indicate that Mrs. Warren had moral support in her plan. Benjamin Lincoln wrote to her from Boston on March 25, 1890:

I am pleased with the information that you are attempting the history of the late important transaction of this country which led to its separation from Great Britain. It must be considered as a fortunate circumstance, indeed when there unites in the historian the means of the best information, the power of perfectly preserving the materials, an ability pleasingly to arrange them and a disposition to undertake the laborous task... My public papers are at your command. ⁴⁸

Thomas Jefferson wrote her from Washington on Feb. 8, 1805:

...he learns with great satisfaction that Mrs. Warren's attention has been so long turned to the events which have been passing. the last thirty years will furnish a more instructive lesson to mankind than any equal period known in history. he has no doubt the work she has prepared will be equally useful to our country and honourable to herself. ⁴⁹

Mrs. Warren began her history as a record of events from her own experience and correspondance rather than an interpretation of events. She hoped to trace the origin of the revolution, to review the characters who effected it, justify

⁴⁸. MHS Coll., LXXIII, p. 317-318.

⁴⁹. Ibid., p. 345.

The full title of Mrs. Warren's work, The History of the Rise, Progress and Termination of the Revolution Interspersed with Biographical, Political and Moral Observations fully expresses the scope of her three volume history. The first volume traces the rise of the Revolution from the reactions and protests to the Stamp Act of 1765 until Washington's winter encampment at Valley Forge in 1777. The Second Volume continues a description of the battles of the Revolution, characterizes the personalities involved in the campaigns and concludes with the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown October 19, 1781. The last volume is a commentary on the world situation from the successful completion of the Revolution until the close of the century. Mrs. Warren describes foreign attitudes toward the revolution and their acceptance of the new American republic. She also comments on the climate of opinion in America after the war and emphasizes the necessity of preserving those ideals which prompted the satisfactory separation from the tyranny of Britain.

In stating the causes for the rise of the Revolution Mrs. Warren makes it clear that American opposition was not based on a fear or hatred of Britain. She emphasizes that a close bond connected England and America by virtue of a sameness of habits, manners, religion, laws, and government.^a The colonies based their right to revolution against the

a. Warren, History, I, 304.

the "Mother Country" on a precedent of English law and philosophy. The two basic arguments were vocalized by the Virginia and Massachusetts colonies. Virginians asserted their rights as men, Massachusetts founded their claims on the basis of their natural rights as Englishmen. ^b

After a discussion of revolutionary ideology, Mrs. Warren singled out important events or turning points in the pre-war years. Most important of all the events in cementing a union of the colonies according to her was the establishment of the committees of correspondance. ^c The idea of a circular letter to connect the interests and coordinate the action of the thirteen colonies may have been formed in 1768 at her own fireside according to one authority. ^d Mrs. Warren cited the Declaration of Independence as an important step because it established the status of the colonies as a distinct people independent of every foreign power and capable of carrying on war operations and negotiations with other nations. ^e

b. Ibid., 311.

c. Ibid., 110.

d. Anthony, First Lady, 77.

e. Warren, History, I, 109.

the principles of the opposition and the final separation from the parent state, and finally to indicate her anti-federalist leanings in order to preserve the inalienable rights of man.

As she stated in her "Address to the Inhabitants" which prefaced her history:

At a period when every manly arm was occupied, and every trait of talent or activity engaged, either in the cabinet or the field, apprehensive, that amidst the sudden convulsions, crowded scenes, and rapid changes, that flowed in quick succession, many circumstances might escape the more busy and active members of society, I have been induced to improve the leisure Providence had lent, to record as they passed, in the following pages, the new and unexperienced events as exhibited in a land previously blessed with peace, liberty, simplicity and virtue.

Connected by nature, friendship and every social tie with many of the first patriots, and most influential characters on the continent; in the habits of most influential confidential and epistolary intercourse with several gentlemen employed abroad in the most distinguished stations, and with others since elevated to the highest grades of rank and distinction, I had the best means of information....The most interesting circumstances were collected, active characters portrayed, the principles of the times developed, and changes marked. 50

Mrs. Warren confined her three volume History of the American Revolution to the thirty-five year span between the Stamp Act of 1765 and the close of the century. Volume ends with Washington at Valley Forge, Volume II with Cornwallis at Yorktown, and Volume III with her comments on the world situation in general and the American situation in particular. She began by indicating the close bond which had connected England and America and compared their relationship to that

50. Warren, History, p. iii-iv.

between the "revered parent and the dutiful child." ⁵¹
The two countries she said were connected by "interest, by a sameness of habits, manners, religion, laws, and government." Americans visiting England always spoke of their journey as "going home." ⁵² Despite her love of the mother country, however, she was a staunch supporter of the revolution. In accounting for the break she tried to be as objective as possible and distinguished in the arguments for a move for independence:

It has been observed that Virginia and the Massachusetts made the first opposition to parliamentary measures, on different grounds. The Virginians, in their resolves, came forward, conscious of their own independence, and at once asserted their rights as men. The Massachusetts generally founded their claims on the rights of British subjects, and the privileges of their English ancestors. ⁵³

She regarded the Declaration of Independence as an important step for

everything stood on a new and respectable footing both with regard to the operations of war or negotiations with foreign powers... Americans...were a distinct people, who claimed the rights, the usages, the faith, and the respect of nations uncontrolled by any foreign power. . ⁵⁴

She considered that no step contributed so much to cement the union of the colonies and to the final acquisition of independence as the establishment of committees of correspondence. ⁵⁵

It has been suggested that the idea of the circular letter

⁵¹. Warren, History, I, 304; Observations on the New Constitution and on the Federal and State Conventions, (Boston, 1788), p. 18.

⁵². Warren, History, I, 304.

⁵³. Ibid., 311

⁵⁴. Ibid., 109

was formed in 1768 at her own fireside and that she might have participated in the discussions.⁵⁵ At any rate it established a "connection of interest and union of action."⁵⁶ Her description of the Boston Tea Party is particularly vivid and a break in the usual stilted unimaginative style which characterizes the rest of the book.

there appeared a great number of persons, clad like the aborigines of the wilderness, with tomahawks in their hands, and clubs on their shoulders, who without the least molestation marched through the streets with silent solemnity, and amidst innumerable spectators, proceeded to the wharves, boarded the ships, demanded the keys, and with much deliberation knocked open the chests, and emptied several thousand weight of the finest teas into the ocean. No opposition was made, though surrounded by the king's ships; all was silence and dismay.

This done, the procession returned through the town in the same order and solemnity as observed in the outset of their attempt.⁵⁷

Most of the first volume was filled with descriptions of actual battles and events of the revolution. Her statements were for the most part backed up by letters, acknowledgments and footnotes. The main weakness, however, was that Mrs. Warren seemed unable to distinguish between the relative value of events.

The second volume continued the narrative of the war and displayed an understanding of the British situation. Mrs. Warren was aware of the fact that the British generals "did not harmonize in opinions: their councils at this time were confused, and their plans indecisive."⁵⁸ She included

55. Anthony, First Lady, 77.

56. Warren, History, I, 110.

57. Ibid., 107.

58. Ibid., II, 379.

many actual conversations and glimpses behind the battle line. In one instance she quotes a letter from Cornwallis to Henry Clinton indicating the importance of taking Virginia to the successful completion of the war:

until Virginia was subdued, they could not reduce North Carolina, or have any certain hold of the back country of South Carolina; the ban of navigation rendering it impossible to maintain a sufficient army in either of those provinces, at a considerable distance from the coast; and the men and riches of Virginia furnishing ample supplies to the rebel Southern army. ⁵⁹

She indicated that even at Yorktown there was no consistent plan of conquest either arranged or executed. ⁶⁰

The third volume was devoted mainly to a sketch of the views of foreign nations on the new country and their diplomatic and secret dealings with her. Mrs. Warren knew that the French had aided the colonies not out of sympathy to her cause but as part of a Bourbon objective to humble the power and pride of Great Britain through the loss of her colonies. ⁶¹ She noted the position of Holland whom Great Britain claimed as an ally but who in actual fact favored America. ⁶² She claimed further that most of the European powers had either secretly or openly espoused the cause of the colonies not as a result of a genuine love of liberty but out of regard for their own interests and ambitions. ⁶³

Following her description of the eight year seige and the period when "the benign and heavenly voice of harmony soothed their wounded feelings" Mercy turned to describing what the government should be and what pitfalls it might

⁵⁹. Ibid., 371-72.

⁶⁰. Ibid., 367.

⁶¹. Ibid., 400.

⁶². Ibid., fii, 272.

⁶³. Ibid., 193.

Mrs. Warren's History of the Revolution is valuable not only as a contemporary and detailed account of the revolution but also as a biographical sketch of prominent revolutionary figures. John Adams had termed ladies as "the most infallible judges of Characters" and Mercy Warren tried her hand at the task.^a It was her aim to write without partiality to her own friends or those of her country, "to state facts correctly and to draw characters with truth and candor".^b Her descriptions of George Washington and Samuel Adams illustrate her frank and candid observations. She termed Washington a gentleman of family and fortune and of a polite but not a learned education; a man of good judgment, good humour and dignity.^c She called Samuel Adams a gentleman from a good but not a wealthy family and commented on his wisdom, understanding and firmness in pursuing the cause of civil and religious liberty.^d Mrs. Warren appeared particularly kind to her relatives, however. Her brother (John Otis she believed was the first champion of American freedom and the founder of the revolution.^e On the other hand, Mrs. Warren was harsh on those with whom she did not agree. Thomas Paine received severe criticism from her pen for adulterating his ideas on government with a disregard for the divine hand of providence in the movement of events.^f

a. MHS, Coll., LXXII, 201.

b. MHS, Coll., IV, 329.

c. Warren, History, I, 23.

d. Ibid, 212.

e. Ibid., 47.

f. Ibid., 108.

It is quite obvious that Mrs. Warren condemned him because of his atheism.

Her former friend John Adams was the brunt of her harshest criticism. She described him as

a statesman of penetration and ability, whose passions and prejudices were sometimes too strong for his sagacity and judgement....unfortunately for himself and his country, he became enamoured with the British Constitution and the government, manners, and laws of the nation, that a partiality for monarchy appeared, which was inconsistent with his former professions of republicanism. ^g

The exaggerated and unfair attack was a severe blow to Adams both personally and politically. On July 11, 1807 Adams wrote the first of a series of ten angry letters to Mrs. Warren in answer to her evaluation of his political ideas and in criticism of her political observations on the course and legacy of the American Revolution. He complained particularly about her inability to distinguish between the importance of events and illustrated his point by calling attention to the fact that she had skimmed over the significant establishment of a maritime and naval military power. ^h After several specific examples of her misrepresentation and misinterpretation, Adams concluded that

History is not the Province of the Ladies. These three Volumes nevertheless contain many Facts, worthy of Preservation. Little Passions and Prejudices, want of Information, false Information, want of Experience, erroneous Judgment, and frequent Partiality, are among the Faults. ⁱ

There were others, however, who disagreed with Adam's statement that "history is not the province of the ladies."

g. Warren, History, III, 327.

i. MHS Coll., LXXIII, 380.

h. MHS, Coll., IV, 318.

One Massachusetts official claimed that the facts of Mrs. Warren's History were true and the characters justly described.^j Another called it readable, well written and polished.^k Thomas Jefferson believed it a valuable contribution of facts and principles not before stated to the public.^l

The fact that at least a few prominent political figures praised Mrs. Warren's history becomes more significant in light of the fact that it was not the first attempt to describe the Revolutionary War. William Gordon had published his History of the Rise, Progress and Establishment of the Independence of the United States of America: including An Account of the late war; and of the Thirteen Colonies from their Origin to that period. In 1788, David Ramsay had written a two volume History of the American Revolution in 1793, and John Marshall had his Life of Washington published in 1805.

William Gordon was an English clergyman who sided with the colonists in their struggle against Great Britain. Whereas Mercy Warren had described the revolution as a singular event, Gordon took a broader viewpoint and showed "the principles on which states and empires have risen to power, and the errors by which they have fallen into decay." Although he did not have the wealth of material available to Mrs. Warren, his work was scholarly and dependable. Only after editing in England did it lose some of its interpretative value.^m Gordon's easy style and his technique of making the revolution more alive by

j. MHS. Coll., LXXIII, 282.

k. Ibid., 350.

l. Ibid., 348.

m. Anthony, First Lady, 204.

using a series of letters rather than a series of chapters is in direct contrast to Mrs. Warren's stiff classical style and unimaginative narration. Mrs. Warren had pointed out as the important events of the Revolution the establishment of the committees of correspondance and the Declaration of Independence. Gordon gave more emphasis to the impact of Thomas Paine's pamphlet Common Sense in laying the foundation of the Revolution than many other events. He called Common Sense a well-timed attack on kingship "in unison with the sentiments and feelings of the people."ⁿ Read by almost every American, the pamphlet proved the necessity, advantages and practicability of revolution. In describing the Boston Tea Party, Gordon was more specific than Mrs. Warren. He included the number dressed as Indians, the length of time taken to unload the tea, the number of chests thrown into the water but did so in such a way that the facts did not overwhelm the story.^o In short, William Gordon was a better storyteller than was Mercy Warren but cannot be called better historian.

n. William Gordon, History, (London, 1788), I, 275.

o. Ibid., 341

expect. She opposed the Jay treaty saying that America should maintain a character of her own away from the squabbles and confusion and miseries of the European world. ⁶⁴ She emphasized the necessity of a government based on order, authority, obedience, wisdom and justice. ⁶⁵ Lastly she voiced the fear that the republicanism cherished by the philosopher and admired by the statesman might dwindle into theory

and when called into operation, the combinations of interest, ambition, or party prejudice, too generally destroy the principle, though the name and the form may be preserved. ⁶⁶

The full title of Mrs Warren's book is The History of the Rise, Progress and Termination of the American Revolution Interspersed with Biographical, Political and Moral Observations.

The main weakness of her work is precisely the fact that there are many more observations than there is selective objective history. This biographical information is of course valuable; it has provided a good insight into the characters active in the revolution through the eyes of a woman who knew them personally and intimately. And as John Adams said " You Ladies are the most infallible judges of Characters, I think." ⁶⁷ She termed Washington a gentleman of family and fortune and of a polite but not a learned education; a man of good judgment, good humour and dignity. ⁶⁸ She said that James Otis "may justly claim the honor of laying the foundation of a revolution.. the first champion of American freedom. ⁶⁹ She characterized Sam- Adams as:

a gentleman of good education, a decent family, but no fortune. Early nurtured in the principles of a

⁶⁴. Ibid., 381
⁶⁵. Ibid., 434.

⁶⁶. Ibid. 279.

⁶⁷. MHS, Coll., LXXII, 201.

⁶⁸. Warren, History, 23

⁶⁹. Ibid., 47.

civil and religious liberty, he possessed a quick understanding, a cool head, stern manners, a smooth address, and a Roman-like firmness, united with that sagacity and penetration that would have made a figure in conclave. ⁷⁰

Mrs. Warren did not have many good things to say about Tom Paine the author of the pamphlet "Common Sense" which found such widespread appeal in the colonies. She said:

The lovers of liberty on reasonable and just principles, were exceedingly hurt that a man so capable as was Mr. Paine, of exhibiting political truth in pleasing garb, and defending the rights of man with eloquence and precision, should prostitute his talents to ridicule divine revelation, and destroy the brightest hopes of a rational and immortal agent. ⁷¹

Praise of Mrs. Warren's History came from many prominent men. James Winthrop wrote to her on February 26, 1787 many years before publication

It appears to me that the style is nervous and perspicuous and flowing. The facts are justly and methodically narrated. The characters, which indeed form the most difficult part of history, appear to be accurately defined, and so far as I have had opportunity to be acquainted with them to be perfectly just. ⁷²

John Winthrop wrote on February 4, 1807:

I cannot avoid writing to express the pleasure I derived from reading your history of the revolution. It is a well digested and polished narrative, and gave great satisfaction. ⁷³

Thomas Jefferson wrote her on April 26, 1806 that

he anticipates much pleasure from the perusal of a work which taking truth, both of fact and principle, for its general guide, will furnish in addition original matter of value, not before given to the public. ⁷⁴

70. Ibid., 212.

73. Ibid., 350.

71. Ibid., 108.

74. Ibid., 348.

72. MHS, Coll, LXXIII, p. 282

John Adams did not agree with his contemporaries.

Although he had been a close friend and constant correspondant, he found fault with many parts of the History but especially with her remarks on his own aims and accomplishments. Following his earlier advice that she "delineate characters truly, let the censure fall where it will" she had

uniformly endeavored to write impartially, to state facts correctly and to draw characters with truth and candor, whether the friends or the foes of my country, or the enemies of myself and family, or of those connected by the dearest ties of nature and friendship. ⁷⁵

Mr. Adams was disturbed over the fact that Mrs. Warren had called him

a statesman of penetration and ability, whose passions and prejudices were sometimes too strong for his sagacity and judgement...unfortunately for himself and his country, he became enamoured with the British Constitution and the government manners, and laws of the nation, that a partiality for monarchy appeared, which was inconsistent with his former professions of republicanism. ⁷⁶

His pride hurt, Adams sent Mercy Warren ten angry letters beginning on July 11, 1807 which she received with "proper feminine dignity." ⁷⁷ The long correspondance initiated by Adams is valueless not only as a criticism of her work but because of the inclusion of many interesting insights on our diplomatic history. He complained for one thing that:

the boldest, most dangerous and most important Measures and Epochs in the History of the New World The Commencement of an independent National Establishment of a new maritime and Naval military Power should be thus carelessly and confusedly hurried over? ⁷⁸

⁷⁵. July 16, 1807 in MHS Coll, IV, 329

⁷⁶. Warren, History, III, 327.

⁷⁷. MHS Coll, IV, 318.

⁷⁸. Ibid., 380.

He then added that

History is not the Province of the Ladies. These three Volumes nevertheless contain many Facts, worthy of Preservation. Little Passions and Prejudices, want of Information, false Information, want of Experience, erroneous Judgment, and frequent Partiality, are among the Faults. 79

Mercy Warren was not the only figure contemporary with the Revolution who wrote a history of that event. Her history was indeed placed on the same shelf in the Library of Congress with those of Gordon, Ramsay and Marshall. 80 Although Gordon and Ramsay are better remembered than Mrs Warren and are easier to read. they had at hand not nearly the amount of information that she had.

William Gordon's History of the Rise, Progress and Establishment of the Independence of the United States of America: including An Account of the late war; and of the Thirteen Colonies from their Origin to that period, was a four volume work published in London in 1788. Gordon was an English clergyman and sympathizer of the American Revolution. The author hoped "to show the principles on which states and empires have risen to power, and the errors by which they have fallen into decay." He told his history in the form of letters in order to make each event alive and contemporary and enclosed several complete maps. He agreed with Mrs. Warren that Europe was in favor of the American struggle. 81 He disagreed with her evaluation of Tom Paine's contribution

79. John Adams to Elbridge Gerry, Quincy, April 17, 1813, in MHS Coll., LXXIII, p. 380.

80. Samuel Latham Mitchell to Mercy Warren, Washington November 28, 1808, in MHS Coll., LXXIII, p. 374.

81. William Gordon, History, 4 vol. (London; 1788), 219

and said that Paine had made a well-timed attack on kingship and had proved the necessity, advantages and practicability of revolution.

In unison with the sentiments and feelings of the people, it has produced most astonishing effects; and has been received with vast applause; read by almost every American; and recommended as a work replete with truth, and against which none but the partial and prejudiced can form any objections. ⁸²

His description of the Boston Tea Party is much more specific and detailed than that of Mrs. Warren.

David Ramsay's History of the American Revolution appeared in two volumes in London in 1793. Dr. Ramsay collected the materials for his history in 1782-83, and 1785-86 when as a member of Congress he had access to all the official papers. Unfortunately he was restricted in sources and leaned too heavily on the ones he had. In some instances he copied straight from his materials. ⁸³ Ramsay unlike Mercy concentrated on a simple narrative of events and gave explanations rather than judgments of events. He suggested that England could have maintained her commerce and saved herself great expense if she had declared her colonies free and independent after the Declaration of Independence. ⁸⁴ He commented on the continuation of law and government in the colonies despite a change of allegiance:

The genius of the Americans, their republican habits and sentiments, naturally led them to substitute the majesty of the people, in lieu of discarded royalty...Such a portion of power

82. David Ramsay, History. 2 vol, (London, 1793), 275.

83. Anthony, First Lady, p. 204.

84. Ramsay, History, 347.

had at all times been exercised by the people and their representatives, that the change of sovereignty was hardly perceptible and the revolution took place without violence or convulsion. ⁸⁵

Ramsay did agree with Mrs. Warren, the Revolution resulted in the derangement of the institution of religion, the depreciation of paper currency, the improvement of literary, political and military talents, and the inferiority of moral character. ⁸⁶

Mercy Warren unlike Ramsay and Gordon had not confined her history to that of the Revolution only, she included her feelings on the principles and establishment of government on which the new nation would be based. Like Jefferson she felt that government existed for the protection and safety of the people and not for the profit of one man or class. ⁸⁷ She believed with Locke and Jefferson that man is free and has certain rights which must be guaranteed by a virtuous government. The Jeffersonians for the most part restricted themselves to pamphlet warfare and left history writing to the well-to-do lawyers most of whom were Federalists. One such attack on the Federalists appeared in the Independent Gazeteer in Philadelphia May 10, 1778. It was entitled "The Political Creed of Every Federalist:"

I believe in the infallibility all-sufficient wisdom and infinite goodness of the late Convention... I believe that aristocracy is the best form of Government...I believe that to speak, write,

85. Ibid., 348.

86. Ibid., 354.

87. Warren, Observations, 4-5.

read, think, or hear anything against the proposed government is damnable heresy, rebellion and high treason against the sovereign majesty of the Convention. And lastly, I believe that every person who differs from me in belief is an infernal villain. ⁸⁸

Mercy Warren ^{is} unique then for the very fact that she based her interpretation of the revolution and the subsequent events on the anti-federalist viewpoint--^athe factor which has obscured her book. Mrs. Warren had not expressed herself only in her history, however, ^{for} much earlier she had written a fifteen page pamphlet, "Observations on the New Constitution, and on the Federal and State Conventions by a Columbian Patriot." The "Columbian Patriot" was long thought to have been Elbridge Gerry but the style was so unlike his simple, direct, practical manner of speaking that her authorship later came to light. On September 28, 1787, (11) days after the Constitutional Convention adjourned Mrs. Warren wrote to her friend Mrs. Macaulay of England, to describe her own theories of government, that her inspiratress [?] might understand the anti-federalist viewpoint and the consequences which might result from the hasty adoption of the new form of government. She wrote:

Our situation is truly delicate and critical. On the one hand, we stand in need of a strong federal government, founded on principles that will support the prosperity and union of the Colonies. On the other, we have struggled for liberty and made costly sacrifices at her shrine and there are still many among us who revere her name too much to relinquish, beyond a certain medium, the rights of man for the dignity of government. ⁸⁹

⁸⁸. MHS, Proceedings, "Ratification of the Federal Constitution in Massachusetts", LXIV, (March 1931), 148.

⁸⁹. Ibid., 162.

The "Observations on the Constitution" was called a well composed piece by the Albany Anti-Federalist Commission who wrote the New York Commission on April 12, 1788, but it was termed too sublime and florid in style for the common people to read.⁹⁰ Despite its elaborate, formal manner and extensive vocabulary many read the pamphlet and believed with Mercy that

assent to the ratification of a constitution, which, by the undefined meaning of some parts, and the ambiguities of expression in others, is dangerously adapted to the purposes of an immediate aristocratic tyranny; that from the difficulty, if not impracticability of its operation, must soon terminate in the Most uncontrouled despotism.⁹¹

For the most part, however, those who agreed with her were the older patriots, the men who had been among the most active participants in urging independence.⁹² Gerry, Adams, Winthrop, and Sam^l Adams were 65, James Warren and George Mason, 61, R.H. Lee, 57 and Henry, 51. Charles Warren suggests that this was the result of an unwillingness to see another strong government built up even by their own countrymen.⁹² The Federalists were on the other hand men of the younger generation who were lukewarm in urging independence. Madison was 36, Gouvernor Morris. 35. Jay. 30 and Pinckney. 29. The exceptions were George Washington and Ben^l Franklin,⁹³

The weakness of the anti-federalist program was that it had nothing to offer in place of the proposed constitution. Its ^{advocates} ~~Its~~ contented themselves with a mere rejection of the plan.

90. MHS, Proceedings, LXIV, p. 144.

91. Warren, Observations, p. 4.

92. MHS, Proceedings, LXIV, 145.

93. Ibid.

Mercy Warren was no exception. She expressed her idea of government in her pamphlet with a wish

to see the Confederated States bound together by the most indissoluble union, but without renouncing their separate sovereign ties and independence, and becoming tributaries to a consolidated fabrick of aristocratick tyranny. 94

She felt that not enough power or resources were left to the states. 95

She feared those who would assume control,

But it will not be many years before the inhabitants of the United States will see the error of their precipitant and mistaken zeal, and their misplaced confidence which has brought them down to a level with other nations by the intrigues of individuals.

The whole continent may be duped out of their liberties by the plausibility of pretended patriots, and the intrigues of statesmen of more address than integrity. 96

She further suggested that under the Constitution a few could gain and retain control. Annual elections which would protect the rights of the individual were not provided for, there was no provision for rotation in office a fact which could result in indefinite tenure of office, there was inadequate representation → the system of electors resulted in aristocratic control, the six year senatorial term made it possible for these men to forget their constituents, there was no bill of rights, Congress could determine its own salary. In general, there was no security for the rights of the individual against life office-holders, and no guarantee that he would be adequately represented. 97

94. Warren, Observations, 12.

95. Ibid., 8.

96. MHS, Pro., LXIV, 184.

97. Warren, Obs., 6-11.

Thirdly she was opposed to the proposed structure or division of powers suggested by the Constitution. The executive and the legislative branches she termed "dangerously blended" and given indefinite ambiguous and vague powers. In addition there were established no defined limits to judiciary powers and the Supreme Federal Court had too much power over life liberty and property. To exercise equal and equitable powers of government by a single legislature over such a wide territory as was the United States was both difficult and impractical she said.⁹⁸ She opposed a standing army the "Nursery of vice and the bane of liberty" for thus defense and security would be not under civil authority but under the monarchy or aristocracy.

Finally she condemned the manner in which the Convention itself assembled, carried on its business and presented its proposals. She was concerned with the fact that the drafting of the Constitution had been such a hurried process and that it had been so secretive. No member of the convention could make communication with his own constituents or to men of ability in other states. He could not even have copies of resolutions passed during the convention.⁹⁹ In a high-handed authoritarian manner, the Constitution had been recommended to the people without the advice of Congress or of the state legislatures and had been forced through before it was thoroughly understood.¹⁰⁰

On the matter of the new plan of government, Mrs. Macaulay differed with her American friend. She wrote:

98. Ibid.,

99. Ibid. 15.

100. Ibid., 6-11

It is my opinion that were some plan of the kind now proposed by convention to be adopted and carried into execution and were your people less fond of Commerce and European luxuries would they attend to the cultivation of their Lands and employ their industry in those manufactures which are necessary to the comforts of life and were strict prohibitions made against the consumption of any foreign manufactures you would in a short time be the happiest and the greatest people in the world. 101

Despite the astute political judgments of Mercy Warren in both her history of the revolution and her criticism of the Constitution she is remembered for neither. The main reason for her obscurity is aptly phrased by Charles Beard in the preface to his Economic Interpretation of the Constitution-- our history has been written by Federalists-- Mercy Warren was an anti-federalist. In addition her History came out at the same time as Chief Justice John Marshall's Life of Washington, a highly federalist account. As Mrs. Judith Sargent Murray wrote:

The Life of Washington, it is said, forestals, if not wholly precludes, the utility of this history; and very many urge the political principles attributed to the otherwise admired writer, as a reason for withholding their signatures. Genius revolts from an idea so contracted; but Genius is not possessed by the multitude, and Mrs. Warren must be apprized, that in this Commercial Country, a taste for Literature has not yet obtained the ascendancy. 102

In the face of such competition Mercy Warren stood little chance to win approval after her death. Yet the intellect and political influence of this remarkable woman who never saw a professional actor or dramatic performance

101. MHS Coll., LXXIII.

102. Ibid. Franklin Place, June 1, 1805, p. 346.

yet wrote plays for the stage, whose whole world extended from Boston to Providence, yet wrote of attitudes beyond the seas, who knew no language but her own, cannot be denied. She was one of the first to urge the rights of women as individuals and citizens--not as feminists but as active and patriotic citizens--and who showed that women could contribute to the world of literature and politics.

One of the two major biographers of Mercy Otis Warren said

Her full nature...spent itself in channels which had no great name on the earth. But the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive; for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts. ¹⁰³

If Mercy Warren had set out to draw her own character it is possible she would have written

Affable without familiarity, gracious to her equals, and condescending to those whom the social order dominated her inferiors; of an heroic temper, which was nevertheless sometimes shaken by the adverse currents of a nervous organism; deeply affectionate, and yet, save in rare cases, studiously reserved. Her intellectual habit was distinguished by an extraordinary acumen in the judgment of character and an ability to portray it. She was possessed of vivacity of speech, and unvarying address in action. ¹⁰⁴

~~Thus~~ at the age of 86 in October 1814, Mrs. Warren died, still unimpaired in intellect. ¹⁰⁵ She died with no blaze of glory around her and nothing to catch fire later. She had left her mark on those who knew her, however, George and Martha Washington, John and Abigail Adams, Jefferson. She had left ideas written in many newspapers--ideas not of edu-

103. Alice Brown, Mercy Warren, (New York, 1896), p. 312.

104. Ibid., 233

105. Hutcheson, Mercy Warren, p. 401.

cation and child rearing but on aristocratic control of government, political affairs both foreign and domestic, the dignity and worth of the individual. She had rare opportunities for political and personal influence and made the most of both. She made a great contribution to the propaganda warfare before and during the Revolution. Afterwards she made no less a contribution as a patriot of a lost cause. That she is forgotten today is not important; that she made the most of her talents in her own time remains.

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Contains much information from the papers of the author's ancestress which has not been published elsewhere. Definitely proves that Mrs. Warren was the author of "Observations on the Constitution."