

*A Finding Aid to the **Deborah Sampson Collection***

Date Range: 1778-2004

Compiled by Arielle Nathanson,

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Summary

Creator: The Sharon Public Library

Title: Deborah Sampson Collection

Dates: 1778-2004

Extent: 2.9 linear feet, including: 1 T-Shirt, 1 Diary, 2 Sculptures

Abstract: The papers of this collection date from 1778 to 2004, with the bulk consisting of photocopied pictures, articles and historic documents. The rest of the materials include correspondence, biographical essays, articles in newsprint and magazines, and genealogical documents.

Language: English

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information: Some items in this collection were donated by Eugene Tappan and others by unknown individuals.

Accruals: As Deborah Sampson is a hotly researched topic, accruals at random intervals are possible.

Restrictions on Access: The physical Deborah Sampson Collection may only be accessed with the permission of the Sharon Public Library.

Conditions Governing Use: The Deborah Sampson Collection is owned by the Sharon Public Library. It may be used for research, study and scholarship purposes. Permission to quote, publish or copy these materials requires the permission of the Sharon Public Library, which can be contacted at: <https://www.sharonpubliclibrary.org/> or 781-784-1578.

Preferred Citation: Deborah Sampson Collection, 1778-2004, Sharon Public Library, [item].

Biographical Note

Deborah Sampson is known throughout Massachusetts as a hero of the American Revolution. During a time when women were not permitted outside of their domestic sphere, she disguised herself as a man named Robert Shurtleff and fought valiantly in battle. She was the only woman to be given a military pension for her war efforts.

Deborah Sampson, born on December 17, 1760, in Plympton, Massachusetts, near Plymouth, was one of seven children born to Jonathan Sampson Jr. and Deborah

(Bradford) Sampson. Their lineage traced back to prominent Pilgrims: Jonathan's roots connected him to Myles Standish and Priscilla Alden, while his wife's heritage linked her to Massachusetts Governor William Bradford as his great-granddaughter. Despite their illustrious ancestry, the Sampson family grappled with financial hardships. When Jonathan failed to return from a sea voyage, his wife, now impoverished, had no choice but to disperse their children into various households. At the tender age of 10, young Deborah became an indentured servant under Deacon Benjamin Thomas, a farmer in Middleborough with a sizable family. By the time she turned 18 and had fulfilled her indenture, Sampson, who was largely self-taught, took on roles as a teacher during the summer sessions of 1779 and 1780 and as a weaver during the winter months.

In 1782, amidst the ongoing turmoil of the Revolutionary War, the devoted Deborah Sampson assumed a male identity, going by the name Robert Shurtleff, and enlisted in the Fourth Massachusetts Regiment. Her assignment placed her at West Point, New York, where she was incorporated into Captain George Webb's Company of Light Infantry. Her mission was nothing short of perilous: she was tasked with scouting neutral territory to evaluate the British military presence, both in terms of troops and supplies, in Manhattan—a location that General George Washington was considering for a potential attack.

In June of that same year, Sampson, alongside two sergeants, led approximately 30 infantrymen on an expedition that frequently brought them into direct confrontations, often on a one-on-one basis, with Tory loyalists. She even took charge of a daring raid on a Tory residence, which resulted in the capture of 15 men. In line with the narratives of many Revolutionary War veterans, Sampson also asserted that she participated in the siege of Yorktown. During this period, she was purportedly involved in various activities, including digging trenches, aiding in the assault on a British redoubt, and enduring the relentless barrage of enemy cannon fire. However, the credibility of Sampson's claim regarding her involvement at Yorktown was recently cast into doubt by the discovery of a neighbor's diary in 2019.

For more than two years, Deborah Sampson's true gender remained concealed, despite several close encounters. Even when she suffered a gash to her forehead from a sword and took a gunshot wound to her left thigh, she managed to extract the pistol ball herself, revealing nothing of her secret. However, her ultimate unmasking occurred roughly a year and a half into her military service, in Philadelphia. It was during an epidemic that she fell ill, necessitating her admission to a hospital, where she subsequently lost consciousness.

Following her honorable discharge on October 23, 1783, Deborah Sampson returned to Massachusetts. On April 7, 1785, she married Benjamin Gannett from Sharon, and

together they had three children: Earl, Mary, and Patience. Her life story was documented in 1797 by Herman Mann in a book titled "The Female Review: or, Memoirs of an American Young Lady." Additionally, she received a military pension from the state of Massachusetts. While much of Sampson's post-army life followed the typical path of a farmer's wife, she embarked on an extraordinary venture in 1802. This year-long lecture tour, in which she shared her wartime experiences, marked her as the first woman in America to undertake such a venture. On occasion, she even appeared in full military regalia.

Four years after Deborah Sampson's passing at the age of 66, her husband petitioned Congress for compensation as the spouse of a soldier. Although the couple was not married during her military service, in 1837, a congressional committee recognized that her role in the history of the Revolution stood as an unparalleled example of female heroism, fidelity, and courage. Consequently, her husband was granted the compensation, although he passed away before receiving it.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of this collection date from 1778 to 2004, with the bulk consisting of photocopied pictures, articles and historic documents. The rest of the materials include correspondence, biographical essays, articles in newsprint and magazines, and genealogical documents. This collection is arranged into nine series by document genre or subject and presented alphabetically. Subseries are ordered by document genre, subject or author and are also presented alphabetically. Notable materials in this collection include: Deborah Sampson's diary, an account written by her great niece and photocopies of her pension documents.

Series 1: Black Controversy. The materials in this series date from 1855 to 1976. Materials are organized chronologically.

Series 2: Correspondence. The materials in this series date from 1778 to 2004. The most notable materials include photocopies of letters written by Deborah Sampson with her signature as Robert Shurtleff.

Series 3: Genealogy. The materials in this series date from the 1800s to 1970. Subseries are arranged by document genre and ordered alphabetically.

Series 4: History. The materials date from 1802 to 1988. Subseries are arranged by document genre and ordered alphabetically. Materials within each subseries are ordered alphabetically by document genre or subject. Notable materials include: Deborah Sampson's diary, obituary and printed copies of the address she gave in 1802.

Series 5: Maps. The materials in this series are undated.

Series 6: Newspapers. The materials in this series date from 1889 to 1989. Clippings relate to various subjects, such as; Deborah Sampson's life and monuments erected in her honor.

Series 7: Official Documents. The materials in this series date from 1778 to the mid 1800s. Subseries are arranged by document genre and ordered alphabetically. Materials in each subseries are ordered chronologically. Notable materials include: a photocopy of Deborah Sampson's deposition and proof that she was not at Yorktown.

Series 8: Photographs. The materials in this series date from 1961 to 1976. Notable materials include photographs of the: Deborah Sampson coin, unveiling of the Deborah Sampson statue and Deborah Sampson's dress.

Series 9: Published Books and Articles. The materials in this series date from 1866 to 2004. Subseries are arranged by document genre and ordered alphabetically. The materials within each subseries are ordered chronologically where possible. The physical books are organized alphabetically by author's last name and then by year published if necessary.

Series 10: Miscellaneous. The materials in this series date from 1802 to 1986. Subseries are arranged by subject and ordered alphabetically. Notable materials include: the menu from Deborah Sampson's 1802 lecture series and a recently made coat of arms for the Sampsons.

Container List

Series 1: Black Controversy, 1855-1976

Box	Shelf	Folder	Description
1	7.4	1	Documents from the black controversy, 1855-1976

Series 2: Correspondence, 1778-2004

Box	Shelf	Folder	Description
1	7.4	2	Letters written by Deborah Sampson and later researchers, 1778-2004

Series 3: Genealogy, 1800s-1970

Subseries 3.1: Family Trees, Undated

Box	Shelf	Folder	Description
1	7.4	3	Sampson family trees, Undated

Subseries 3.2: Essays, 1800s-1970

Box	Shelf	Folder	Description
1	7.4	4	Essays, 1800s-1970

Subseries 3.3: Other Families, 1903-1960

Box	Shelf	Folder	Description
1	7.4	5	Families with possible distant relations, 1903-1960

Subseries 3.4: Miscellaneous, Undated

Box	Shelf	Folder	Description
1	7.4	6	Miscellaneous Genealogical Notes, Undated

Series 4: History, 1802-1988

Subseries 4.1: Articles Copied by M. M. Copeland, Undated

Box	Shelf	Folder	Description
1	7.4	7	Articles copied from various publications, Undated

Subseries 4.2: Biographies and Obituary of Deborah Sampson, 1804-1988

Box	Shelf	Folder	Description
1	7.4	8	Biographies of Deborah Sampson, 1804-1988

Subseries 4.3: Deborah Sampson Address, Diary and Family Accounts, 1802-1905

Box	Shelf	Folder	Description
Clamshell 1	7.3	N/A	1866 Copy of The Female Review: The Life of Deborah Sampson
Clamshell 2	7.3	N/A	Account of the Deborah Sampson Gannett Dinner by Eugene Tappan, 1902

Clamshell 3	7.3	N/A	Facsimile of Deborah Sampson Gannett's Diary by Eugene Tappan, Early 1900s
Clamshell 4	7.3	N/A	Facsimile of Deborah Sampson Gannett's Diary by Eugene Tappan, Early 1900s
1	7.4	9	Photocopy of Deborah Sampson's Address, 1802-1902
1	7.4	9	Printed Copy of Deborah Sampson's Address, 1905

Subseries 4.4: General History, 1858-1971

Box	Shelf	Folder	Description
1	7.4	10	Articles and Essays, 1858-1971

Subseries 4.5: Pension Related Documents, 1837-1988

Box	Shelf	Folder	Description
1	7.4	11	Photocopies of Deborah Sampson's pension, 1837-1988

Subseries 4.6: Miscellaneous History, 1890-1973

Box	Shelf	Folder	Description
1	7.4	12	Miscellaneous history articles and essays, 1890-1973

Series 5: Maps, Undated

Box	Shelf	Folder	Description
1	7.4	13	Unofficial, hand drawn maps, Undated

Series 6: Newspapers, 1889-1989

Box	Shelf	Folder	Description
1	7.4	14	Newspaper articles and clippings of various topics, 1889-1989

Series 7: Official Documents, 1778-Undated

Subseries 7.1: Deborah Sampson Pension Documents, 1778-1837

Box	Shelf	Folder	Description
1	7.4	15	Photocopies of official pension documents, 1778-1837

Subseries 7.2: Commonwealth Holiday, 1983

Oversized Box	Shelf	Description
3	7.5	A Proclamation by the Governor of Massachusetts to make May 23rd Deborah Sampson Heroine of the Commonwealth Day, 1983

Subseries 7.3: Miscellaneous, 1905-Undated

Box	Shelf	Folder	Description
1	7.4	16	Marriage documents and miscellany, 1905 - Undated

Series 8: Photographs, 1961-1976

Box	Shelf	Folder	Description
1	7.4	17	Photographs of Deborah Sampson Items and Events, 1961-1976

Series 9: Published Books and Articles, 1866-1985

Subseries 9.1: Book Articles, 1881-1983

Box	Shelf	Folder	Description
1	7.4	18	Photocopies from books, 1881-1983

Subseries 9.2: Longer Book Articles, 1866-1954

Box	Shelf	Folder	Description
1	7.4	19	Photocopies from books that are either complete or very long and detailed, 1866-1954

Subseries 9.3: Physical Books, 1967-2004

Box	Shelf	Description
1	7.4	Books Include: The Incredible Deborah, Deborah Sampson Soldier of the Revolution, Deborah Sampson The Girl Who Went to War, Masquerade

Subseries 9.4: Published Booklets, 1972-1975

Box	Shelf	Folder	Description
1	7.4	20	Informational booklets on Deborah Sampson, 1972-1975

Subseries 9.5: Magazines/Magazine Articles, 1965-1985

Box	Shelf	Folder	Description
1	7.4	21	Magazine articles, 1965-1985

Subseries 9.6: Miscellaneous, Undated

Box	Shelf	Folder	Description
1	7.4	22	Short articles and miscellany, Undated

Series 10: Miscellaneous, 1802-1986

Subseries 10.1: Boulder Dedication, 1976

Box	Shelf	Folder	Description
1	7.4	23	Boulder dedicated with plaque, 1976

Subseries 10.2: Items, 1902-1986

Box	Shelf	Folder	Description
1	7.4	24	Anecdotes about some of Deborah Sampson's possessions, 1902-1986

Subseries 10.3: Sampson Coat of Arms, 1953

Box	Shelf	Folder	Description
1	7.4	25	Original hand drawn coat of arms, 1953

Subseries 10.4: Street, 1860-1949

Box	Shelf	Folder	Description
1	7.4	26	Information about the naming of Deborah Sampson Street, 1860-1949

Subseries 10.5: Tour, 1802

Box	Shelf	Folder	Description
1	7.4	27	Materials from Deborah Sampson's tour, 1802
2	7.4	N/A	Hard Bound Copy of Deborah Sampson's Address, 1905

Subseries 10.6: Miscellaneous, 1902-1965

Box	Shelf	Folder	Description
1	7.4	28	Miscellaneous, 1902-1965
2	7.4	N/A	T-Shirt and Hard Bound Copies of Deborah Sampson's Address from 1905
	7.4	N/A	Photocopy of Deborah Sampson Gannett Artwork, Undated
	7.3	N/A	Lu Stubbs Bust, Undated
	8.5	N/A	Lu Stubbs Sculpted Face, Undated