

THE LUDINGTON REGIMENT, SYBIL LUDINGTON AND THE 1777 BRITISH INVASION OF CONNECTICUT

One of the most enduring stories that arose out of the British invasion of Connecticut is the midnight ride by sixteen-year old Sibel¹ Ludington, daughter of Colonel Henry Ludington. Her ride was initiated to recruit members of her father's regiment located in Dutchess County, New York, to help repel the British invaders. This story, as told by recent writers, involves a sixteen year old girl living with her father and eleven brothers and sisters, a horse of varied descriptions, a dark and stormy night, a route that covered forty miles on narrow, rutted and muddy roads, a ride that lasted from 9:00pm until dawn, Sibel knocking on doors along the route, use of a stick by Sibel to spur her horse and to fend off at least one attacker and a successful ride that recruited 400 men who were in her father's regiment.²

The Sibel Ludington story, as this book is written, is acknowledged to have been first mentioned in a Memoir of Colonel Ludington published by the Ludington family in 1907 and in an article in Connecticut Magazine that same year written by a descendant of the Henry Ludington family, Louis Patrick.³ Even though these two simultaneously publications did not appear until 130 years after the event, the Sibel Ludington story has continued to gather momentum and is now an accepted part of Revolutionary history. Not only does the current day story go beyond the original from 1907, it has acquired a plethora of new details added by each new storyteller.

In addition to these 1907 stories that mention Sibel's involvement, it should be pointed out that an 1886 History of Putnam County, New York, includes one paragraph regarding the Danbury Alarm and nine pages of biographical details about Henry Ludington, but contains no mention of Sibel's ride.⁴ No biographer of Sibel has been able, at this point, to uncover any earlier references to the ride.

Assuming that the story recounted in the Memoir and the Louis Patrick article is accurate, subsequent details that have been added, in each new retelling so that the story that is currently being told is quite different from the 1907 original.

For example, the horse that Sibel rode to rouse her father's men in the current version is different from the description of the horse in the memoir and Patrick article. Over time the following details have been added⁵:

- Sibel's horse acquired a name: Star.
- Sibel's horse acquired a hair coat color: bay, which is characterized by a reddish brown color with a black mane and tail.
- One author says the horse was new and given to her as a birthday present by "Uncle" Enoch Crosby, who was a well-known spy during the Revolution. Both 1907 writings present Ludington and Crosby as being friends and engaging in the spy business together. More research needs to be done to verify this aspect of the story. No source has been cited to support Crosby's gift of the horse, although there is convincing evidence that Crosby lived near and knew the Ludington's.
- Another author described the horse as "a large, strapping gelding, recently broken to bit and saddle by Sybil herself.
- Although the memoir mentions a bridle and a saddle, the story now has Sibel saddling the horse herself.

- Sibel's ride is described as setting off on an all-night gallop of over forty miles.

This chapter will present new information, resulting from research on Ludington's regiment, regarding its participants that opposed the British raid on Danbury. It is not the purpose of this chapter to examine and critique the Sibel Ludington story or to refute the details of the story that are currently presented as a historical fact. Rather it is to present new facts and a new perspective on her involvement in the Danbury Alarm. Any information bearing on the historical basis of her story should be welcomed by those who support historical accuracy.

Whether the Sibel Ludington story can be verified as an actual historical event is still in question. However, what is clearly evident today is that the Sibel story has risen to the status of folk legend. True or not, the story has attracted significant interest from a wide variety of groups ranging from the DAR to local historical societies. The number of symbolic artistic representations and historical remembrances is extensive and exceeds that of any other female folk hero of the Revolution, as well as most males. Among these remembrances are: a statue of Sibel on her horse by Anna Hyatt Huntington is located at Lake Gleneida in Carmel, New York; a DAR plaque honoring Sybil is located under the statue; an official post office stamp has been issued in her honor, titled "Contributions to the Cause;" historical markers have been installed in various locations on the accepted route of her ride in Putnam County, New York; a Sybil Ludington Road Race is held annually in Carmel, New York; and numerous books relating her story have been written. It is clear that Sibel represents more than a token recognition as a female heroine. Her story has wide acceptance because it fills a clearly perceived unmet need for heroic stories of the country's founding era that involve a female as the primary participant.

Vincent T. Dacquinto sums up the legacy of Sibel the heroine as follows:

Sybil Ludington Ogden has every reason to be celebrated as a national hero. Her ride rivaled that of Paul Revere. She is most deserving of a statue by Anna Hyatt Huntington and an eight-cent postage stamp in her honor (though close inspection will reveal a major error on the back of the stamp). The poems, songs and parades are fitting tribute to her heroic deed...⁶

When this author began his research, he was uncertain whether documentation would be found about Colonel Ludington Regiment's involvement in the Danbury Alarm because no one has previously provided such details. Surprisingly, thirteen pension applications⁷ found in the Revolutionary War Pension Files of the National Archives, submitted by participants and their families, confirm participation in Colonel Ludington's regiment at the Danbury Alarm. It is clear that Colonel Henry Ludington did send or lead men into the heart of the American response. How his regiment got called out to travel to Danbury is less clear.

Based on a review of the thirteen Ludington regiment pension applications, five companies, or portions thereof, from Colonel Ludington's regiment were involved in the Danbury Alarm. Captains Nathaniel Scribner, David Waterbury, Joel Mead and Hezekiah Mead commanded four of those companies and led their men to Connecticut from Dutchess County.⁸ The other company, commanded by Captain Joshua Myrick, came to the battle from Fishkill, New York, where it was stationed when the British invasion began.⁹ Myrick's Company arrived too late to take part in the battles. Because of that, it is included in the rosters in the Appendix with other companies that arrived too late to be involved in any battle. The total

number of men that can be identified with a reasonable certainty as part of the Ludington Regiment's response to the burning of Danbury is 112, not counting those in the Myrick Company.¹⁰

None of the thirteen pension applications contain any reference to a call to arms made by Colonel Ludington's daughter or anyone else. The references to the Danbury Alarm typically only contain minimal information stating that the applicant was with Ludington's regiment at the time Danbury was burned. One additional fact stands out in the rosters of Ludington's regiment as shown in the Appendix. There are no men wounded, killed or taken prisoner among the 112 men in the four companies. It is possible that Ludington's men were not actually in the heat of battle or there would be some indication of it in the disposition of his men. While this observation raises questions about the nature of the Ludington regiment's activities in the battle, it does not detract from its contribution.

The wording of the declarations in the pension applications indicate that most of the men considered themselves a member of a company, and identified more with their captains than with Colonel Ludington. These captains were respected men in their communities regardless of their abilities as a commander. It is likely that any calling out of the men by Sibel would have been to the homes of these four officers or their lieutenants and not to all of the men in the companies, who were spread throughout the county. Given the manner in which the militia typically worked, it is unlikely that Sibel would have made contact with all of men who marched from Frederickstown to Connecticut.

Since Ludington's men were in a militia prepared to be called up when needed, a system was in place by which Ludington could call up his men at any given time. One of the Ludington regiment pensions not included in the thirteen was from a soldier who makes no mention of being at Danbury. He states that when the men returned home after being called out they "were required to hold themselves in readiness at a minutes warning."¹¹ The action taken by the regiment in responding to the Danbury Alarm was not a one-time activity. Ludington called up his men numerous times. A procedure had to be in place for a call up. It did not rely solely on the discretion of a spirited sixteen year old to get the word out and rally all of the troops on her own. Because these men typically marched off to do battle with less than one day's notice, to the extent that she was involved, Sibel had help in calling out the Ludington militia.

The Col. Ludington Memoir states that, "By daybreak, thanks to her daring, nearly the whole regiment was mustered before her father's house at Fredericksburgh, and an hour or two later was on the march for vengeance on the raiders."¹² This account implies that all of the men to answer the call appeared at her father's house. Given that four companies and a number of men were involved, the initial call, whenever and whatever it consisted of, would not have all of them show up to rendezvous at Ludington's house. More likely there would be more than one initial place of rendezvous.

The Memoir also states that "nearly the whole regiment" responded to the call. As the numbers in the rosters in the Appendix demonstrate, only a portion of the regiment actually showed up and marched to Danbury. Since most recent accounts of the Sibel story state that there were about 400 men in the Ludington regiment, it seems appropriate to look at the known facts about the size of that regiment. According to at least two New York histories, in 1778 Ludington had a total of 49 officers and 610 men in his regiment.¹³ This author has discovered an additional twelve men who are not included in the 1778 roster. The regiment could have had fewer members in 1777 so it is difficult to calculate their exact number in April of that year. Based on the known rolls, it is likely that there were more than the 400 men

cited by most Sibel writers. Even if this is on the low side, the total number of 112 responders is significantly less than the whole regiment of between 400 and 600 men.

The lower number of men in Ludington's regiment that can be verified as responding to the Danbury Alarm strengthens the credibility of the Sibel ride. Four hundred men is a huge number to call up in one night regardless of how many riders were involved. Calling up a quarter of that number seems more feasible. Based on reading over a hundred pension applications from the Ludington Regiment, this author is confident that the lower number is defensible and accurate.

In reviewing the Ludington regiment pension applications, a surprising fact emerged. In 1834, Sibel Ogden, A.K.A. Sibel Ludington, wrote a statement in support of a pension application for Jonathan Carley, who claimed to be a former member of her father's regiment and was then living in Otsego County, New York, which is where she also lived.¹⁴ Mr. Carley was not in the Danbury Alarm, but claimed to be a later member of the Ludington Regiment. Sibel's statement in support of Carley was not very helpful because she says that "she had no distinct recollection of any such particular services rendered by him." She goes on to say that "she believes he must have served occasionally as a soldier in her father's Regiment." Sibel's statement contains no mention of a ride to call out the men in her father's regiment or any other activity by her. The only comment in her letter of support that relates to the war is that "detachments from said Regiment [her father's] were almost constantly kept upon the alert to counteract the designs and incursions of the Tories and British."

Others have pointed out that Sibel submitted an 1838 pension application for her husband, Edmond Ogden, who died in 1799.¹⁵ That pension application, submitted under her married name, Sebal Ogden, does not contain any mention of her ride to notify her father's men. It is not surprising that neither of the nineteenth century statements made by Sibel Ogden contains a reference to her own personal activities. Because each is written to support a pension claim of someone else, her ride would not be relevant to the claims by either Carley or her husband. Those claims would need to be supported by evidence of their participation in an army unit of a sufficient length of time to comply with the requirements for obtaining a pension. The fact that these statements contain no account of Sibel's ride does not necessarily negate the validity of her story.

This author has also found an earlier source for Sibel's story that was published prior to 1907. That account dates back to 1893 and is found in an article about one of Colonel Ludington's descendants, *Nelson Ludington, Lumberman and Banker*.¹⁶ The author, who is not a family member, concludes that Sibel's "all-night ride on horseback to arouse Col. Ludington's regiment of 'minute men' just after the British forces had raided Danbury, Connecticut, is hardly less famous than the midnight ride of Paul Revere." At that point her ride was definitely less known, although, if true, it is certainly as heroic. Unfortunately, this 1893 account seems to rely on a family member for its authenticity so even though it was published fourteen years earlier than the two accounts from 1907, it does not add historical merit to authenticating the ride. It does show, however, that the Ludington family's story of the ride was in circulation prior to 1907.

The comparison of Sibel's ride to the more famous ride of Paul Revere was repeated in *The Col. Ludington Memoirs* where the author states, "There is no extravagance in comparing her ride with that of Paul Revere and its midnight message." The Memoir account states that the messenger who came to the Ludington house "could ride no more" and that Sibel agreed to "take a horse, ride for the men, and tell

them to be at his house by daybreak.” It goes on to say that Sibel used a man’s saddle and a “hempen halter.”¹⁷

In 1886, Louis Patrick, the author of the article on Henry Ludington in Connecticut Magazine, published a book entitled *The Ludington Family, The First Name in America*.¹⁸ This five page book contains information about William Ludington, the original emigrant with that last name, but contains no mention of Henry Ludington, his daughter or the ride. It is clear that purpose of Patrick’s book was to highlight William Ludington and not any of his descendants.

Although not well-known today, Sibel’s father, Henry Ludington, was a real patriot leader who was instrumental in Dutchess County’s involvement in the Revolution. His regiment’s participation in the Danbury Alarm is well documented and it played a helpful role. Henry Ludington was an acknowledged leader of his regiment for most of the war and continued to maintain a leadership role in his community after the Revolution.

His daughter’s life was less documented until 1907. After the 1907 book and article, many written accounts of the Sibel Ludington story have surfaced. The most significant information about her life was revealed in more accurate detail by V.T. Dacquino in his book about Sibel and her ride, published in 2000.¹⁹ Readers wanting more information about Sibel’s life after 1777 are encouraged to read Dacquino’s book. Sibel died on February 26, 1839, and is buried near her father in the Presbyterian Church graveyard in Patterson, New York.²⁰ No mention of her now famous ride has been found in any document or publication at the time of Sibel’s death.

¹ The name spelling used in this chapter for Henry Ludington’s daughter is taken from her letter of support to the Carley pension application. (See # 10). The most common spelling by those writing since the 1907 publications is Sybil, but it is not found in any contemporary document and thus is probably not historically accurate.

² Listing of books re Sibel

³ Willis Fletcher Johnson. *Colonel Henry Ludington A Memoir*. (n.p.)Lavinia Elizabeth Ludington & Charles Henry Ludington, 1907. Louis S. Patrick. “Secret Service of the American Revolution.” *Connecticut Magazine*, Vol. XI, No. 1, 1907: 265-274. According to Dacquino (End Note 15), Lavinia and Charles Ludington are grandchildren of Henry Ludington. Louis Patrick is acknowledged in the Memoir as a great-grandson of Henry Ludington.

⁴ History of Putnam County

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⁶ Dacquito, Vincent T. *Hauntings of the Hudson River Valley, An Investigative Journey*. Charleston, SC: Haunted America, a Division of The History Press, 2007: 115.

⁷ Thirteen have been identified to date.

⁸ The names of the four captains in Ludington’s regiment comes from the thirteen different pension applications each of which contains the names of one of the three company commanders.

⁹ The location of the Capt. Joshua Myrick Company is from Myrick’s own pension application (NARA Rev War Pension Files, S9982) which says he went from Fishkill to Danbury in April of 1777 and a company muster roll, dated April 1, 1777 at Fishkill, New York (NARA Revolutionary War Rolls, Myrick Co. 1776-77)

¹⁰ The total of men in the Ludington Regiment in the Danbury Alarm by company is Waterbury: 42; Scribner: 57; 2 Mead Co’s: 100. Names are from the Alphabetical List of State Troops. James A. Roberts, comp. *New York in New York in the Revolution as Colony and State*. Albany, N.Y.:Weed-Parsons Printing Co, 1897. Scribner’s Company roll is also in the Ludington Memoir.

¹¹ Stephen Turner Pension Application. National Archives and Records Administration, Revolutionary War Pensions, W2198, p. 26.

¹² Johnson, Ludington, 90.

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¹⁴ NARA Revolutionary War Pension Application, Jonathan Carley, S23152.

¹⁵ V.T. Dacquino. *Sybil Ludington The Call to Arms*. Fleischmanns, N.Y.: Purple Mountain Press, 2000: 49-56.

¹⁶ Howard Louis Conard. "Nelson Ludington, Lumberman and Banker." *The National Magazine*, Vol. XVII, Nov., 1892-Apr, 1893: 480.

¹⁷ Johnson, Ludington, 90.

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¹⁹ See End note 15.

²⁰ Sibbell Ludington grave marker states, "In Memory of Sibbell Luddington, Wife of Edmund Ogden Who Died Feb. 26, 1839, 77 yrs 19 mo. & 21 d's."