

This Day in History... April 26, 1777

Sybil Ludington's Daring Ride

On April 26, 1777, a 16-year-old girl climbed onto her horse and rode 40 miles through a driving rainstorm in the dark, covering twice the distance of Paul Revere's famous ride two years earlier. Her name was Sybil Ludington — and most Americans have never heard of her.

Sybil was the eldest of Colonel Henry and Abigail Ludington's 12 children, living in Fredericksburg, New York. Her father was a gristmill owner and veteran of the French and Indian War who commanded the local militia. The British considered him so effective that they offered a reward of 300 English guineas for his capture, dead or alive.

On April 25, 1777, British General William Tryon came ashore with 2,000 troops at Compo Beach in Westport, Connecticut. Their target was Danbury — about 24 miles inland — where the Continental Army had stockpiled a large supply depot. Tryon's men torched storehouses containing 5,000 barrels of pork and beef, 5,000 pairs of shoes, 2,000 bushels of grain, 1,600 tents, and medical supplies desperately needed by Washington's army.



Sybil received personal thanks from both General George Washington and General Rochambeau, the French commander fighting alongside the Americans.

Colonel Ludington had dismissed his militiamen to plant their spring crops. The men were scattered across a 40-mile radius, tending to their farms and families. Then, at 9 p.m., an exhausted messenger arrived with news of the attack. The colonel needed someone to ride out and muster his troops — but he also couldn't leave his post to do it himself. Sybil volunteered.

She mounted her horse, Star, and left home around 9 p.m., carrying only a stick for protection as she rode into the rainy night. The burning town of Danbury lit up the distant sky with an orange glow. She rode from Kent through Carmel and Mahopac, then through Mahopac Falls and Cold Spring, continuing through Farmers Mills to Stormville before heading home — crossing both Putnam and Dutchess counties through forests, over streams, and across rough terrain.

At each home along the route, she banged on doors with her stick and called out: "Muster at Ludington's!" In Carmel, a church bell rang after her warning, spreading the alarm further. When a man offered to ride with her for safety, Sybil sent him east instead to warn the town of Brewster and continued the mission alone. At one point, she reportedly fended off highwaymen with her stick.

Sybil reached home as the first light appeared on the horizon. Her clothes were soaked, and her 40-mile journey had taken between eight and nine hours. By the time she returned, roughly 400 militia members had gathered at her father's house.

The militia marched but arrived too late to save Danbury. On April 27, American forces fought the British at Ridgefield — about 700 Americans against 2,000 British troops — in the only inland battle fought in Connecticut throughout the entire war. Sybil's warning had allowed American forces to harass the British during their retreat to the coast. After this battle, the British never again tried to raid deep into Connecticut.

General George Washington personally thanked Sybil for her service. Alexander Hamilton also wrote to her father, saying: "I congratulate you on the Danbury expedition." Sybil later married Continental Army veteran Edmund Ogden and had one son named Henry. She died on February 26, 1839, at age 77.

It's interesting to note that the earliest written account of Ludington's ride appeared in an 1880 local history book — more than 100 years after the event. And a 2015 report in *The New England Quarterly* found little contemporary evidence backing it. Whether or not every detail is verified, the story has become an enduring part of Revolutionary War history. New York State placed historical markers along her purported route beginning in 1934, and an annual 50-kilometer race has followed her path every April since 1979.



Ludington was honored as part of the Contributors to the Cause Bicentennial Series.



When loyalist Ichabod Prosser arrived with 50 men to capture her father, she lit candles throughout the house and had her siblings march past the windows in formation — and Prosser's men turned back, believing the house was defended.

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