

The Homespun Movement

The events leading up to the American Revolution included the Parliamentary Acts, the colonists' pledges to boycott, and perhaps a Tea Party or two, but what is rarely mentioned are the patriotic women who fulfilled the promises to boycott and proved to Americans—and the rest of the world—that America could indeed survive without Britain. These intelligent, organized women made the boycotting of British goods possible by becoming domestic producers of the same materials. They committed themselves to this cause whole-heartedly, even making it fashionable to do work that had once been considered onerous and uncouth. Above all, these women showed a commitment to the cause of the American Revolution that they carried on throughout the war, providing the economic foundations for victory.

Women such as these were praised by the Patriotic press for devoting time and energy to serving their country. Participating in “spinning bees,” wearing homespun fabric, and publicly vowing to participate in the boycotts were visible, publicized manifestations of women's desire to fight for their country.

Whereas much of women's participation in the American Revolution has been discussed in terms of individual anecdotes about extraordinary women, the Homespun Movement was a collective campaign that encompassed a broad range of social spheres, political positions, and personal motivations. There were women who were politically minded within this demographic, and many knew the rhetoric of the Patriots, and they wanted to support the cause. Many women who were aware of the political implications of their actions but were more concerned with the practical, charitable effects of producing cloth for the people most negatively impacted by the economic strain of a boycott. Other women were completely unconcerned about the politics behind the boycott and simply wanted to ensure that their families were fed and dressed.