

How the Battle Hymn of the Republic was Written – Julia's Own Words

It was during the second year of the war and I had gone to Washington with my husband and pastor, the Rev. James Freemann Clarke. I had wished many times that I could do something for my country but the way seemed closed. My husband was too old and ill to go; my son was only a boy. The children were young so I could not leave my home for long myself. While we were in Washington there was a great review of troops across the river. We drove out to see it. While it was in progress there was a dash made against some of the troops by the enemy. It was repulsed, but the review was abandoned, and the troops came thronging back to Washington and we with them. The progress of our carriage was slow, for the roads were crowded with soldiers. To encourage the men we began singing various songs and hymns and they would join the the chorus. After we had sung "John Brown's Body" Dr. Clarke turned and asked me why I did not write some new words for that music. I replied that I had tried several times, but never could seem to write any good enough. The next morning just about 4 o'clock I woke suddenly. As I lay there in bed the words of the hymn began to form themselves in my mind. I got up and by the faint light of the early morning scrawled them on a piece of paper and then went back to bed and sound asleep again. That is the way the hymn was written. (Saturday Evening Post- as quoted in the Newport Mercury May 30, 1914)

Julia's words were published in the Atlantic Monthly in February of 1862. Set to music (from John Brown's Body) it became a rallying cry for the Union. Although it is more of a Christian hymn, the song was used by the anti-slavery and suffrage movements as well.



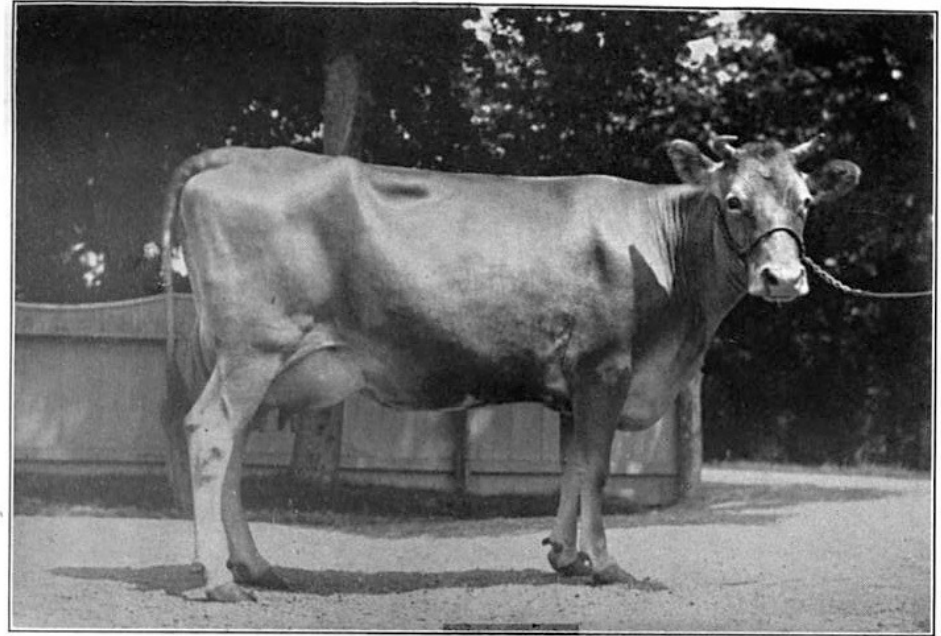
In July 1777, while Aquidneck Island was occupied by the British and Hessian troops, American Major William Barton, who was camped in Tiverton, received word that the British Commander in Chief, General Prescott was staying at Mr. Oevering's house on West Main Road close to the Middletown border. Barton plotted to capture Prescott so he could be exchanged for American Major General Charles Lee who had been captured in New Jersey. July 9, 1777 Barton and forty volunteers left Warwick Neck in five whaleboats and rowed across the Bay with muffled oars. The Americans landed on the west shore of Portsmouth and followed a gully up to the Oevering Farm. Barton talked his way past a guard and took control of a sentry so he could not sound the alarm. The men worked quickly and within a few minutes took Prescott, the sentry and Prescott's aide-de camp with them. No shot was fired. This capture gave the colonial troops some encouragement.



Barton's Raid

Missy of the Glen

When “Missy of the Glen” set a record as a butterfat producer, another “gentleman farmer” protested and claimed there had been irregularities in the testing. Now H.A.C. Taylor had two good reasons for defending the record of his Guernsey. He was protecting the honor of his workers (who had been accused of cheating) and his cattle would claim their “true value” as champions when he sold Missy’s calves. Taylor sued the President of the American Guernsey Cattle Club, the publisher of the official register. The suit made its way from one court to another higher court until it finally ended up with the U.S. Supreme Court! Missy was under the observation of the Rhode Island Experiment Station (URI today) for an entire year. This independent monitor found that she was indeed the world champion Guernsey cow! H.A.C.’s grandson commented that although Taylor received a verdict of \$10,000 in damages, the suit cost him \$25,000 to win the case. It was worth it to Taylor. He upheld the honesty of his workers and ensured a good price for Missy’s calves.



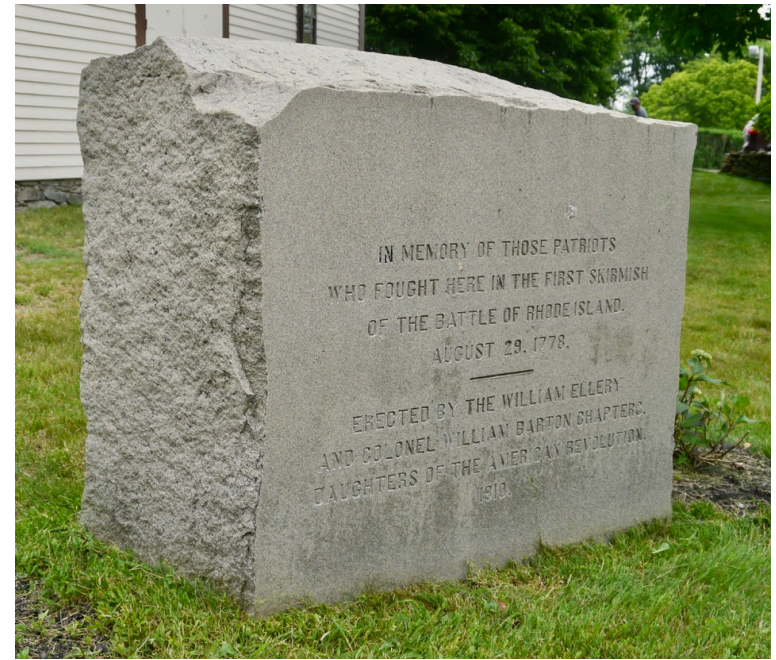
MISSY OF THE GLEN.

Record Guernsey cow of the world. Milk, 14,591.70 lbs.; butter, 1100 lbs. in one year.

By courtesy of H. A. C. Taylor, Newport, R.I.

Skirmish - Battle of Rhode Island. Union Street and East Main Road.

Colonel Nathaniel Wade's Rebel troops were hidden in the fields between East Road and Middle Road. Wade instructed his men not to fire until he gave the order. Then they were to reload, fire again, and retreat. Half of the British 22nd Regiment headed up Union Street to cross to Middle Road. At Wade's signal his men rose up from their hiding spots and fired the two volleys at the British Troops. There were heavy losses for the Red Coats. As Lieutenant Colonel Campbell's 22nd Regiment came up to help, it too began to take casualties. Musket balls tore through Campbell's coat without harming him. The 22nd Regiment suffered many casualties that day, most of them from this ambush. Livingstone did not linger. Like Laurens he pulled back to safer ground. The picket line retreated towards Quaker Hill. The 43rd Regiment of Foot (RoF) took pursuit down Middle Road while the 54th, 38th, and 43rd RoF continued up East Main Rd.



School and School Master A Schoolhouse Story

There is a little schoolhouse on the grounds of the Portsmouth Historical Society. We call it the “Southermost School” and we believe it may be the oldest school in Rhode Island. In the early days of Portsmouth, children probably were taught to read and write at home if their parents had those skills. Education was important to the townspeople of Portsmouth. In 1716, while considering how to divide land in the southern part of town, the freemen of Portsmouth were planning for public education in town. “Having considered how excellent an ornament learning is to mankind and the great necessity there is in building a public school house on said south side” of Portsmouth, the freemen put aside money to build a school and chose a committee to raise money to build it. It must have taken a long time to collect the money needed because it took nine years for that school - Southermost School - to open its doors.

Land was donated on the corner of East Main Road and Union Street. Town citizens authorized 20 pounds (English money) for construction but it actually cost 23 pounds or about a hundred dollars in today’s money. We can understand how the school was built from reading the bill presented to the town by the builder, Captain Adam Lawton. The building is fourteen feet by twenty-six feet. It took eight days for Lawton and his “negro” to build it. Slaves and indentured servants (who had agreements to work for a specific time) were part of the community in early Portsmouth. The town was billed for 2000 feet of boards, 200 shingle nails and 200 clapboard nails. There were hearth stones for a fireplace for warmth and 200 bricks for an oven in the cellar so that cooking could be done. It has a simple “post and beam” construction which uses heavy timbers as supports. Even though it is an old way to build, the original wood frame has lasted all these years. To save costs it had a “pony chimney” which is supported by just the roof and extends down part way into the building. It has an arched and plastered ceiling that was unusual for a school in those days. It was a type of construction used in finer homes.

In colonial days the school teachers were all men. The families of the students in the school were responsible for providing a home and food for the schoolmaster and his family. Early records of the town tell us about the first schoolmaster, James Preston, and how his family ending up living in the cellar of Southermost School. The school opened in 1725, but by 1727 Preston was reported to be sick and unable to work. The Preston family had been living at the home of James Strange. Town records from 1727 mention that “James Strange refuses to entertain James Preston and his family any longer in his dwelling house. It is agreed by this council that said Preston and his family be settled in the Southermost School house in town for the present, that is in the cellar part...” The town tried to take care of families in need and the school was one of the few public buildings that could house a family. By 1730 they family was ordered out of the schoolhouse. Interestingly, the widow of James Strange, Sarah Strange, ended up needing to use Southermost School as her home, too. In a town meeting in 1746 she and her family were ordered out so that the “school house might be improved in the use for which it was built..”



Sarah Eddy:

Sarah Eddy (1851-1945) was a noted painter and photographer. She used her family fortune to promote good causes. Humane treatment of animals, arts education and providing a community center (the Social Studio) were among her main causes.

Sarah began a Rhode Island group to make sure people treated animals well. She came into Portsmouth schools to teach children how to care for their pets. She wouldn't even have her lawn mower because it would kill some insects. Sarah was a noted artist - painter, photographer, sculptor. Artists would come from all over the world to learn from Sarah. She founded a club house called the Social Studio where young people could learn skills in arts and music. She always gave away her art. She began her suffrage activities (trying to get the vote for women) in Providence but made a permanent move to Portsmouth around 1900. Sarah's family had connections to national leaders such as Susan B. Anthony. She often attended national meetings as a delegate.

