

BARBARA AND ANDREW SUSONG
REVOLUTIONARY WAR SOLDIERS

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Drumbeat

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The Evidence of Things Not Seen: *Barbara Susong's Three Years in the Continental Army*

By David W. Swafford, Editor

In early 2014, a new member joined our esteemed Society based on the service record of a female patriot-ancestor. When Dennis L. Eggert of Oak Ridge, Tennessee, applied for GSSR membership, he listed the name of Barbara Susong on his application. In 1777, Barbara was a married woman with children, a recent immigrant from France, and newly enlisted in the Virginia Fourth Regiment.

"I could have chosen other, male ancestors," Mr. Eggert said, "but I wanted to make my application special. I wanted to choose a woman as my ancestor."

Dennis is not the first GSSR member to use Barbara Susong's name on an application. That distinction belongs to Timothy E. Massey, also of eastern Tennessee and a past President of the Tennessee Society. Mr. Massey joined the SR in July 1994 and used Barbara Susong's name on his forty-seventh supplemental in April 2009. Dennis and Tim are fourth cousins and are 5th great-grandsons of Barbara's.



Susong descendants have said Catherine Adeline (1837-1921), left, most resembled Barbara. To the right, images of Barbara's son Andrew Jr. (1777-1832). —Source: Ancestry.com

But neither was Tim's supplemental application the first instance of a member of a major Revolutionary War lineage society invoking her name as a qualifying patriot-ancestor. The original occurrence appears to have been on a supplemental DAR application of the late Katharine Susong Harmon, prolific author, educator, and Susong family historian who passed away on 5 June 1999. She, too, hailed from East Tennessee.

This development begs the question, just who was Barbara Susong? How could a woman have accomplished three years of enlisted service, an anomaly, in the American Revolution? There were many women who "chased" the army, but women were strictly barred from enlistment. Moreover, if Barbara's was such a unique case, why has she not received her fair share of the historical limelight? Schoolchildren learn of Molly Pitcher and Betsy Ross, maybe even of Deborah Sampson, but not of Barbara Susong.

The Susongs were from Alsace-Lorraine, France. Barbara was reportedly born in 1742, while her husband, Andrew, came into this world in 1738. Although Alsace-Lorraine is a part of France, its culture is heavily German. Barbara's married name in German was Barburah Suesanger, although her maiden name is unknown.

Traditionally it has been said that Barbara was German and Andrew was French, but after considerable thought, Tim Massey believes Barbara was French and Andrew was German. Her being French would certainly add credence to the probable connection she had with the Marquis de Lafayette.

A French Connection

According to long oral tradition, the Susong family (a pregnant Barbara, Andrew, and sons Nicholas and Jacob) were among the few passengers aboard Lafayette's ship, *La Victoire*, when the nineteen-year-old nobleman secretly sailed to America and landed at Georgetown, S.C., although their names are not on the passenger list and no other documentation survives to substantiate it. Be that as it may, the research and writings of Katharine Harmon indicate the Susongs were recruited to join the Patriot cause by Silas Deane, the first American diplomat in Europe.

The oral tradition says the Susongs followed Lafayette to Philadelphia. Andrew and oldest son Nicholas were the first to enlist and joined the Eleventh Pennsylvania Regt, which later was absorbed into the Tenth Regiment. *The History of Tennessee Illustrated* says, "Andrew [Susong] Sr. was a Major on George Washington's staff throughout the war."

Sometime after Andrew and Nicholas had enlisted, Barbara enlisted herself in the Fourth Virginia and took her younger son Jacob with her. Family records at the genealogy library in Abingdon, Virginia state Nicholas evidently had sent his family to Virginia for their safety, as the couple's fourth child, Andrew Jr., was born in Rockingham County on 14 June 1777.

Why did she enlist in the Fourth Virginia when Andrew and Nicholas were in the Tenth Pennsyl-



Dennis Eggert pauses at the gravesite of his 5th great-grandparents, Andrew Sr. and Barbara Susong, Susong Memorial Church Cemetery.—Photo courtesy Dennis Eggert

vania? Her decision is better understood if one keeps in mind the ties to Lafayette. The Fourth Virginia was organized under Scott's Brigade, in Lafayette's Division. Oral tradition has it that while Jacob was too young to enlist as a private, he served as an aide on Lafayette's staff. Could it be that Lafayette himself advised her to go to Virginia?

Whatever the family's motivations were,

the Eleventh Pennsylvania and Fourth Virginia were both in action across New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Both regiments engaged at the battles of Trenton, Princeton, Brandywine, Germantown, and Monmouth. Both regiments also spent the miserable winter of 1777-78 camped at Valley Forge.

As a past Commander-in-Chief of the Society of the Descendants of Washington's Army at Valley Forge (DVF), Tim Massey confirms not only that Andrew, Barbara, Nicholas, and Jacob were at Valley Forge, but that the Susongs were together as a family there. Tim says the Eleventh Pennsylvania and the Fourth Virginia were camped adjacent to each other.

"When I went to Valley Forge and saw where the two regiments were camped, it hit me like a ton of bricks. They were together!" Massey exclaimed.

Again, how is it that these two regiments were camped together? Were they together merely to accommodate Barbara and Andrew Susong? Probably not, but maybe so. Stranger things have happened.

Evidence of the Unconfirmed

This is one of the clues that Barbara's presence in the Army may have been arranged by someone near the top, or, for that matter, by the very top. Not only was her place in the Army not challenged, but it seems an unidentified benefactor high up the chain of command was looking out for her. That helps explain the undeniable respect which Barbara Susong commanded once she was in America and among the troops as an enlisted private.

Records exist to prove she served three years. The most telling evidence is the fact that her husband received a bounty warrant in Virginia for three years of service which he did not complete. In a 2009 interview with the *Greeneville Sun*, Tim

Massey stated that Barbara's land title was issued in Andrew's name since married women could not own land in Virginia.

Ironically, despite Andrew's veritable service in the Pennsylvania Line for the period January 1777 – January 1781, he was not awarded any bounty lands there. The law in that colony stipulated that soldiers had to serve until the end of the war to qualify for government land. The old records on file in Abingdon indicate Andrew did receive a bounty warrant in Pennsylvania, but that is not true. Contemporary archivists of Pennsylvania's Revolutionary-era records confirm he was not given any land for his service.

In contrast, Virginia required only three full years of service from its veterans before it awarded them lands, which allowed Barbara to qualify. While women were barred from serving in the Army and could not receive military pensions nor hold title to land, there are clues that officials in the Commonwealth of Virginia skirted around laws in order to recognize Barbara's service and sacrifice. As will be detailed, fictitious documents were drawn up to support the Virginia service of Andrew Susong, which actually never occurred.

In addition to the bounty warrant issued in Andrew's name, Barbara benefited from a sworn certification of Andrew's service in the Virginia Line, a complete fabrication in order to support the bounty warrant. The sworn certification is dated 1784, while the bounty warrant is dated 1785. Both these documents are sourced on the Library of Virginia website.

When the writer of this article contacted the Library of Virginia reference desk to inquire of the specific military unit for Andrew Susong during the Revolutionary War, he was told no record of Andrew Susong's name could be found on any unit's roll. Not only did Barbara's husband not serve in Virginia, but the company commander's name (James Carney) and the regiment colonel's name (Col. Hartley) listed on the certificate do not appear elsewhere in the state's records of the Continental Line.

Interestingly enough, there was a Col. Thomas

Hartley to serve during the war, but he was from Pennsylvania and commanded the Eleventh Pennsylvania Regiment—the same regiment which Andrew Susong did serve.

These documents testify not only to Barbara's historical service, but underscore the high regard she must have garnered from top Army authorities. Someone of lower rank is not going to risk ordering the creation of these false documents; in the same vein, someone in the lower ranks would not necessarily object to processing the falsification, if he knew it was ordered from a very high authority.

Assuming even Washington approved of this or knew of this, it is highly improbable that he would

have tolerated, let alone accommodated, just any female in the Army. After all, he is on record as referring to women as "clogs in the wheel." In his day, women were seen as a liability to the most crucial aspects of the Army's mission, more prone to hampering the combat effort rather than helping it. In that light, it means *this* woman, Barbara Susong, was indeed special.

The next question is, what qualities in a woman would make her so special? The most plausible answer, for a woman in her circumstances and background,

is her relation to Lafayette. Barbara's connection to the Marquis is the linchpin. The Commander-in-Chief likely showed both his deference and gratitude to Lafayette (and the greater alliance with France) by accepting Barbara Susong into his ranks, no questions asked. "You do me a favor, and I'll do you a favor."

On a more personable level, Washington even reached a paternal level with Lafayette. The two of them immediately bonded. What man, experiencing those deep feelings and placed in Washington's exact circumstances, would not have done likewise? For indirect reasons, his arms opened wide for Barbara Susong. The question remains, what was her relationship to Lafayette?

Keeping a Low Profile

Her extraordinary circumstances aside, it is strongly suspected that Barbara chose to dress as a man to hide her gender identity and that she was

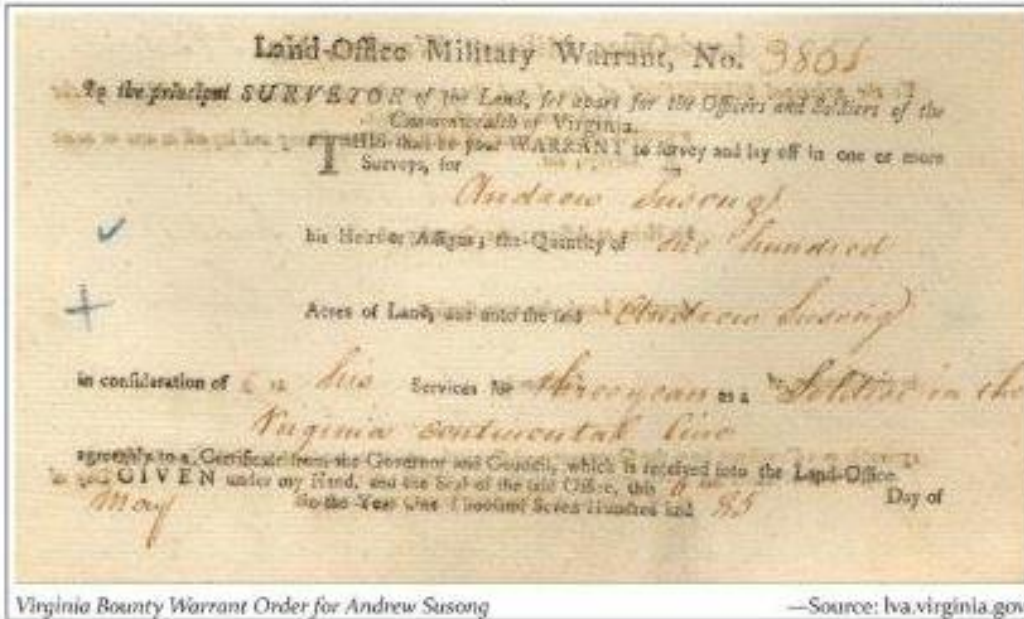


Tim Massey.—Photos courtesy Tim Massey

successful at it. Otherwise, one has to assume the rank and file would have objected highly. Had her gender identity been known throughout the Army, her name would have become legendary, the stuff of folktales. Her story would have been similar to that of Deborah Sampson, who served for seventeen months in the Fourth Massachusetts as private "Robert Shurtlieff" before her gender identity

relative anonymity.

Yet not everyone buys into the idea that she had to keep a low profile. Tim Massey believes Barbara's place and circumstances were so exceptional that she probably did not need to conceal her gender identity, even though she chose to do so. "I used to think she *had* to dress like a man," Massey said, "but over time I've come to the opinion that she



Virginia Bounty Warrant Order for Andrew Susong

—Source: lva.virginia.gov

became known in mid-1783. Even if her true gender identity were known among a few, she was never called out for it.

Another indication that Barbara may have hid her identity is her use of a pseudonym. She seems to have switched out the final letter in her given name—from Barbara to Barbary. The name "Barbary Susong" is in the historical literature. It appears on muster rolls and in several texts, including *J. H. Gwathmey's Historical Register of Virginians in the Revolution, 1775-1783*. The June 1917 issue of the *DAR Magazine* says: "Three men by the name of Susong—Andrew, Barbary, and John—are mentioned in the Eight [Annual] Report of the Virginia State Library."

Her discreet qualities are furthermore underscored by her not leaving behind a diary or journal of her Army experience—and by the Army not having left a historical document about her. Neither did she seek to comment about her experiences in public lectures or to the press, as Sampson did. After the fighting was over, Barbara turned inward to her family and to the fruits of living quietly in her new country. Like so many men who served in the war but were not singled out for their service, Barbara, too, transitioned from soldier to citizen in

could have dressed however she pleased. There's too much evidence of her powerful connections."

Eggert added: "Col. Isaac Read certainly had the authority to discharge my fifth-great grandmother if he had wanted to, but he never did. I have always felt that it was due to his respect for Lafayette."

At some point, the truth about Barbara's gender identity emerged in the historical record. In 1883, the Virginia Historical Commission republished the bounty warrant issued in Andrew's name with accompanying text which reads, "Land warrant issued by the Commonwealth of the State of Virginia to Andrew Susong for the service provided by his wife to the Virginia Continental Line, Fourth Regiment of the Third Division, under the command of Col. Isaac Read... The Lady of repute, Barbara Susong, is listed as a soldier of that Regiment."

In a 1905 issue of the *Quarterly Historical Magazine of William & Mary College*, a listing of Revolutionary soldiers of Berkeley Co., W. Va., on page 34, includes the following about Barbara:

"At a court held for Berkeley County, the 20th day of April, 1779. Ordered that Barbarah Susong, wife of Andrew Susong, a soldier in the Continental Service, be allowed Twenty-five pounds for her support for the present year."

After Her Discharge

As many war veterans did, Andrew sold the bounty land in the military zone as well as the family's twenty-seven acres in Rockbridge County to relocate his family to Goodson, Virginia (modern Bristol), adjacent the Tennessee border. Family records furthermore indicate that Andrew had obtained other lands from Native Americans, in exchange for a cow and a bushel of beads. Apparently, he sold that land as well prior to the move.

Townspople in Goodson considered the Susongs' arrival in 1794 a "sight to be seen." In 1962, the *Bristol Herald Courier* ran the following headline: "Susong Family Came Here in a Caravan." The feature article looked back to the momentous day when the renowned Susong family entered their new hometown. "No other family had such a spectacular entry, nor was to play a more important role in the history of Bristol, than did the Susongs," the article said.

Dennis said the caravan arrived on the outskirts of Goodson on the same day that another big event was taking place: the funeral of the highly esteemed Gen. Evan Shelby. The latter had erected Shelby's Fort and stockade in the Goodson vicinity, had successfully fought the Indians during the French & Indian War, had commanded a militia unit down the Tennessee River on a punitive raid against the Chickamauga Nation in 1779, and later led a contingency of militia at the Battle of Kings Mountain during the Revolution.

"The townspeople wanted to see the caravan," he said, "so they asked Andrew if he would delay bringing his team through town until the next day. Not only did he comply with their wishes, but he attended Shelby's funeral, too." This detail gives the impression that their material status and historical standing must have been elevated and, therefore, was of general interest.

The 1962 *Herald Courier* article further stated, "The unusually large and wealthy Susong wagon train, which had originated in Rockbridge County, Virginia, consisted of more than 100 persons, including a large company of slaves; numerous wagons and carriages; outriders and herds of livestock."

After the Susongs settled in Goodson, they bought over a thousand acres of land. Given all the material goods and property they brought with them to southern Virginia, and the land they subsequently bought in

what is now West Bristol, it is obvious the Susongs were financially well off. Did Barbara or Andrew have money already—before they came across the Atlantic? If the money was on her side, did it come directly from Lafayette or from someone in Lafayette's extended family?

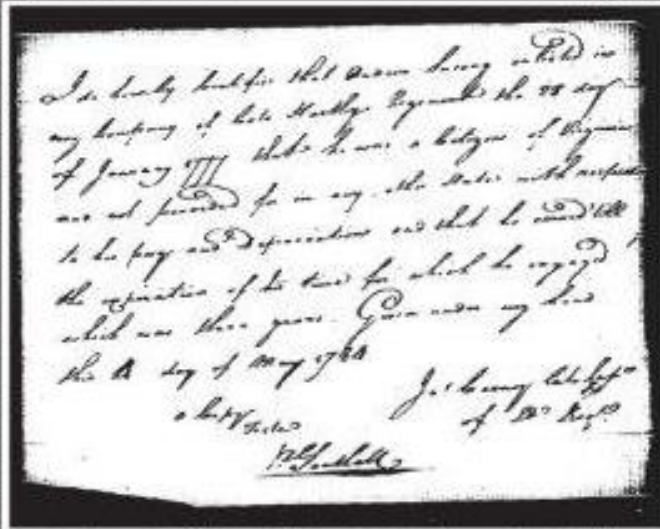
In 1817, the family moved again from Virginia into Greene County, Tennessee. Eight years later, in 1825, the Marquis de Lafayette during his tour of the United States made a stop-over in Greeneville,

Tennessee. "There's absolutely no reason for him to have visited Greeneville except for his tie to the Susongs," Massey stated.

"We want to further research the family's ties to Lafayette. There is obviously more to the story than we've been able to uncover," he said.

The year following the nobleman's visit, Andrew, Sr. died. Barbara's year of death has been lost and forgotten. Still today, folks in Greene County will reference directions by citing the old Susong Farm south of Greeneville. On that property, the original farmhouse was a log cabin which five successive generations of the Susongs called home. Today the farm opens to the public once a year as part of a local celebration to honor family farms more than a century old. ■

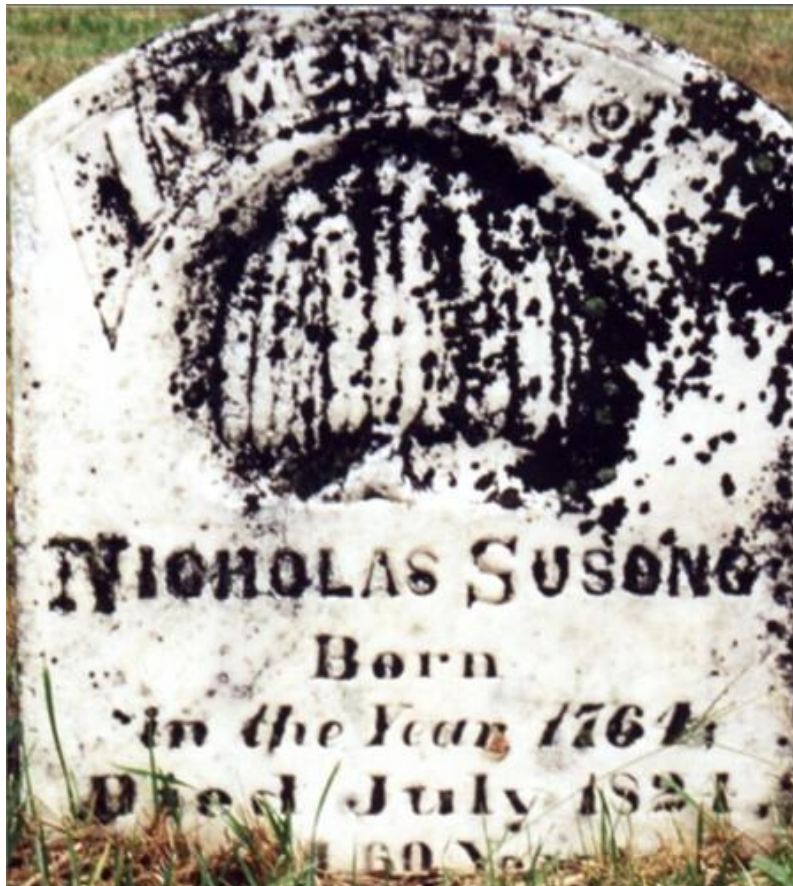
NOTE: GSSR Executive Director Jeffrey Lambert brought Barbara Susong's name to the Editor's attention.



Virginia Sworn Certificate of Military Service—Source: lva.virginia.gov

TRANSCRIPT: I do hereby certify that **Andrew Susong** enlisted in my Company of Col. Hartley's Regiment the 28th day of January 1777, that he was a citizen of Virginia, and not provided for in any other states with respect to his pay and depreciation and that he served 'til the expiration of the time for which he engaged, which was three years. Given under my hand this 4th day of May, 1784. Signed Jas. Carney, late Capt. of [illegible] Regt. A copy [illegible] [illegible].

**Andrew and Barbara - together in life - together in death.
Buried on their farm in Greene County.
Their descendants continue to reside in Greene County.**



**Andrew and Barbara's
son,
Nicholas,
also a Revolutionary
War Soldier**