



## Virginia C.A.R. Patriots of the Round Table

### *Polly Cooper*

Polly Cooper was an Oneida woman from the New York Colony who took part in an expedition in 1778 to aid the Continental Army during the American Revolution. The Oneida Indian Nation supported the American cause throughout the war and had a great relationship with George Washington and his army. In 1777-78 Washington's exhausted troops struggled to survive the harsh conditions in Valley Forge. Thousands of soldiers lacked proper clothing and food supplies. So, on April 25<sup>th</sup>, 1778, a group of forty-seven Native American men and Polly Cooper, sent by the Oneida chief Skenandoah, left New York carrying bushels of white corn to assist Washington at Valley Forge. When Polly Cooper and her fellow Oneidas arrived, the soldiers residing there tried to eat the corn uncooked. The Oneidas stopped the soldiers, knowing that if they ate the raw corn it would swell up in their stomachs and kill them. Since white corn takes careful preparation before it can be eaten, Cooper taught soldiers and their families how to properly cook it. She also cared for sick soldiers as she was skilled in medicine as well as cooking.

After the war, the Continental Army tried to pay Polly Cooper for her service, but she refused any compensation, stating that it was her duty to help her friends in their time of need. Instead, Cooper accepted a black shawl that she admired in a store window. Congress appropriated money for the shawl, and it was given to her for her services as a cook for the officers of the army. This shawl is still in the care of Polly Cooper's descendants and is on display at the Shako:wi, The Oneida Nation Cultural Center in New York.



"Allies in War, Partners in Peace" commemorates the alliance between the Oneida Indian Nation and the United States during the American Revolution. The Oneida Indian Nation donated the bronze statue to the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian. In the sculpture, George Washington stands alongside the Oneida diplomat, Oskanondonha, or Skenandoah, and Polly Cooper.

Unfortunately, many parts of Polly Cooper's story, such as her life before the American Revolution, are unknown. Much of what we know now has been passed down by her descendants and the Oneida Indian Nation. Nevertheless, her efforts in support of the American cause deserve to be recognized and her legacy lives in the hearts of Native Americans and all Americans who value freedom.

Polly Cooper's individual contributions to the Revolution and those of the Oneida Indian Nation have been honored in a variety of ways. In 2004, the Oneida Indian Nation commissioned a bronze statue of Cooper to be created. The 22-foot tall, 2,200-pound monument was given to the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian and is displayed on the Oneida floor. There is also a D.A.R. chapter named the "Polly Cooper Chapter," located in Chappaqua, New York. In March 2022, SAR President General Davis Wright presented the current Oneida Nation Chairman with the Distinguished Patriotic Leadership Award. Oneida Warriors have served in every military conflict on the side of the United States since the Revolutionary War.

### *Discussion Questions for Local Societies*

Why did the Oneida choose to support the American cause during the Revolution?

Who was Samuel Kirkland and what role did he play in the Oneida's decision to support the American cause?

How do we know about the story of Polly Cooper?

<https://www.oneidaindiannation.com/the-polly-cooper-shawl-testimony-to-a-pact-of-the-revolutionary-war/>

Why did SAR President General Davis Wright say that he might not be here today but for the Oneida people?

<https://oneida-nsn.gov/blog/2022/04/01/oneida-nation-honored-by-sons-of-the-american-revolution/>

Is there a memorial to Native American veterans that we could visit?

<https://www.si.edu/exhibitions/national-native-american-veterans-memorial:event-exhib-6572>

Where can I learn more about the role of the Oneida in the Revolution?

Glatthaar, Joseph T. and James Kirby Martin. *Forgotten Allies: The Oneida Indians and the American Revolution*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2006.

What happened to the Oneida and other tribes after the Revolution?

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oneida\\_people](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oneida_people)

Watch the Smithsonian videos associated with the special exhibit "Nation to Nation: Treaties Between the United States and American Indian Nations."

[https://americanindian.si.edu/explore/exhibitions/item?id=934&utm\\_source=si.edu&utm\\_medium=referral&utm\\_campaign=exhibitions](https://americanindian.si.edu/explore/exhibitions/item?id=934&utm_source=si.edu&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=exhibitions)