

Women Spin Cloth to Support the War

Before the outbreak of the American Revolution, British colonists protested new taxes by refusing to buy things that were shipped from England. Women were important to these boycotts, because they were in charge of all the purchases made for colonial homes and families. They also had the skills to make homemade substitutes for British products.

In New England, women joined in the boycotts by going to spinning bees. At these events, women would set up spinning wheels and keep each other company while they spun yarn that could be woven into fabric. The fabric made this way was called “homespun.” Wearing clothing made from homespun fabric was one way to demonstrate your support for the rights of the colonies in the 1760s and 1770s.

Most spinning bee participants were young, unmarried women, because they were the people who had the spare time for such work. Spinning was considered an acceptable way for women to express their political opinions, because it was within the bounds of traditional women’s work.

To make yarn or thread, fibers from wool, flax, or cotton must be tightly wound together to form a single strand. For most of human history, this “spinning” work was done by hand, but the process was slow. The spinning wheel, which was first invented in India between the years 500 and 1000, made the work much faster. The large wheel is powered by a foot pedal, and as the wheel spins, it causes a smaller spindle to whirl at a very fast speed. The person operating

the wheel steadily feeds fibers onto a strand of yarn attached to the spindle, and they are wound tightly as the spindle spins.

In the British American colonies, spinning was traditionally women’s work. By the mid-1700s most women did not need to spin their own yarn, because they could buy fabric at stores. But when the colonists started boycotting British fabric because of the new taxes, it inspired a whole new generation of women to learn the skill of making their own fabric from their mothers and grandmothers.

Source: New York Historical Society Museum & Library; / [Settler Colonialism and the American Revolution, 1692-1783](#) / [The American Revolution](#) /



Provided by the
Iowa Society Daughters of the American Revolution
Commemorative Events 2024-2026