

United States Daughters of 1812  
A Minute in History at the Star-Spangled Banner Flag House #3  
Caroline Pickersgill Purdy

Born in Philadelphia on June 12, 1800, Caroline Pickersgill, like her mother, would come of age at a pivotal time for the United States and would have the course of her life changed by the death of her father. After falling ill while working in London, John Pickersgill dies on June 14, 1805, leaving Mary and Caroline to adjust to life without a male head of household. The Young-Pickersgill women, as we know, would not be deterred. In January of 1807, Mary and Caroline would settle in Baltimore in the house at the corner of Pratt and Albemarle Streets. That same year the Embargo act of 1807 would be passed by Congress, further igniting tensions over trade between the United States and Britain, pushing the two countries ever closer to impending conflict. By 1813, at the height of the War of 1812, Caroline would have just turned 13 when her mother received the commission for the garrison and storm flags at Fort McHenry. As a young adult woman whose mother ran a business based on her sewing prowess, Caroline would have no doubt been educated in the feminine art of needlework and plain sewing. Over six weeks from June to August 19, 1813, the household of women would complete both the 30' x 42' garrison flag and a smaller 17' x 25' storm flag. We have little knowledge of Caroline's life in the years between the crafting of the Star-Spangled Banner and the end of the War of 1812. However, Caroline appears in marriage records as marrying John Purdy, an iron merchant, in Baltimore on December 4, 1817. Caroline's marriage shifted the dynamic in the Pickersgill-Purdy household. Mary ceases to be listed as the proprietor of the business at the Flag House's address, and although she owns the home, John Purdy begins to be listed as the head of the household. The couple and other occupants of the Flag House are listed in census records through John Purdy's death on October 1, 1837. Both Caroline, Mary, and Mary's sister Hannah Wells Fearson, all become involved in with the Impartial Female Humane Society under Mary's presidency. In October of 1851, the Impartial Female Humane Society's Aged Women's Home opens at Franklin Square and Lexington Street in West Baltimore, Mary and Caroline are listed as the "lady managers" of the property at this time. In April of 1857, six months before her death, Mary Pickersgill bequeaths the Flag House, possessions, and four enslaved persons to Caroline. Caroline Pickersgill Purdy's later life is plagued with financial difficulties. In 1876, Caroline sent a letter Georgiana Armistead Appleton, daughter of George Armistead, to recount the making of the Star-Spangled Banner in advance of the 100th anniversary of the American Flag and to give an appeal to the public for financial assistance. She references her status as a widow and childless woman and to her family's connection to the flag to inspire generosity. On April 23, 1884, Caroline Pickersgill Purdy dies and is buried in Loudon Park Cemetery. The *Annual Report* of the Impartial Female Humane Society provides an obituary for Caroline, revealing that she had spent her final years at the Aged Women's Home "in peace and comfort."

## Letter from Caroline Pickersgill Purdy to Georgiana Armistead Appleton, Baltimore (1876)

"Mrs. Appleton. Dear Madam. I have lately seen in the newspapers that the noted flag which waved over Fort McHenry in the bombardment of Baltimore: is in your possession, and is to be sent to the Centennial.

I take the liberty to send you a few particulars about the "Flag". It was made by my mother, Mrs. Mary Pickersgill, and I assisted her. My grandmother, Rebecca Young made the first flag of the Revolution, (under General Washington's direction) and for this reason my mother was selected by Commo. Barney and George Stricker, (family connections), to make this "Star Spangled Banner" which she did, being an exceedingly patriotic woman.

The flag being so very large, mother was obliged to obtain permission from the proprietors of Claggetts brewery which was in our neighborhood, to spread it out in their malt house; and I remember seeing my mother down on the floor, placing the stars: after the completion of the flag, she superintended the topping of it, having it fastened in the most secure manner to prevent its being torn away by (cannon) balls: the wisdom of her precaution was shown during the engagement: many shots piercing it, but it still remained firm to the staff. Your father (Col. Armistead) declared that no one but the maker of the flag should mend it, and requested that the rents should merely be bound around.

The flag contained, I think, four hundred yards of bunting, and my mother worked many nights until 12 o'clock to complete it in the given time.

I would also state, that many of my ancestors were in the Revolution. My grandfather William Young was a captain in the war: my uncle Col. Flower was "Commissary General of Military stores", and Colonel of "Artillery" - these, both lost their lives by camp fever; I had another uncle taken prisoner by the British, and whipped through the fleet for attempting to escape: and my father in-law, Henry Purdy, served through the war.

For my character and position I could refer to you Miss Margaret Purviance, or any other reference you would require; I could further recall myself to your recollection, as I was a Manager of the "Aged Woman's" Home at the same time you were, and was particularly fascinated with you, (both being Episcopalians) in the care of a Mrs. Jefferson, daughter of Ms. Whipple a signer of the Declaration of Independence.

Your kindness and prompt attention to her induced me to present my case to you. I am widowed and childless, and now find myself, in my seventy sixth year, in feeble health, and with the barest pittance of support. My friends here in Balto.- have suggested that if these particulars, met with your approbation, and were placed on a card attached to the flag, they might excite among patriotic people, some compassion for my helpless condition; but I would leave this matter entirely up to your judgement.

I have not been able to write, on account of not having the use of my right arm, but thought it was better to put the signature in my own hand with kind regards. I trust your sympathy.

(Sgd) C. Purdy (full name Caroline Purdy)  
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