



HOW TO RESEARCH WOMEN LIKE A Historical Novelist

I often ask this question at DAR events...

Are you researching a female patriot and if so which one?

I often receive details of this Patriot by the FACTS required for proof. Using an example of a woman I researched for my own novel, *Carrying Independence*, I might hear...

- Esther de Berdt Reed.
- Born: London in 1746
- Married: Joseph Reed who was an American, 1770
- Moved to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 1770
- Husband:
 - Member of First Continental Congress
 - Aide de Camp to George Washington
- Six children and she died: September, 1780...

However, what we've missed in this list of facts are the finer points of Esther's LIFE STORY that could instead be told, memorably, like this:

Born a British subject in London 30 years before the Revolution, Esther de Berdt's father helped repeal the Stamp Act, setting ablaze her desire for fair treatment of subjects under the Crown.

A young American-born lawyer helped her father in that case—one Joseph Reed whom she would later marry. She moved to Philadelphia with him and her mother after her father died.

Known as "Hettie" or "Hattie," Esther was so well loved in Philadelphia, they called her "Mrs. President," and the Reeds were in circles dominated by figures like Washington and Dickinson.

Not one to sit idle when her husband became George Washington's Aide de Camp, despite a "weakened constitution" as she called it, Esther began the first Ladies Association in America—she along with 38 women raised over \$7000 in silver by going door to door in Philadelphia. In 1780 those funds resulted in over 2100 linen shirts made for the Colonial soldiers, each shirt labeled with a tag bearing the woman's name who made it...

Sadly, Esther did not live to see the results, dying of intestinal disease just two weeks after the linen was purchased in 1780, leaving Col. Reed to arrange care for their six children while he and the country were at war.

Now THAT is a story. A story about a REAL person. One that is inspiring. Sad. Thought-provoking. It makes us feel connected and curious for more. AND, more importantly, it's a story that is just one of many missing from our greater American Story. The women's stories.

Why are the women's stories absent?

True, that part of the reason was because it has long been men who primarily researched and wrote the stories of the revolution. That's why we have over 900 biographies of George Washington and not one of Esther. But seeking blame isn't going to improve the situation.

And so, let's look at how we can remedy the issue instead. We can do that by **Researching Women Like a Historical Novelist (and biographers and historians), which begins with:**

- 1. Revising the way we talk about our research.**
- 2. Reframing how we collect and organize our research.**

First, REVISING the way we talk about our research.

WHAT WE OFTEN SEEK: I need these specific facts for my proofs or theories.

INSTEAD: What is the subject's story?

Eg: Was Esther's life about dates and documents? No, and by researching the finer aspects of her life story, I begin to recreate her life and build proof not just of her existence but of her personality and contributions. Therein lies the proofs.

WHAT WE OFTEN SAY: If I just keep looking I'll eventually find what I need.

INSTEAD: Who can I connect with who might (even surprisingly) deepen my subject's story?

Eg: I hired Bill Ochester, who is a Ben Franklin reenactor, to give me a tour of Philadelphia. He gave me a book of historic Philly homes and buildings that also had a paragraph about Reverend Ewing of the first Presbyterian Church—a reverend who helped map the trajectory of Venus and whose [entire book of sermons \(which included his eulogy\)](#) was available AND online—Esther Reed was sometimes one of the congregation, which means he's an influence upon her world, contacts, and context.

WHAT WE OFTEN DECLARE: I have all my subject's documents and data.

INSTEAD: Which aspects of the time period might place my subject in context?

Eg: Learning about homespun goods can be helpful. While the men were at war, some women in communities formed sewing bees. Those women donated linen to the Revolutionary Cause, which qualified them to be DAR Patriots, but studying this subject more deeply allows me to weave a subject like Esther into the greater known history.

Second, REFRAMING how we collect and organize our research.

A reexamination of three aspects that we'll go over today:

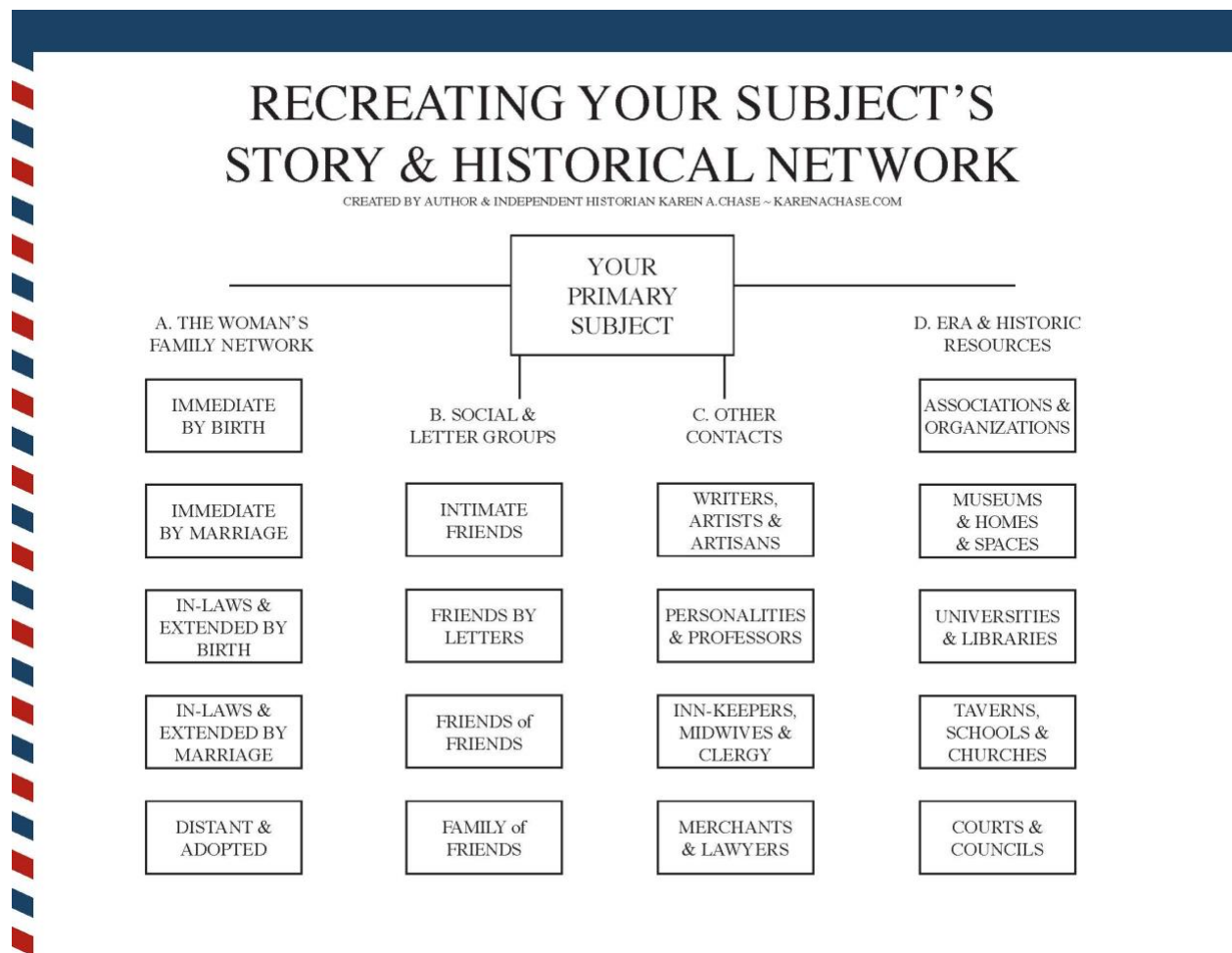
- ONE: YOUR SUBJECT'S NETWORK
- TWO: YOUR OWN NETWORK
- THREE: EDUCATION & TIME TRAVEL

ONE: YOUR SUBJECT'S NETWORK

To authors and biographers recreating the story of a life means recreating ALL aspects of a person's existence beyond their family lineage and relations. It means rebuilding the full network they constructed throughout their lives.

Think of your subject as you would your own network. If I define you as the daughter of your mother and father, and these four grandparents, and so on... How many people are actually a part of your life that don't make it onto that lineage chart?

All those people have the opportunity to provide the proof data we need, but moreover, this contextual network includes the places, the organizations, and the people both close and distant who helped them become the person that left their mark—however big or small—upon your family and the world.



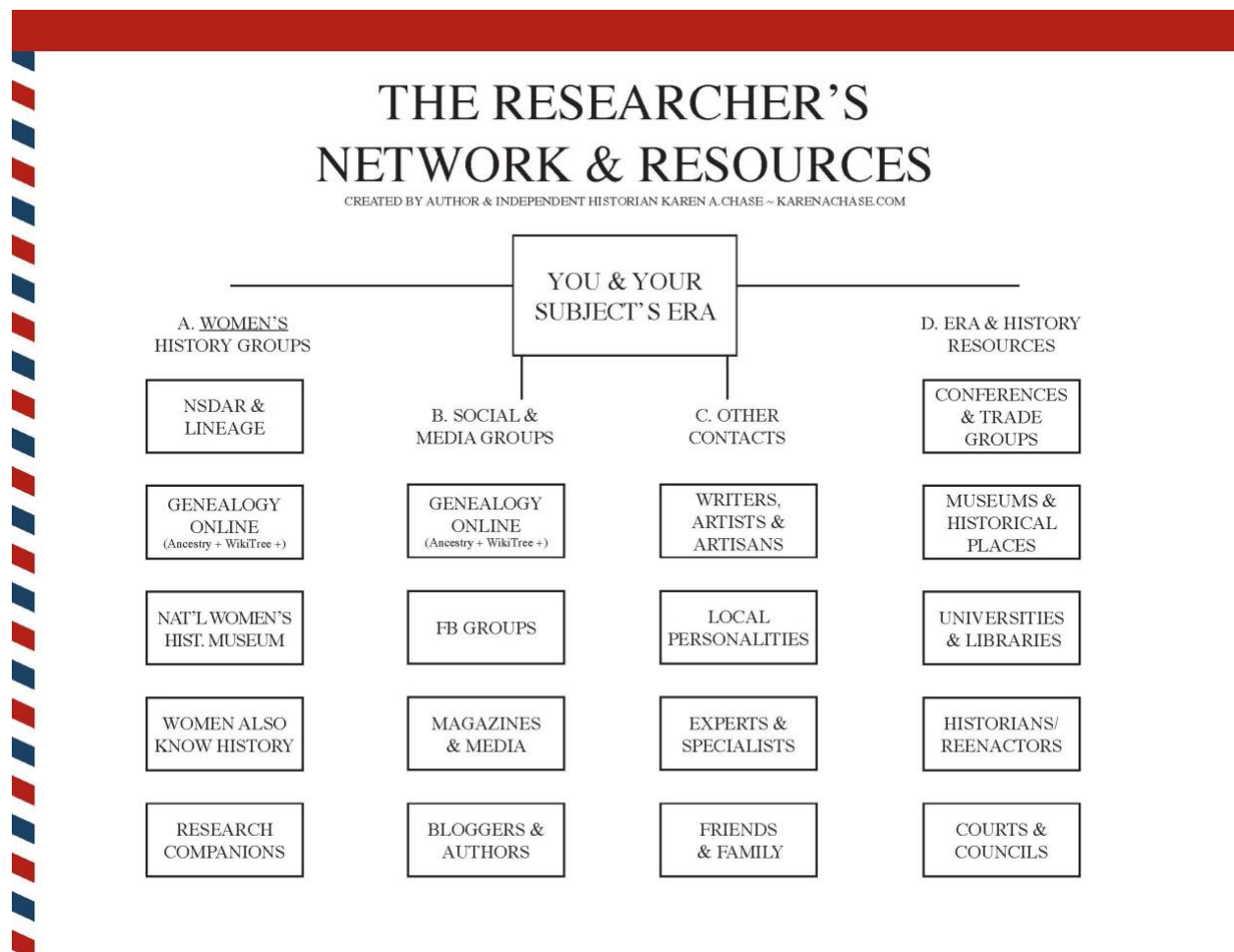
TWO: YOUR OWN NETWORK

In order to research any subject's world, you need to create your own network—one many of you likely have that goes beyond the DAR, court or census records, and genealogy networks like Ancestry.com to encompass all your contacts. But how are you organizing it?

I recommend an excel spreadsheet, but at the least, have a sectioned notebook or MSWord document for each column and category. For each contact, it should include Name, organization, email(s), phone(s), physical/mailling address, social media handles. You can also add a picture of the person and who referred you.

By creating this comprehensive researcher network, you'll:

1. Learn which places, organizations, and people—both distant and close to you—help provide the most accurate answers to particular questions.
2. Learn how those contacts are connected to each other.
3. Have a resource to easily search regardless of how many new subjects.
4. Have a resource list you can share with research companions.



EXAMPLES AND LINKS FOR YOUR NETWORK:

We are women researching women, and so important to understand where the female academics, biographers, authors, and historians are... Here are some links to help you fill in gaps.

CONFERENCES

Women's History Network

<https://womenshistorynetwork.org/>

Southern Association for Women Historians

<https://thesawh.org/>

Sarah Lawrence College

<https://www.sarahlawrence.edu/womens-history/conference/>

ORGANIZATIONS beyond the DAR

The National Women's History Alliance (NWHHA)

Formerly the National Women's History Project (NWHP), this not-for-profit American organization was founded in 1980 and strives to "promote multicultural women's history awareness."

– Thanks to them we have Women's History Month

<https://nationalwomenshistoryalliance.org/>

The Coordinating Council for Women in History

Aimed at supporting women in the historical profession as well as research in women's history. <https://theccwh.org/>

The Women's History Affinity Community

<https://aaslh.org/resources/affinity-communities/womens-history/>

Organization of American Historians

Feature women and historians that focus on American women's history experiences & political activism.

<https://www.oah.org/lectures/featured/womens-history/>

<https://www.oah.org/lectures/featured/women-politics/>

Women Also Know History

This organization grew out of the common complaint of conferences that offer the dreaded "all male panel." This database is a list of professional historians, authors, and others and is searchable by era, geography, subject, and more, making it a great resource if you need a question answered about a specific topic or era. Women helping women is always a grand thing. <https://womenalsoknowhistory.com/>

THREE: EDUCATION & TIME TRAVEL

In addition to learning how to be better genealogists, learning more about how to research, as you've done through this program, aides in your research. Here are some additional resources.

DAR Facebook – Finding our Female Patriots

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1458025390911817/>

Left-hand Column

- “Files” notes and information shared by state
- Search bar by keyword

Announcements:

- Proven Patriots list
- Patriots in Progress
- Patriots with Proof Problems

Debbie Duay's Website

Debbie's Lineage Research Corner

<http://www.learnwebskills.com/lineage/index.htm>

Collaborative Communities

Free online community where genealogists collaborate

Specifically, there is a searchable forum: <https://www.wikitree.com/g2g/>

The Family Tree Webinars

Requires a subscription, but includes videos and webinars such as

Video: 50 Records that Document Female Ancestors

<https://familytreewebinars.com>

Story Building & Research Organization Software

A software for building and maintaining timelines AEON Timeline:

<https://www.aeontimeline.com/>

Research & Writing Software, Scrivener by Literature & Latte

<https://www.literatureandlatte.com/>

TIME TRAVEL — LEARNING ABOUT THE TIME-PERIOD

Researching a patriot from the Revolutionary era, whether male or female, cannot be conducted in a modern bubble. It must be done in coordination with learning and understanding the time period. People moved & traveled, names of places changed, skills and trades help us find details. Here are a few of my favorite places.

David Rumsey's Maps

for historic: <https://www.davidrumsey.com/>

This site also has a georeferencer that allows you to see ancient maps over Google:

<https://www.davidrumsey.com/view/georeferencer>

North American Women's Letters & Diaries

The largest electronic collection spanning more than 300 years.

<https://alexanderstreet.com/products/north-american-womens-letters-and-diaries>

Colonial Review

Old & Current Books about the Revolution/Colonial Period, Fiction & Nonfiction
<https://colonialreview.com/>

The Journal of the American Revolution

A lot on battles and ideology, not much on women:
<https://allthingsliberty.com/>

Both Revolutionary Museums

Yorktown: <https://www.historyisfun.org>
Philadelphia: <https://www.amrevmuseum.org/>

American Battlefields Trust

Preserves battlegrounds and educates about why that matters.
<https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/women-american-revolution>

SUMMARY: WHY DOES ALL THIS MATTER?

Our job, especially in the DAR, is not to ONLY to identify women to add to a list of patriots by gathering their facts. Facts & proofs may increase DAR membership, but our role is also education. Education means sharing. *Stories are better and more often shared than facts.*

WHERE TO SHARE

Share the stories of your female ancestors and research subjects with:

- Other researchers, historians and reenactors in your network.
- Your family and friends.
- With local schools, school administrators, and reading groups.
- With national organizations like
- Your DAR chapter and the DAR on What's Your DAR story?
<https://www.dar.org/whats-your-dar-story>
- National Women's History Museum, Submit A Women's Story Database.
<https://www.womenshistory.org/submit-womans-story>

I TASK YOU WITH A MISSION

It is greater than simply identifying female patriots, which can help the DAR grow.
It is to weave women's stories into the fabric of American storytelling for everyone.

We are 185,000 women strong! Collectively, we have the power to show how women contributed to our human American History by compiling their stories and rebuilding their networks. And we can do this by deepening and strengthening and sharing our own networks and research with each other. You are not merely researchers or genealogists.

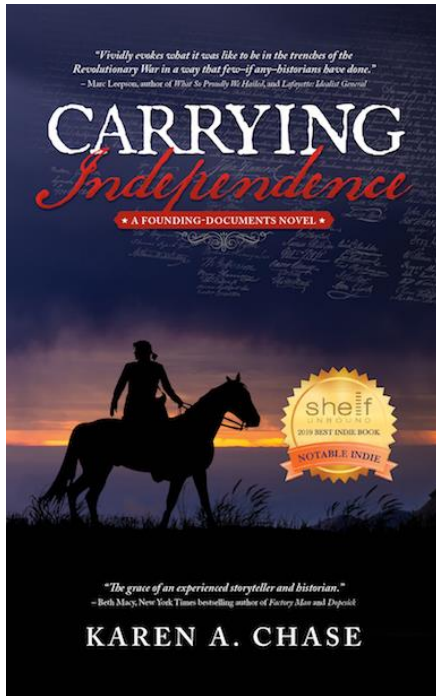
YOU ARE... STORYTELLERS!

By your research, you can help us ENLIGHTEN, ENLIVEN, & ENGAGE! and SHINE A LIGHT on women of America's History and the DAR.

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<http://bit.ly/carrying1776>

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<http://carryingindependence.com>

CARRYING INDEPENDENCE:

In 1776, with pressure mounting to join the American Revolution, an intrepid young Post rider, Nathaniel Marten, accepts the task of carrying the sole copy of the Declaration of Independence to seven congressmen unable to attend the formal signing. British generals and double-crossing spies are eager to capture both him and the document so they can divide the colonies already weakened by war. Through encounters with well-known original founding fathers and mothers, and by witnessing the effects of the Revolution on

ordinary Americans, Nathaniel must learn that independence—for himself, for those he loves, and for the country—is not granted, it's chosen.

Karen A. Chase is an independent author and a Daughter of the American Revolution with the Commonwealth Chapter in Virginia. Her first novel, *Carrying Independence*, book one of the 3-part Founding-Documents Series, is historical fiction about the signing of the Declaration of Independence. It was awarded #12 on Shelf Unbound's 100 Best Indie Books of 2019.

TALKS: Karen is available for online or large group presentations. With talks about the history behind the novel, lesser known aspects of the American Revolution, Researching Women, and How to Travel with the Eyes of an Author. Please email info@KarenAChase.com for details.

AUTHOR'S WEB LINKS:

Book Quick-Link: <http://carryingindependence.com>

Website: <http://karenachase.com>

AUTHOR'S SOCIAL SITES

Twitter: <http://twitter.com/karenachase>

Facebook: <http://facebook.com/karenachaseauthor>

Instagram: <http://instagram.com/karenachase>

Goodreads: <http://goodreads.com/karenachase>

