

# THE LADIES DECLARE

## By Thomas Hischak

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# THE LADIES DECLARE

*A One Act Comedy*

**By Thomas Hischak**

**SYNOPSIS:** It is July 4, 1776 and while the Founding Fathers in Philadelphia are debating the Declaration of Independence, seven women wait in a nearby tavern for the outcome. Betsy Ross experiments with different colors and patterns for the new flag, Martha Washington and Martha Jefferson complain about the Quaker food, Abigail Adams follows the Congressional debate on her laptop, Mrs. Paul Revere plays solitaire on her iPhone, and Mrs. Ben Franklin runs her Underground Railroad operation through her cell phone. The women discuss the same things being argued at Independence Hall and come to some insightful conclusions of their own. This wacky and anachronistic look at an historic day is as thought-provoking as it is entertaining.

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

*(7 female, 0-3 either; gender flexible, doubling possible)*

BETSY ROSS (f).....Determined, dedicated, efficient  
*(60 lines)*

MARTHA WASHINGTON (f).....Classy, matronly, understanding  
*(48 lines)*

ABIGAIL ADAMS (f).....Feisty, intelligent, outspoken  
*(89 lines)*

MARTHA JEFFERSON (f).....Soft, pleasant, a bit slow to catch on  
*(63 lines)*

MRS. REVERE (f).....Opinionated, practical *(47 lines)*

MRS. FRANKLIN (f).....Old but spry, straightforward, wise  
*(62 lines)*

LIZZY (f).....Quiet and unassuming *(23 lines)*

VOICE (m/f).....Off-stage speaker. Can be played by 1-3  
actors or doubled by existing  
character(s). *(11 lines)*

**DURATION:** 30 minutes

## SETTING

The dining room of a colonial tavern in Philadelphia. There are four or five tables with period chairs. There is an entrance to the street and another to the kitchen. Perhaps through the windows one can see colonial Philadelphia.

**TIME:** July 4, 1776, or any time since

**PLACE:** Philadelphia, or anywhere with WiFi

## COSTUME SUGGESTIONS

BETSY ROSS - simple dark blue colonial dress, white cap

MARTHA WASHINGTON - elegant gray and maroon colonial dress,  
bonnet

ABIGAIL ADAMS - simple dark brown colonial dress, bonnet

MARTHA JEFFERSON - frilly yellow and white colonial dress, showy sun  
bonnet

MRS. REVERE - dark burgundy colonial dress, white cap

MRS. FRANKLIN - fashionable black and evergreen colonial dress,  
matching sun parasol and bonnet

LIZZY - simple charcoal colonial dress, white apron and cap

## PROPERTIES LIST

### SET PROPS:

- Four or five wooden tables with period chairs (Set props)

### HAND PROPS:

- Laptop (Abigail)
- Cell phones (Mrs. Revere, Abigail, Betsy, Mrs. Franklin)
- 2 tin plates, 2 tankards, 2 forks (Martha W. and Martha J.)
- Wooden tray (Lizzy)
- Sewing basket with scissors, needle, thread (Betsy)
- Basket filled with different color fabrics (Betsy)
- 2 mugs of root beer (Lizzy)
- 1 mug of beer (Lizzy)

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**DIRECTOR'S NOTES**

While some of the historical details in the play are true, much of the comedy is fiction and anachronistic fiction at that. By adding cell phones, internet, and other modern technology to an historic day, the intention is to spoof history while trying to make some valid points about that important day.

The actresses should not exaggerate the characters and turn them into caricatures. As silly and far-fetched as the comedy might become, the women should be played as real people. The best thing is to act them as contemporary women in a situation comedy.

Do Not Copy

**AT RISE:** *Before the lights or the curtain rises, we hear a VOICEOVER announcement.*

**ANNOUNCER'S VOICE:** We interrupt our live coverage of the Continental Congress debate in Philadelphia for this CNN news flash: General Howe and his contingent of His Majesty's Army have drawn closer to New York City, establishing themselves in the little village of Brooklyn. General Washington and the Colonial Army are stationed north of the city and it looks like a military conflict is inevitable. When asked for a statement, General Washington replied with . . .

**WASHINGTON'S VOICE:** Defending the Big Apple is essential. If we can hold our own there, we can hold it anywhere.

**ANNOUNCER'S VOICE:** When CNN interviewed General Howe he stated . . .

**HOWE'S VOICE:** No comment. I only talk to the BBC.

**ANNOUNCER'S VOICE:** An update on the weather. The heat wave along the Eastern seaboard continues for the fourth day. High temperatures are recorded in all the colonies but the radar shows the greatest concentration of hot air to be in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

*Lights rise on the inn. ABIGAIL ADAMS sits alone at one table watching her laptop which is set on the table facing away from the audience. MRS. REVERE sits at another table playing solitaire on her cell phone. Next to her is BETSY ROSS cutting and sewing flag samples. She has a basket of different color material and once in a while holds up a prototype of a possible American flag.*

*MARTHA WASHINGTON and MARTHA JEFFERSON sit at a third table eating off of tin plates and drinking out of tin tankards. All wear colonial dresses and caps or bonnets. MARTHA JEFFERSON speaks with a thick Southern accent, MARTHA WASHINGTON with a slight one. ABIGAIL ADAMS, BETSY ROSS, and MRS. REVERE come from Boston Massachusetts and have New England accents. All the women are middle-aged except MARTHA JEFFERSON who is in her twenties. LIZZY can be any age, from a teenager to an elderly woman.*

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**ANNOUNCER'S VOICE:** We now return to our live coverage of the debate concerning a proposed Declaration of Independence which the Continental Congress is arguing right now in Philadelphia.

**BETSY:** Turn that thing off, Abby. It's giving me a headache!

**ANNOUNCER'S VOICE:** John Adams, the delegate from Massachusetts . . .

**ABIGAIL:** I just want to know what my husband and the other delegates are up to.

**BETSY:** What men are always up to: Foolishness! *(Holds up some purple cloth.)* What do you think about purple?

**MRS. REVERE:** Isn't that the color of kings? Royal purple and all that?

**BETSY:** You're right, Mrs. Revere. *(Tosses purple cloth back into the basket.)*

**ANNOUNCER'S VOICE:** For two days now Adams has been arguing the point of States' Rights on the floor . . .

**ABIGAIL:** I'll turn it lower. *(Turns the laptop low until the ANNOUNCER'S voice is no longer heard.)* Better?

**BETSY:** Much. Thank you.

**MRS. REVERE:** I wish you could turn down this heat. Philadelphia is stifling!

**BETSY:** You can say that again.

**ABIGAIL:** I think my laptop is overheating.

**MARTHA J.:** You three New England gals must find it awful, this heat. Now us Virginia ladies –

**BETSY:** I know. Southern belles don't mind the heat. They just sit out on the veranda and sip cool lemonade.

**MRS. REVERE:** What's a veranda?

**BETSY:** Durned if I know.

**ABIGAIL:** It's a kind of a porch.

**MRS. REVERE:** How did you know that, Mrs. Adams? You have a veranda up in Quincy?

**ABIGAIL:** I suppose so. But we just call it a porch.

**BETSY:** My hands are so sweaty, the needle keeps slipping through my fingers!

**MARTHA W.:** Don't you find it a bit premature, Mrs. Ross? Your sewing, I mean.

**BETSY:** How do you mean, Mrs. Washington?

**MARTHA W.:** Coming up with a design for a flag for a country that doesn't exist yet.

**BETSY:** Call me an optimist. Surely you can understand optimism, Mrs. W.

**MARTHA W.:** The wife of a General has to be a realist.

**MARTHA J.:** Honestly, Martha. If my husband was leading a ragtag army of farmers against the British Empire, I'd learn to become an optimist pretty quick.

**BETSY:** I don't like the description ragtag. Some of them boys are dressed rather nicely.

**MARTHA W.:** Your husband, you mean. He's got a wife that sews. I never could tolerate sewing. I hadn't the talent.

**BETSY:** Talent? Needlepoint takes talent. Sewing is easy. Especially flags. I think I'm going back to the green. *(Pulls green fabric from basket and starts cutting and sewing.)*

**MARTHA W.:** I once tried to sew a dress coat for George. *(Laughs mildly.)* It looked more like a flag than a coat!

**BETSY:** What do you say, Mrs. Revere? Do you sew your husband's clothes?

**MRS. REVERE:** Heavens no! Paul is such a dreadful dresser. Always looks like he just rolled out of bed. I hope that folks don't think I make those clothes! *(Looking up from her cell phone.)* Darn, this new variation of solitaire is tricky! There's too many kings!

**ABIGAIL:** That's what John says all the time. Too many kings in this world. *(Still watching the laptop.)* They just read a text from General Washington to the Congress.

**MARTHA W.:** Oh dear . . .

**ABIGAIL:** It did not encourage much optimism.

**MARTHA W.:** George's texting is so depressing. They're never going to sign that Declaration if they read his texts out loud in Congress.

**BETSY:** I think green is rather nice. The trouble is, it doesn't go well with too many other colors. *(Holds up a sample with green and blue stripes.)* See what I mean?

**MRS. REVERE:** Looks awful dreary, Mrs. Ross. I'd keep the blue and get rid of the green.

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**MARTHA J.:** Do you sew, Mrs. Adams?

**ABIGAIL:** Me? Not on your life! Besides, it's too hot to sew in this heat. I suppose you Southern belles have slaves to do all your sewing.

**MARTHA J.:** Servants. Please.

**ABIGAIL:** Servants. Slaves. Porch. Veranda. It's the same thing.

**MARTHA W.:** I understand Mr. Adams is quite against slavery.

**ABIGAIL:** So am I. If that means anything to anyone.

**MARTHA J.:** That's what's holding up this here Congress, isn't it? Slavery.

**MRS. REVERE:** Servants. Please.

**ABIGAIL:** Yes. Evidently the slave issue has caused some heated debate.

**BETSY:** Just what this town needs today. More heat.

**MARTHA J.:** This is city heat. I don't like it. Country heat is different.

**ABIGAIL:** Heat is heat. I wish I was back in Massachusetts.

**MRS. REVERE:** Me too. Philadelphia is an all-right town, I suppose, but I miss home.

**MARTHA W.:** I miss Southern home cooking. This Quaker food is a little bland for my tastes.

**MARTHA J.:** I swear they don't even know how to fry a chicken!

**ABIGAIL:** I could use a nice lobster tail right now.

**MARTHA W.:** Or some crab cakes!

**MARTHA J.:** Some grits!

**MRS. REVERE:** Some Boston baked beans!

*LIZZY, a bar maid, enters from the kitchen with an empty tray and goes to the TWO MARTHAS.*

**LIZZY:** How was your lunch, ladies?

**MARTHA W. and MARTHA J.:** Delicious!

**LIZZY:** That's good. Can I clear these away?

**MARTHA J.:** Yes. But I believe I shall have some more root beer.

**MARTHA W.:** Me as well. As cold as you can get it.

**LIZZY:** Certainly. *(Places dishes on a tray.)* We've got some hot rhubarb cobbler for dessert.

**MARTHA W.:** No. Nothing hot.

**MARTHA J.:** Just cool drinks.

**LIZZY:** How about some cupcakes? They ain't hot.

**MARTHA W.:** Who made them?

**LIZZY:** Dolly Madison.

**MARTHA J.:** Forget it.

**LIZZY:** As you ladies wish. (*Exits.*)

**BETSY:** Quaker food is not supposed to be delicious. That's considered a sin.

**ABIGAIL:** You don't say. I thought only the Puritans thought that way.

**BETSY:** I used to be a Quaker. Before I eloped with Mr. Ross. I had to learn how to cook all over again.

**MARTHA J.:** How much longer do you think that Congress is going to take to come to some kind of decision?

**MRS. REVERE:** They've been at it for weeks!

**BETSY:** Men can be so stubborn.

**ABIGAIL:** I know John is the kind that refuses to give in.

**MARTHA W.:** Many would consider that a virtue.

**ABIGAIL:** It is, Mrs. W. The trouble is, most of those delegates are just as stubborn. So the talk goes round and round and nothing is accomplished. I think in the future all one need do to get a chuckle is to mention the word "Congress" and folks will break up laughing.

**MARTHA J.:** Can't they agree on anything? Just one little thing?

**MRS. REVERE:** They all hate the King, I suppose.

**ABIGAIL:** Not really. Some of the conservatives want to reject the crown without offending King George.

**MARTHA J.:** What do you mean, conservatives?

**MARTHA W.:** The South.

**MARTHA J.:** Oh.

**BETSY:** Ouch!

**MRS. REVERE:** You stick yourself again, Mrs. Ross?

**BETSY:** I sure did! Oh, that hurts! And look at that . . .

**MARTHA J.:** What?

**BETSY:** I bled right here on the white fabric.

**MARTHA W.:** You poor dear!

**MRS. REVERE:** Let me see . . .

*BETSY hands her a piece of white cloth with a bit of red on it.*

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That is a nasty stab. But I sure like the red against the white. You ought to consider it, Mrs. Ross.

**BETSY:** In the meantime I might bleed to death!

**MRS. REVERE:** Let me patch up your finger for you.

*Puts down her phone and wraps cloth around BETSY'S finger.*

**BETSY:** Thanks. It seems to me that if that there Congress was made up of women, everything would have been settled by now.

**MARTHA W.:** A farfetched notion, Mrs. Ross.

**ABIGAIL:** Is it?

**MARTHA J.:** Come now, Mrs. Adams! Talk sense.

**ABIGAIL:** That's exactly what a female Congress would talk: sense!

**MRS. REVERE:** *(Finishing wrapping BETSY'S finger.)* How's that, Mrs. Ross? Does your finger feel better?

**BETSY:** Much. Thank you, Mrs. Revere.

*LIZZY enters with two tankards and goes to the TWO MARTHAS.*

**LIZZY:** Root beer right from the cellar! Drink it up while it's still cool.

**MARTHA W.:** Thank you, my dear.

**ABIGAIL:** What is your name, Miss?

**LIZZY:** You want to know my name?

**ABIGAIL:** That's the general idea.

**LIZZY:** I'm Lizzy.

**ABIGAIL:** Good. Now, Lizzy, don't you think you could be part of the Continental Congress if you wanted to?

**LIZZY:** Gosh! What would the Congress need with a bar maid in the Hall? They go to the taverns to drink. A lot of them come here.

**ABIGAIL:** But what if you were not a bar maid but a member of the Congress? Like one of the men?

**LIZZY:** Glory! Now you're joshing me, Ma'am!

**MARTHA W.:** Like I said, Mrs. Adams. A far-fetched notion.

**ABIGAIL:** This whole revolution is a far-fetched notion! If it was a normal, everyday thing, it wouldn't be happening!

**MARTHA J.:** Women running a Congress? I cannot conceive of it.

**ABIGAIL:** Your husband wrote “all men are created equal.” Some of those delegates cannot conceive of that either.

**MARTHA J.:** Well, at least Tom didn’t write that “all men and women are created equal.”

**ABIGAIL:** He should have!

**LIZZY:** I have to get back before –

**ABIGAIL:** That’s fine, Lizzy. Thank you.

*LIZZY exits.*

**BETSY:** I think this combination works pretty well. (*Holds up a flag with red, white and orange.*) It’s red, white and orange.

**MRS. REVERE:** What’s this thing here? (*Points.*)

**BETSY:** A tree. The Tree of Liberty!

**ABIGAIL:** But it’s orange!

**BETSY:** Well we agreed that green was out. And I don’t think a red tree will work. It’ll look like blood!

**MARTHA J.:** But an orange tree . . . ?

**MARTHA W.:** I like the idea of the tree, Mrs. Ross. But I’m afraid . . .

**BETSY:** You’re probably right.

*A cell phone plays “Yankee Doodle”.*

Is that my cell phone?

**MRS. REVERE:** I think it’s mine.

**ABIGAIL:** No, it’s mine. (*Speaks into phone.*) Hello, darling! Is anything the matter?

**BETSY:** I wish my kids would call me. All they ever do is text.

**ABIGAIL:** (*Into the phone.*) No, I don’t think that’s a very good idea, Abby. First of all I don’t think Mabel is a trustworthy chaperone and –

**MRS. REVERE:** Teenagers! Aren’t they something?

**MARTHA W.:** George and I never were blessed.

**MRS. REVERE:** It’s a mixed blessing, to say the least.

**ABIGAIL:** That’s not the point, dear. You are far too young to be going into Boston with only –

**BETSY:** And if I call them they say, “Mom, I’m busy right now. Just text me!”

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**MARTHA J.:** That's this new generation for you.

**ABIGAIL:** Abigail, you are getting hysterical. Is Quincy there? Put your brother on.

**MARTHA W.:** Women tend to get get hysterical over nothing. That's why I don't think I'd like them running a Congress.

**BETSY:** Men get just as hysterical. They call it debate.

**ABIGAIL:** Quincy? Hello, dear. Will please talk some sense into your sister? People have a way of listening to you.

**MARTHA J.:** This root beer is warm already. I declare . . .

**ABIGAIL:** Thank you, Quincy. Good bye, dear. *(Switches off.)* That Quincy will grow up to be famous someday. I just hope it's not in politics. One Adams in government is plenty!

*The door from the street opens and MRS. FRANKLIN sticks her head in. She is older than the rest but far from fragile.*

**MRS. FRANKLIN:** Are you getting cell service in here?

**BETSY:** Yes. Abby just got off the phone.

**MRS. FRANKLIN:** Good. *(Comes in and shuts door behind her.)* I can't get service at home today. I think one of Ben's invention contraptions is messing up the airwaves.

**MARTHA W.:** Come in and sit, Mrs. Franklin. Do you know everybody here?

**MRS. FRANKLIN:** I believe so. Good to see you again, Mrs. Jefferson. Ladies . . . *(Sits with the TWO MARTHAS.)* I swear, every time that man experiments with something new we lose cable or internet or something! *(Punches in numbers.)*

**MARTHA J.:** You been trying to call your husband, Mrs. Franklin?

**MRS. FRANKLIN:** Heck no! He never answers his cell once things heat up in that Congress.

**MRS. REVERE:** Heat is the operative word here.

**MRS. FRANKLIN:** Oh, I didn't see you there, Mrs. Revere. Not too crazy about our Philadelphia heat?

**MRS. REVERE:** Can't say I recommend it.

**MRS. FRANKLIN:** Every summer I feel the humidity more and more. I keep saying to Ben, forgot all this fussing with the Franklin stove and invent air conditioning! No answer. *(Puts cell phone away.)* And I hate leaving messages.

**ABIGAIL:** Your son, I take it?

**MRS. FRANKLIN:** No. It's the William Penn Anti-Slavery Committee. Excellent people but always busy. Just like the Quakers.

**MARTHA J.:** I'm sure.

**MRS. FRANKLIN:** Tell me, Mrs. Jefferson, do you know any of the Anti-Slave folk?

**MARTHA J.:** Ah . . . Maybe some friends on Facebook?

**MRS. REVERE:** Wrong side of the Mason-Dixon line, I'm afraid.

**MRS. FRANKLIN:** But your husband wrote that wonderful passage about all men being equal and such! Ben read parts of it to me. Terrific stuff!

**BETSY:** We were just saying how typical it was of men to disagree over so fine a document.

**MRS. FRANKLIN:** Well, Betsy, I think a Declaration of Independence which everyone immediately accepts would be a little suspect.

**MARTHA J.:** Tom read to me what he wrote and I think it's just splendid!

**MRS. FRANKLIN:** It is, Mrs. Jefferson. But there are parts of that Declaration that are going to be difficult for some men to swallow. So far they have just taken a little taste of it and it seems a bit too bitter to them. Give them time.

**MRS. REVERE:** Time! It seems like they have been at it forever!

**ABIGAIL:** I think the whole idea of united states is an oxymoron.

**MARTHA J.:** What's that? Some kind of Boston fish recipe?

**ABIGAIL:** No. A paradox. A contradiction.

**MARTHA J.:** Oh.

**ABIGAIL:** A state, by its nature, is a self-contained, self-governed, self-sufficient entity. Now these men want to combine –

**MARTHA W.:** The word is unite . . .

**ABIGAIL:** Unite these very separate, very distinct entities into one way of thinking, one way of living. I wonder if it can be done. "United . . . States." It's a contradiction in terms. It's like saying . . . a mob . . . of individuals.

*Cell phone rings playing "Turkey in the Straw".*

**MRS. REVERE:** Is that mine?

**BETSY:** I think it's mine.

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**ABIGAIL:** Not mine.

**MRS. FRANKLIN:** Oh, it's Millicent. (*Into phone.*) Hello, Millicent, dear! What a coincidence! I just tried to call you.

**BETSY:** (*Looking at her cell phone.*) Not even a text. (*Puts her cell away.*) Children!

**MRS. FRANKLIN:** It's rather important, dear. Mrs. Harris is hiding a runaway in her attic. A woman and her baby. Poor Mrs. Harris is quite at odds over what to do next. Should she call our contact in Allentown?

**MARTHA J.:** A runaway?

**MRS. REVERE:** A slave, Mrs. Jefferson.

**ABIGAIL:** A servant, you mean.

**MRS. FRANKLIN:** That's a wonderful idea, Millicent. I'll call Frieda first and make sure everything is ready.

**MARTHA J.:** Isn't this . . . illegal?

**BETSY:** Very.

**MRS. FRANKLIN:** Thank you, Millicent! I'll get right on it! (*Hangs up.*) Seventy-four years old and still as active as ever!

**MARTHA J.:** The runaway?

**MRS. FRANKLIN:** No. Millicent!

**MARTHA J.:** Was this slave from . . . the South?

**ABIGAIL:** I don't think she's from Connecticut!

**MARTHA W.:** My, Mrs. Franklin, I had no idea you were so actively involved in . . . these things.

**MRS. FRANKLIN:** It was Ben who started the Committee. His best invention since Daylight Savings Time.

*LIZZY enters, sees MRS. FRANKLIN.*

**LIZZY:** Mrs. Franklin! I didn't hear you come in!

**MRS. FRANKLIN:** Needed to make some calls, Lizzy. How about some beer?

**MARTHA J.:** I ought to warn you, Mrs. Franklin, that the root beer doesn't stay cool in this heat.

**MRS. FRANKLIN:** Who said anything about root beer?

**LIZZY:** Right away, Mrs. Franklin. Sam Adams all right?

**MRS. FRANKLIN:** I guess so. Mr. Franklin and Mr. Adams don't see eye to eye on some issues but Ben likes Sam's beer okay.  
(*Presses buttons on her phone.*)

**LIZZY:** Sure thing. (*Exits.*)

**BETSY:** Anything happening at the Congress, Abby?

**MRS. REVERE:** Silly question.

**ABIGAIL:** It seems that Mr. Rutledge from South Carolina is spewing most of the hot air at this point.

**MRS. FRANKLIN:** (*Into cell phone.*) Frieda? This is Bluebell. I have a message from Buckshot. Code Purple. That's right. Get right on it. (*Hangs up.*) Well, that's that.

**MARTHA W.:** It seems like a lot of women are involved in your . . . organization.

**MRS. FRANKLIN:** Yes. And they do a bang up job of it too!

**ABIGAIL:** Then why not women in a Congress?

**MRS. FRANKLIN:** What's that, Abigail?

**MRS. REVERE:** Mrs. Adams believes that women would do a better job passing this Declaration of Independence than the men are doing.

**MRS. FRANKLIN:** Possibly. But I wouldn't tell the men that. They're such sensitive creatures.

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