

Anne Bonney—Woman Pirate

North Carolina's most notorious woman was blood-thirsty and cruel as any corsair who ravaged the coast of North America in the early days of the eighteenth century. She was the woman pirate, Anne Bonney.

A prolific but inattentive mother, unfaithful to her husband, yet an intrepid and resolute fighter, she handled pistol and cutlass as well as a man. When her vessel was finally defeated by an English naval sloop, Anne Bonney, with two others, was the last to leave the bloody deck, while her crew sought shelter from the enemy's deadly cannon fire in the ship's hold. Cursing them for their cowardice, the enraged woman fired her pistols, killing one and wounding another of her own men.

Came to North Carolina as a Child

Anne came to this state — which was at that time part of the province of Carolina — as a child. She was born at Cork, Ireland, probably in the sixteen-nineties. Her father was an attorney who was highly respected until, alas! Anne was born — the daughter of his servant girl. He immediately eloped to America, leaving his affectionate and lawful wife. Little Anne was brought along.

The father became a successful merchant and bought a plantation which is thought to have been in the Cape Fear region of North Carolina, and there the little girl grew up. When her mother died, Anne superintended her father's domestic affairs.



In spite of her vicious disposition, she had many suitors from respectable families, probably because she was

heir to her father's considerable fortune. More masculine than feminine, she was quick-tempered and easily enraged. Once when an English serving-woman irritated her, the hot-tempered Anne sprang upon her and disembowelled her with a carving knife.

Disregarding her local suitors, Anne fell in love with a young sailor whose sole worldly goods were the clothes he wore. She married him.

The father, as impetuous as the daughter, was enraged and turned her out of doors. Tired of hum-drum plantation life, the fiery Anne was glad to follow the sea with her husband, and embarked with him for the island of New Providence off the coast of New England.

New Surroundings

New Providence, a nest of buccaners, gave Anne a new, delightful surrounding of daring, dashing sea-robbers. Beside these bold pirates, a sailor seemed plain and stupid. One day she deserted her husband and, putting on men's clothes, ran away to sea with Captain John Rackham, one of the most feared pirates of the day.

It was Rackham who had led a successful mutiny against Charles Vane, a friend and companion of Blackbeard, and with his stolen vessel, he and Anne began to terrorize the Spanish Main, stealing gold and cargoes.

She donned the clothes of a pirate, girded to her side a cutlass, and hung pistols in her belt. During many voy-

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Definitions:

* notorious - well known for being bad or evil

* corsair - North African pirate

* prolific - producing abundantly

* intrepid - fearless, bold

* cutlass - sword - small, curved

* superintended - supervised

* domestic - household

* vicious - fierce

* disposition - personality

* suitors - boyfriends

* disembowelled - removed intestines

* impetuous - hasty

* mutiny - when a crew overthrows a captain

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ages she sailed with Captain Rackham, and whenever there was pirate's work to do, she was on deck to do it. With every outward appearance she was a sea-robber, except that she wore no bristling beard; but her sun-burned face was seamed and mannish enough to scare the wits from any unfortunate merchant whose ship she plundered.

Frequent Vacations

Through all her corsairing, she found time to bear Rackham children, but after each child she again accompanied her husband on his expeditions.

After the king's proclamation in 1718 offering to pardon all pirates, Rackham and Anne lived quietly ashore. But chafing with inactivity, they took up privateering under government license. Hardly out to sea, they again turned to unrestricted piracy.

In November, 1720, near Port Royal, Jamaica, Anne's ship was set upon and defeated by the English naval sloop, and on November 16 the captain and eight of his unslain crew, including Anne and Mary Read, another woman pirate aboard, were returned to the Carolinas. Rackham was condemned and executed — hanged in chains.

By a special favor just before the execution, she was admitted to see her

common-law husband. Instead of condoling him, she glared contemptuously. She was sorry to see him there, she told him; but if he had fought the English sloop like a man, he would not be waiting to be hanged like a dog, and with that she walked away.

Anne's companion, Mary Read, was quite as masculine and sanguinary. Mary was an English woman reared in boy's clothes to deceive a grandmother who wanted a male heir. Legend has it that Anne did not discover that Mary was a woman until, characteristically unfaithful, she fell in love with her, thinking her a fine, smooth-faced youth. Rackham, a jealous paramour, observing Anne's partiality for a member of the crew, threatened to shoot Mary before he was informed of her sex.

Back in the colonies, the two women were sentenced to die, but Mary was saved from execution when she contracted a fatal fever.

Anne, again with child, remained in prison until her recovery. She was reprieved from time to time, and by some trick of justice, North Carolina's only woman pirate was pardoned. Whether she continued as a sea-bandit, we do not know. It is certain that she was not executed, and it also probably is a fact that she was the last of the female pirates.



- * chafing - to become impatient
- * privateering - legal pirating
- * condoling - declaring sympathy
- * contemptuously - with utter dislike, hate
- * sanguinary - red faced
- * paramour - a lover
- * partiality - fondness
- * reprieved - pardoned, excused