

Oneida History
Conf 1986

REVOLUTIONARY WAR:

13

Oneida Traditions

1. Gloria Halbritter,
*Oneida Territory, New York, recounts the story of the
Polly Cooper shawl.*

According to our oral history, Polly Cooper, an Oneida, was at Valley Forge during the American Revolution. Oneidas under the leadership of Chief Skenandon brought bushels of corn to relieve the starving Patriot army. Cooper worked for General Washington, showing the Americans how to cook the corn properly. Washington offered to pay her, but she refused remuneration because she said that it was her duty to serve her country. Washington then sent his wife Martha, accompanied by Polly Cooper, to the American capital at Philadelphia, where the future first lady bought the Oneida woman a black shawl, a hat, and a bonnet. The Oneida people still have that shawl—the Polly Cooper shawl—which is safely deposited in a bank vault in Syracuse, New York.

The Oneida Indian Experience, Jack Campisi and
Laurence M. Hauptman, 1988, Syracuse Univ.
Press, Page 145