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“A Great Rout in Town Related to My Title”:

Gender, Law, and Landholding in Revolutionary New England

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This article analyzes a Boston widow’s management of her land in northeastern Connecticut, using her story to examine the disruption of property regimes during the American Revolution and the interplay of class, communal belonging, and gendered power within struggles over land. In 1735, Martha Stoddard Stevens (1713–85) acquired an extensive Stoddard family tract in Ashford, Connecticut. In 1776, Connecticut seized this land on the grounds that she and her husband were loyalists. By 1777, Stevens was a widow, and she successfully petitioned to regain her estate. However, the court’s judgment reactivated long-standing tensions between the Stoddard family and the people of Ashford. Multipronged resistance from Ashford residents eroded Stevens’s ability to profit from such land during the remainder of her life. Stevens’s story adds important granularity to narratives of the revolution’s consequences for propertied, high-status women, suggesting that such women’s arenas of activity and their standing within their communities yielded significant situational variances in their access to the privileges of elite femininity. Moreover, attending to Stevens’s dealings in northeastern Connecticut, a patriot-leaning region not conventionally associated with revolutionary land conflicts, underscores that the revolution was a period of legal instability during which numerous town-based actors and sites of contestation collectively sculpted gendered property regimes.