

## Samuel Gridley Howe, American Philhellene

By Andreas Lolis

Picture this: it's 1826. The Greek Revolution is raging. Brave Greeks struggle to free the Peloponnese from oppressive Ottoman control. Zoom in; examine the contributions of three particular American Philhellenes. First, a soldier and doctor in the Greek military splits his time fighting with the Greeks and saving the lives of his brothers. Another supporter of the revolution finds himself stateside, teaching people across the country about the plight of the Greeks, imploring them to support the movement. He raises a tremendous amount of money in the process, which he uses to help poor civilians. The next year, a historian is writing an account of the Revolution to be read by those same Philhellenes, renewing their support for the movement. He gives future generations a source from which to learn about the revolution; his mark is indelible. These three Philhellenes each made a great contribution to the Revolution. Except, they weren't three different people. They were one person, and his name was Samuel Gridley Howe. That man changed history. Through his military, financial, and intellectual contributions to the Greek Revolution and its aftermath, Samuel Gridley Howe is undoubtedly the foremost and greatest American Philhellene.

After graduating from Harvard Medical School in 1824, Howe was greatly moved and inspired by the death of poet Lord Byron in Greece. Arriving in Missolongi to fight in 1824, he was soon given the title "Surgeon-in-Chief" due to his expertise (AHEPA). Howe, a devoted fighter, did not only spend his time on the front lines, but also helped nurse his fellow soldiers when they fell injured or ill. His efforts were so great that one historian declared: "No other [American] Philhellene did so much for the insurgent Hellenic provinces and the cause of their

independence” (Earle). His significance was so great that he earned the title “Lafayette of the Greek Revolution.” Howe’s bravery is a characteristic that should always be looked up to.

Howe’s contributions were not only on the battlefield. As a fledgling young economy, Greece also struggled financially. Fighting a war (meaning the Greek government had to continuously buy new guns, ammunition, and ships) compounded the already desperate economy. He was acutely aware of this difficulty, writing in one of his journals, “The Greek soldiers are ill-clothed, worse fed, and paid, as one may say, nothing at all”. There was no military budget, so there was even less to spare for a social safety net. Poverty was rampant; starvation was killing people. Seeing this need, he returned to the United States to appeal to American Philhellenic committees for financial assistance in 1827. Through his vivacious nationwide campaign, Howe single-handedly raised \$60,000, or over \$1.5 million in today’s money. With these funds, he distributed “several boatloads of food and clothing [...] to the starving, ill-clad people, in whose fight he had risked his own life” (Collins). As if all this wasn’t enough, Howe went on to create a camp in Aegina that housed and fed Greek refugees from all across the land. Make no mistake: Howe saved lives with his charity. In the Christian spirit, he fed the hungry and clothed the naked. His service must be admired.

And yet, Howe’s greatest significance to the Revolution wasn’t as a soldier, doctor, or fund raiser. No, his most important contribution came through his writings about the movement which carry a lasting impact. From the battlefield, Howe wrote about his daily routine, the men with whom he fought and the status of the war. These are compiled in an anthology which serves as a primary source for historians studying the Greek Revolution to this day. Much can be gleaned from his recordings, including the conditions of the fight and the progression of the war

from Howe's perspective. Not only that, but he wrote extensively about his fellow Philhellenes such as George Jarvis and Jonathan Miller. Regarding the former, he wrote, "General Jarvis [...] has become a complete Greek in dress, manners, and language [...] He is a man I am proud to own as a countryman." And Miller, he proclaimed, "is as brave a man as has ever stepped foot in Greece; has the most sterling integrity and an entire devotion to the cause of liberty." Much of their acknowledgement and acclaim is a result of Howe's witness to their contributions.

But his journals and letters aren't even his most impactful writing. After he returned home from the war, he also wrote an historical account of the entire revolution, titled *An Historical Sketch of the Greek Revolution*. Howe opens with an introduction that first contextualizes the movement for independence within all of Hellenic history, and then gives a broad take on the entire development. In recounting the events, he covers every possible topic, from the causes of the Revolution, to the Filiki Etairia; from Bishop Germanos of Patras faithfully and stoically raising the cross to bless the Revolution, to each individual battle; from the ugliness of early Greek politics, to Ibrahim Pasha's counter attack campaign; Howe left no stone unturned and no question unanswered in his extensive history. His goal was to educate and inform, which he accomplished unquestionably. His *Sketch of the Greek Revolution* was widely distributed and doubtlessly reinvigorated American support for the movement. His beautiful and influential writing makes him worthy to be the intellectual progeny of the most prominent and greatest historian, the Father of History, Herodotus, who documented the Greco-Persian War. His writings serve as an eternal testament to the success of the Revolution and the beauty of liberty.

Samuel Gridley Howe went above and beyond in his service to the Greek people. Truly, "no crusading knight of the storied campaigns of chivalry against the infidels did more romantic

deeds of personal and physical valor” (Clement). The time, talent, and treasure that he gave in service left an undeniable impact on the movement for independence. To risk one’s life is to show the greatest love and devotion. Service to others is of paramount importance. Strive to be like Samuel Gridley Howe.

“[The success of the Greek Revolution] should be the prayer not of the Philhellene alone, but of every Philanthropist, of every Christian; for the independence of Greece is not to release her children alone from the thralldom of the Turks; but it will open the door for the advance of liberty, of civilization, and of Christianity in the East.”

Samuel Gridley Howe, *An Historical Sketch of the Greek Revolution*

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