

## Abstract

This study examines the contribution of Sarah Pierpont Edwards and Sarah Osborn to the Great Awakening, a religious spiritual awakening, that happened in the Colonies in the eighteenth century. Sarah Pierpont Edward's name was lost in the shadow of his husband, who was a representative theologian during the First Great Awakening period. The second subject of this study, Sarah Osborn, was unknown till Professor Catherine A. Brekus shed light on her personal contribution to the rise of evangelicalism. As her presence as a female missionary and former boarding school director is of great importance, this paper will empathetically highlight these aspects of her life as well.

This is divided into three main parts. At first hand, it explores the roles of women in the preceding decades of the Great Awakening. Additionally, several related terms will be clarified, such as *religious pluralism*, *revivalism*, and *New Birth*. In the midst of the church and social changes, women were experimenting with how to give voice to their thoughts outside of the domestic sphere. The most significant instance of it was the attitude of the Quakers leaders towards women, who allowed them to preach.

Aside from the reaction of the communities of Sarah Pierpont Edwards and Sarah Osborn, this study will thoroughly elaborate on their personal lives, based on three aspects. First, their personal narratives since they both recorded their own spiritual pilgrimage. Second, as their narratives are one-sided, it is inevitable to take into consideration the reception of their Memoirs, letters, and diary entries. Amongst others, there were two important male characters in their lives, namely, Jonathan Edwards, the husband of Sarah Pierpont Edwards, and Joseph Fish, a minister, and a spiritual guide of Sarah Osborn, whose reconstructed opinion about the above-mentioned women will be detailed. Third, the contemporary influences that could be traced in their narratives, such as the Lockean Sensationalism. These ideas were supported by several significant contemporary scholars in this field, such as Catherine A. Brekus, Kenneth Minkema, Harry Stout, and Amanda Porterfield, just to mention some.

Thus, the thesis intends to shed light on the prospect of these women in the Great Awakening with a special focus on their hardships concerning their spiritual pilgrimage and comparison of the revelations of Sarah Pierpont Edwards with Sarah Osborn's experiences.

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# 1. Introduction

Women's sacrifices were very often unseen or marginal. In the 1700s, women were in a very extraordinary situation if someone was called by God to preach His word: they received condemnation and were believed to be sinful. Regardless of this fact, hundreds of brave European, and American women were called and were inspired to spread the Gospel. Martin Luther would not have been able to fulfil his role as a devoted church leader without the presence of Katharina von Bora, just to mention a significant example from the European continent. Turning to the Colonies, or to the *Promise Land*, as the puritans called it, religion played a significant role in its growth. However, in the beginning of the eighteenth century, Jonathan Edwards<sup>1</sup> had revolutionary ideas concerning a new spiritual awakening, in which, women had significant roles, without notice. Sooner or later, at the dawn of the 1750s, their attempt had failed, though, for a short period, it seemed that women and men had equal rights in the church and had the opportunity to be missionaries. Contemporary, church authorities considered female missionaries to be fundamentally radicals. Evangelicals<sup>2</sup>, on the other hand, followed biblical teachings and frequently referred to missionary women in the Bible. For instance, Anne or Martha from the New Testament, occasionally promoted their faith. What Anne did was the recognition of the Messiah, as it appears in Luke 2: 36-38 as the following:

And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity;

And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.

And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth.”

Her altruistic efforts and commitment to the Lord were her defining attributes. In possession of this knowledge concerning biblical missionaries, how was it possible that a woman in the Bible was able to become a missionary? Why should women be persecuted of doing the same thing in the 17<sup>th</sup> century? As, along with me, countless women and scholars have been asked the same

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<sup>1</sup> 1703-1758.

<sup>2</sup> Were a group of Protestant Christians in America who adhered to traditional Protestant teachings, furthermore, emphasized the importance of spiritual rebirth. They were from a variety of denominations, including Baptist, Methodist, and Pentecostal.

questions since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, however none could provide a sufficient answer. Thus, these questions are not only difficult but deserve further examination.

Therefore, in this paper I intend to focus on several layers that are connected to Sarah Edwards<sup>3</sup> and Sarah Osborn<sup>4</sup>. Based on their personal narratives, they were one of the earliest representatives of female missionaries in the Colonies. On the one hand, Sarah Edwards was an equivalent partner in religious dialogues, since from early childhood her educational background was more thorough than one would normally acquire in the 18th century, due to her father social status. On the other hand, Sarah Osborn, the second subject of this study, had little in common with Sarah Edwards in terms of personality, but they both lived devout Christian lives. As opposed to Mrs. Edwards, Sarah Osborn was a “self-made woman”, as one would refer to her nowadays, supporting her family, community, and herself. The loss of her husband at an early age forced her to acquire typical feminine and masculine attributes. Sarah Edwards and Sarah Osborn both displayed resilience in the face of adversity and extreme stress in a variety of situations, yet their fundamental beliefs functioned as core tenets.

The structure of this study organized in a chronological order; the roles of women in the pre-Great Awakening are examined in order to put Sarah Edwards and Sarah Osborn's missionary efforts into a context. The Great Awakening prepared the way for a new, revolutionized attitude, which provided a little door for women to enter and give voice to their religious experiences, something that had not been possible in previous decades. The second part of this paper seeks to examine their own narratives, such as their memoirs and letters, as eyewitnesses to their devoted lives. However, the characteristics of both Sarah Edwards and Sarah Osborn have not been dealt with in depth. Since they lived during a time of profound spiritual change in religion, their narratives encapsulated different notions, including Lockean sensationalism and Calvinist views on the body – as the fundamental source of evil, which was also emphasized in Puritanism. Both Edwards and Osborn were humble and unaware of the fact that they paved the road for female preaching in America, though it was almost impossible as a woman to spread the word of God. However, taking into consideration their personal narratives, namely memoirs and letters, and the influences that they had on the community, one could easily come to the conclusion that they were indeed the active and constructive recipients of their community. Within the framework of these criteria, there are the approaches interwoven: the opportunities of Sarah Edwards and Sarah Osborn through the comparison of

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<sup>4</sup> Sarah Osborn represents a fascinating female religious leader of her age, as she drew a massive crowd to her house in the 1760s, including many slaves.

their lives, roles and influences that were merged in their personal narratives. While the role of women was unquestionably limited to social spheres, it is inevitable to look beyond these boundaries, by discovering their personal narratives and their indirect fight against exclusion and restriction. Therefore, this study proposes a new approach to understand the role of Sarah Edwards and Sarah Osborn through their narratives.

## 2. Background information

### 2.1. Attitude towards women from the seventeenth century to the early nineteenth century

In contrast to earlier centuries, women in the seventeenth century aspired to break free from their foremothers' conventions. While women were not allowed to speak their minds in prior ages, they were allowed to pray, read the Bible, if they were literate, and attend churches. Prior to the Protestant Reformation, Catholic women were either seen as the Virgin Mary or the prostitute Mary Magdalene. In terms of Protestantism, John Calvin viewed women as human beings motivated by sexual desires. It is known that the Puritans were the equivalents of Calvinism in the American Continent, they were uneasy in terms of biblical teaching. Protestants encouraged women to marry in order to avoid sexual immorality<sup>5</sup>. However, the concept of female-male opposition was only proposed in the nineteenth century; before that, there was no clear line separating the characteristics of female and male roles. They completed each other's lives, treated the other as a partner, and shared common objectives, such as producing goods in order to survive on a daily basis. In this context, Brekus stated that "any role was appropriate for a wife as long as it furthered the good of the family and was acceptable to her husband"<sup>6</sup>. Puritans emphasized the importance of personal relationships through Bible reading which resulted in a shift in women's roles. As a consequence, the Puritan woman was able to interpret the Bible for herself, and to use the knowledge she had already acquired, in due time and with due vocabulary. As a notable instance, Reverend James Hillhouse's<sup>7</sup>, a pastor in New England, mother was praised as being a moral Puritan woman, who found the proper time and place to preach to her family and friends.

Regardless of their differences in doctrine, the Anglicans, Puritans, Presbyterians, and Dutch Reformed all seemed to have one common characteristic: they disapproved of women speaking in public, they all agreed on the well-known letter of Paul to Timothy, in which he declared that women were not permitted to speak. As John Cotton<sup>8</sup> also highlighted "by way of teaching whether in expounding or applying scripture, for this Apostle accounteth the act of

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<sup>5</sup>Puritan Women, YouTube (YouTube, 2020), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IVQNFT9sX2g&t=719s&ab\\_channel=ClaireEberhardt](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IVQNFT9sX2g&t=719s&ab_channel=ClaireEberhardt), 10:00-12:53.

<sup>6</sup> Catherine A. Brekus. *The Religious History of American Women: Reimagining the Past* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 28.

<sup>7</sup> 1687-1740.

<sup>8</sup> 1585-1652.

authority which is unlawful for a woman to usurp over the man”<sup>9</sup>. Women were authorized to sing hymns and answer questions if they had been asked, but Paul’s law stated that in any other circumstance, they were breaking the law of the Bible.

## 2.2. Are there exceptions after all?

Women’s exclusion from institutional authority was the foremost cause of the development of new dominions outside of the church; they were technically permitted to contribute to the public life of their churches but were not allowed to occupy leading positions. However, Quakers granted women the liberty to speak and to lead their communities. Quakers were a group of religious reformers who sought to blur the lines between *clergy* and *laity* by experimenting with new models of liturgy, worship, and other religious practices<sup>10</sup>. It has been suggested by George Fox<sup>11</sup>, a significant Quaker leader, that religious authority is unnecessary and that one should experience God without mediation, which seemed to be an innovative approach in the eighteenth century. They allowed women to occupy leading positions, since they thought that in the moment of conversion gender is not significant. Quaker rituals were different from Anglican and Puritan rituals in various ways; they argued that individuals could experience God on a personal level. However, Puritans refused to embrace God’s revelation as the source of inspiration, especially women, who were regarded as a bodily weaker gender. Their personal experiences would have been unacceptable since they did not have the physical power to manage the Holy Spirit’s presence. Thus, the explanation for the denial of women leaders is simple: Quaker women challenged the patriarchal system’s traditional inequity in church roles. A traditional Puritan woman was “intellectually and physically inferior to men” and “they tried to control every facet of their behaviour, not least of their speech”<sup>12</sup>. Later in her commentary, Brekus refers to historians in this discipline, who found that Puritan doctrines were “irredeemably misogynistic”<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Brekus, *The Religious History of American Women: Reimagining the Past*, 28.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>11</sup> 1624-1691.

<sup>12</sup> Brekus, *The Religious History of American Women: Reimagining the Past*, 29.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 29.

Despite seventeenth-century bias against female preachers, several courageous women endured the burden of exclusion or exile in order to reassert the convictions God planted in their hearts. For instance, Anne Hutchinson, the American Jezebel<sup>14</sup>, was “a woman of a haughty and fierce carriage, of a nimble wit and active spirit”<sup>15</sup>. Supposedly, numerous religious gatherings occurred in her home. In her analysis, Brekus highlights that Hutchinson portrayed herself as a minister by defending and commenting on specific teachings. She embraced Calvinist ideas, arguing that good deeds are insignificant in the eyes of God. Hutchinson confessed her unmediated relationship with God, by saying that God had communicated her directly. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning the case of Sarah Keayne<sup>16</sup>, who was considered as “religious radical” because she travelled to London with her husband, her major flaw was her ability to speak out against Puritan dogmas in a perceptive way. Apart from being excommunicated, her spouse filed for divorce as a result of her unconventional and disrespectful behaviour.

These above-mentioned instances revealed that there were substantial disparities in the treatment of female missionaries between Puritan churches and women in Quaker communities. As previously proposed, the evidence demonstrated that women in the late seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries endured oppression, and those who dared to question the traditional inequalities, such as Quaker women, immediately drew the attention of church authorities and were treated with contempt. Thus, only those women who held positions in society received acceptance, after questioning the clergy’s unshakable authority. Generally, the freedom of free expression was in line with authority. This component is entirely consistent with Hutchinson and Keayne's strong church and government affiliations. Brekus highlighted that this tendency was widespread in Western societies. However, in a larger context, an additional problem was the ongoing witch-hunt, which occurred not only on the new Continent but across Europe. Based on the counterexample of the Puritan goodwife, one could argue that witch-hunting was a result of the lack of knowledge and mere fear of the inexplicable meta sphere of life. However, numerous scholars consider that this evidence is inconclusive.

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<sup>14</sup> In 1 Kings, King Ahab's wife is portrayed as a corrupt and immoral woman who seduces and pushes Jews to return to idolatry.

<sup>15</sup> Brekus, *The Religious History of American Women: Reimagining the Past*, 29.

<sup>16</sup> the sister of Anne Bradstreet, a significant Puritan poet

### 3. Roles of women in The Great Awakening

#### 3.1. Terminology related to the Great Awakening

Although the fundamental origins of the revivals are elusive, both economic and social conditions have aided in the rise of this traditional but revitalized spiritual awakening. These changes were resulted in the birth of several related terms, such as *religious pluralism*, the confrontation of *New and Old Light* evangelicalism, *revivalism*, and *New Birth*.

The Great Awakening appeared to create religious diversity, during the 1740s and 1750s, that supported new Christian practices. Thus, *religious pluralism* is a strongly related term that should be discussed in this section, since it “is the state of being where every individual in a religiously diverse society has the rights, freedoms and safety to worship, or not, according to their own conscience”. Moreover, the increasing class of merchants had a significant role in the development of this so-called New Light<sup>17</sup> revivals. Evangelicalism was divided into two main parts: the Old Light and the New Lights. In Protestant circles, these terms were used to denote the contrasts or breaks between an initially identical movement, or religious denomination that eventually split. When the direction of a denomination changed and some refuse to convert, those that have not changed are called the Old Lights while those who have converted are alluded to as the New Lights. According to Brekus, what New Lights desired most was a return to a traditional and simplistic way of the Christian life, yet they eventually contributed to the creation of a more autonomous and diverse society. They dissolved the social order that had long anchored their communities of religion by prioritizing individual religious experience over distinctions of education, income, age, race, or sex.

Financial security became firmly associated with the Great Awakening since it was a crucial component of both communal and individual well-being. The community, however, reacted differently to this newly formed class, which appears to be attempting to substitute the previously established dependence of genders, leaders, and followers. The advent of a potential new merchant class resulted in substantial emotional and physical changes. However, diphtheria and scarlet fever outbreaks, a lack of land and financial instruments, urban ethnic

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<sup>17</sup> Evangelicalism is divided into two parts: the “Old Lights”, who represented traditional evangelical religious teaching, and the “New Lights”, were the progressing part of evangelicalism.

tensions, and military worries were all massive societal concerns, all of which were perceived through religious lenses<sup>18</sup>. As a result, clergy and church leaders in New England, Connecticut, and Massachusetts, believed that God was enraged with them for failing to inherit their Puritan forefathers' piety. These socio-economic changes in society resulted in the both of the term *revivalism*, which was a vital aspect of Puritanism's reform movement. The most well-known critic of Revivalism, Rossel, suggested that revivals required active participation, removing ideological and institutional barriers that were limiting such reforms<sup>19</sup>.

A new breed of youthful, energetic preachers attempted to revitalize piety by exploring more appealing and emotive preaching styles in the years of 1740s and 1750s. Ministers, as scholars refer to them as a shift from rational religious explanations to the emotional softer teaching, and this was the main factor that distinguished the Great Awakening movement from the other denominations. Jonathan Edwards emphasized the importance of people experiencing the fruits of the Holy Spirit rather than being professional interpreters of the Bible. The term New Birth is inextricably linked to Revivalism; according to its doctrine, no amount of learning can replace the spiritual awakening required to live a God-inspired life. Furthermore, like Jonathan Edwards, Gilbert Tennet advocated for religious experience over formal schooling, and he helped to separate the phrases "laity" and "clergy". Even though they attempted to reconstruct the old approach, they fell short at times, as the members of the new rising spiritual awakening constantly evaluated and judged others, declaring them as "saved" or "damned" based on their behaviour's. Thus, by rejecting past generations' ideas, the Great Awakening established a new innovative and previously rejected way of perceiving the Bible.

### 3.2. Women and the Great Awakening

Interestingly, Isaac Backus, a churchman, referred to his soul as a "she", like many other evangelicals. Therefore, a new common language was born, the language of conversion, since men's and women's narratives reflect true similarities in their individual religious journeys. Conversion was a figurative rebirth in Christ for both women and men. Despite how the revivals softened gender inequalities, they did not totally overtake them. Although there were

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<sup>18</sup> "Religious Pluralism 101," Religion & Society Program, last modified September 4, 2019, <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/blog-posts/religious-pluralism-101/>.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Rossel, "The Great Awakening: An Historical Analysis." *American Journal of Sociology* 75", no. 6 (1970): 908-909.

resemblances between men's and women's conversion, the narratives vary in minor but significant ways. Three significant alterations should be addressed. Primarily, in matters of self-description, female narration tends to use passive and submissive language and overactive I narration. For instance, the case of Mercy Holmes, who wrote that "I was bro't to see yet...", while Abraham Choate stated that "the decision to be saved was his own". Mercy was a passive recipient, being actively converted by God, meanwhile Choate was an active agent in the process of conversion. The narration highlighted an inherited, conventional role of women as being the bearer of the greater original sin. A frequently quoted passage from the Bible was Isaiah 1:6 in which one female lamented upon her sin "From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and purifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment"<sup>20</sup>. It leads to the second complex alternation, the negative attributes that women used in their self-description. Such as, "polluted, infectious, leper," or at other certain points as being "poor," "vile" and "worthless". The traces of Calvinist beliefs are tangible since these above-mentioned attributes are all referring to the body being the primary source of sin, not the heart. Moreover, the traditional medical views demonstrated that women and men had similar sexual organs, they were turned "inside out"<sup>21</sup>. These values correlate well with Brekus' idea and further roles of women as being both physically and intellectually inferior to men. This result had been further strengthened by one of the most influential theologians in the Great Awakening, Jonathan Edwards. He wrote about virtuous women in *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God*. His philosophy was based on biblical foundations; thus, he was sceptical of issues of feminine inferiority and original sin. He referred to women as "frivolous girl" and their conversion left him surprised "I was surprised with relation of a young woman, who had been one of the greatest company-keepers in the whole town"<sup>22</sup>. As previously referred to it, evangelicals' assumed that the souls of women are easily swayed by both Christ and the Devil, thus their portrayal of the soul as a "woman" was an allusion to women's physical, spiritual, and intellectual weaknesses. Bathsheba Kingsley is a primary example of this; it was believed that her body and mind were enticed by Satan's schemes, because she was "brawling" from town to town. Finally, the recorded sources indicate that women frequently associate Satan with bodily features such as a roaring lion or a beast, whereas men rarely or never refer to this

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<sup>20</sup> Isaiah 1:6.

<sup>21</sup> Brekus, *The Religious History of American Women: Reimagining the Past*, 39.

<sup>22</sup> Jonathan Edwards. *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God: in the Conversion of many Hundred Souls in Northampton, of New England*. Independently published by Jonathan & Darlene Edwards, 2019, chap.3, Kindle.

attack occurring physically, rather, as a mental attack<sup>23</sup>. Sarah Osborn frequently used the allusion of “lion” to refer to Satan, as it appears in a diary entry from 1767, “Thou canst rescue them out of the paw of the lion of hell. Regardless of the similarities and differences, at the moment of reversion in Christ, gender is no longer existing”<sup>24</sup>.

Numerous attempts have been made to define the Great Awakening phenomenon, but none have been sufficiently accurate. However, Marty, a historian, concluded as “it might be seen as conservative revolution, but a revolution it was”<sup>25</sup>. Thus, the Great Awakening's intricacy was explained by three significant contemporary changes. First and foremost, the fundamental gender issues between women and men; second, the seemingly unbreakable roles of the clergy and laity, and third, “speech and silence” in the before mentioned spheres. While several factors contributed to the emergence of the Great Awakening, the rising merchant class and the growth of land ownership were unquestionably the most significant. These changes altered religious perspectives as well; women and men began to speak out against ministers and church leaders, despite the Puritan system's persistent attempts to silence them.

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<sup>23</sup> Brekus, *The Religious History of American Women: Reimagining the Past*, 39.

<sup>24</sup> Catherine A. Brekus. *Sarah Osborn's Collected Writings* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2017), 15.

<sup>25</sup> Martin E. Marty, *Religion, Awakening, and Revolution* (Wilmington: Consortium, 1977), 81.

## 4. Sarah Edwards (1710-1758)

### 4.1. General Introduction

Of all major female missionaries, Sarah Edwards Pierpont's devotion was amongst the most influential in the early eighteenth century. She was the daughter of a clerical family and the wife of the prominent preacher, Jonathan Edwards. The difficulties of the Great Awakening had left significant traces in both Mrs and Mr Edwards life. They confronted the challenges of the new Awakening together. Jonathan Edwards graduated from Yale in 1723, at the age of nineteen, and had served as a preacher in New York for a year. He took a position at Yale and moved to New Haven, where Sarah Pierpont lived, when his stay in that church came to an end, they had already known each other before his return. It is possible that he met her during his student years, when he was around sixteen when he visited New Haven's First Church, where her father served as minister until his death. She caught the attention of Jonathan Edwards, which is proven on the cover of a Greek grammar book as the follows:

“They say there is a young lady in [New Haven] who is loved of that Great Being, who made and rules the world, and that there are certain seasons in which this Great Being, in some way or other invisible, comes to her and fills her mind with exceeding sweet delight; and that she hardly cares for anything, except to meditate on Him. . .”<sup>26</sup>

They married on July 28, 1727, and in the same year Jonathan became a priest in Northampton, following his grandfather's footsteps. Their marriage was “an uncommon union,” since the Edwards had an abundant marriage, with eleven children. During their lifetime, the Great Awakening spread across the American colonies, which influenced the development of Sarah's character. Her character was described as a “meek and quiet spirit,” who “talked freely and solidly of things of God, and seemed to be such a helpmeet for her husband” by George Whitefield<sup>27</sup>, a fellow minister and friend of Jonathan Edwards<sup>28</sup>. Sarah herself had an awakening in 1742. According to her spouse, at this point in her life, she possessed

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<sup>26</sup> Minkema Kenneth, Brekus, Catherine A. and Stout, Harry S. “Agitations, Convulsions, Leaping, and Loud Talking: The ‘Experiences’ of Sarah Pierpont Edwards.” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 78, no. 3 (2021): 495.

<sup>27</sup> 1714-1770.

<sup>28</sup> Noël Piper, “Sarah Edwards: Jonathan's Home and Haven”, in *A God Entranced Vision of All Things*, ed. John Piper and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2004), 58.

“extraordinary views on divine things” and deep “religious affections”. *The Sinners in the hand of an angry God* is a sermon that Sarah Edwards highlighted in her memoir, as a matter of concern.<sup>29</sup> It stood in opposition of the usual message that Jonathan Edward intended to convey. As the result of the above mentioned sermon continuously raised concerns about the Edwards, they were fearful, which resulted in negative treatment. The contempt of the community that Sarah Edwards had to endure, her physical and mental wellbeing began to deteriorate in the following year, as she was so “low in grace”<sup>30</sup> and being particularly concerned about how others perceive her husband. Despite this fact, Adams further developed his statement by saying that Sarah Edwards fulfilled her role perfectly as a wife and mother of their children.

Unable to sleep one night, something suddenly changed, she felt cut off from God and encountered an incredible delight, God's immediate presence. After a week of intense agony, and ecstatic religious experiences, she started to overcome this overwhelming sensation of melancholy. During this week of experience, at certain points she felt sick and was hardly able to stand without assistance. The duality of her feelings stood in opposition, she both “melted” and “overcome” at the same time, as it appears in her narrative “I never felt such an entire emptiness of self-love or any regard to any private selfish interest of my own. It seemed to me, that I had entirely done with myself... The glory of God to be all, and in all, and to swallow up every wish and desire of my heart”<sup>31</sup>. This “entire emptiness” was a conversion that led from her old identity to a greater blessing, as she referred to it. Essentially, the reason for her transformation was that she liberated herself from anxieties and temptations and became the “holy vessel of Christ”<sup>32</sup>. For that reason, she was able to overcome her concerns about her role in religious gatherings since she was beginning to lose herself in the process. Sarah’s beliefs about the duality of body and soul were the opposite of the Enlightenment ideas. For instance Descartes’, who believed that the body is separated from the mind and should be treated accordingly. On the contrary, Mrs Edwards represented a heart-centred religion in which “the body was one of the most enduring and contested legacies of the revivals”<sup>33</sup>. Her public life

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<sup>29</sup> Sarah Edwards, *In Love with Christ: The Narrative of Sarah Edwards*. In *Love with Christ: The Narrative of Sarah Edwards: Edited and Annotated by Jennifer Adams*. New York: G.& C. &H. Carvill., chap.1, Kindle.

<sup>30</sup> Minkema, Brekus and Stout, *Agitations, Convulsions, Leaping, and Loud Talking: The ‘Experiences’ of Sarah Pierpont Edwards*, 517.

<sup>31</sup> Edwards. *In Love with Christ: The Narrative of Sarah Edwards*. In *Love with Christ: The Narrative of Sarah Edwards: Edited and Annotated by Jennifer Adams*, Chapter 2.

<sup>32</sup> Catherine A. Brekus. *Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America, 1740-1845 (Gender and American Culture)* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 43.

<sup>33</sup> Minkema, Brekus and Stout, *Agitations, Convulsions, Leaping, and Loud Talking: The ‘Experiences’ of Sarah Pierpont Edwards*, 493.

fulfilled the requirements of a typical woman in those days, accomplishing household chores, raising eleven children but at the same time, like Reverend James Hillhouse's mother, she knew when and how to give voice to her experiences in order to become an integral and productive member of the church's community. Her personal life, nevertheless, is thought to be slightly different, but only fragments of it remained. In her time women were treated with contempt for speaking clerically: she was referred to as a model of sincere devotion and wifely commitment<sup>34</sup>.

#### 4.2. Sarah Edwards: Personal Narrative

Her account covers the challenges of the Great Awakening, her contempt for visiting Ministers, and her daily struggles, as neither the congregation nor the people of Northampton greeted her with open arms. Some parts of her personal narrative had been recently acquired by Kenneth Minkema and his fellow colleagues. Until that point, there were two other manuscripts available: the first was Jonathan Edward's revised version, in which he rewrote her narrative in the third person to protect her from the unpleasant reaction and misunderstanding of the community. While, the other was published in the nineteenth century, by Sereno Edwards Dwight, who in *The Works of President Edwards* incorporated the first-person narrative of Sarah Edwards. However, as Jennifer Adams noted, there are striking differences in "the manner in which the narratives" are presented<sup>35</sup>.

The period of the Second Great Awakening was the time of the second republication and alternation of Sarah's detailed experiences, by her grandson Sereno Edwards Dwight<sup>36</sup>, who decided to elevate Sarah Edwards as a representative of genuine female self-sacrifice. Sereno rewrote her experiences from a nineteenth-century perspective, portraying her as a typical nineteenth-century female, appearing as the "protectors of virtue"<sup>37</sup>. Among slighter alternation, the most significant was the removal of "agitation", although Sarah herself used this expression sixteen times. As suggested by Adams, there are two reasonable explanations. One possible reason could be the mentality of the nineteenth-century attitude indicated above.

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<sup>34</sup> William Warren Sweet, *The Story of Religions in America* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1930), 186.

<sup>35</sup> Edwards, *In Love with Christ: The Narrative of Sarah Edwards*. In *In Love with Christ: The Narrative of Sarah Edwards: Edited and Annotated by Jennifer Adams*. Preface.

<sup>36</sup> He lived in the 19<sup>th</sup> century America, served as a minister, and was a descendant of Sarah and Jonathan Edwards.

<sup>37</sup> Minkema, Brekus and Stout, *Agitations, Convulsions, Leaping, and Loud Talking: The 'Experiences' of Sarah Pierpont Edwards*, 513.

The other could be that Serano suffered from a chronic illness that left him physically disabled, which may have contributed to his lack of insight into the bodily aspect of experiencing God's presence. Serano notes, however, that Jonathan may have altered a few details of Sarah's account while copying her manuscripts. Regardless of her numerous spelling errors and irregular style, Sarah was an outstanding female writer, and her work did not require extensive proofreading. Her style, along with her spirituality, is characterized by a language of sensation that could refer to her own personal voice or Jonathan's own choice, but the latter remains disputed. As Minkema, Brekus and Stout suggest, identifying Sarah Pierpont Edwards' unique narrative voice is challenging for a variety of reasons. Though Jonathan's narrative skills are well-known, it is difficult to trace in Mrs Edwards' reworked collections. Nevertheless, his alternations served no other purpose than to remedy spelling and grammatical problems. Such alternations were "lively sense of things" or "clear"<sup>38</sup>.

In the reflection of her narrative, it appears that the greater her trust in God was, the more she became aware of her own weaknesses. In the midst of agony and shame, the more she saw her insignificance in comparison to Christ's infinite worth, the more she realized the depth of God's divine love. The agitations of Sarah Edwards were all captured in her narrative; therefore, the reader receives a detailed overview of her unstable psychological state. Her account incorporates two major factors that contributed to her growing uneasiness. First, the community had raised concerns about the validity of Jonathan Edwards's approach to the Lord's Supper. Second, the death of their daughter, Jerusha, who was seven years old, a devoted Christ-follower. Sarah Edwards found herself in "an entire resignation to his will and felt that if He should thus strip me off everything, that I would have an entire calm and rest in God, for it was His own, and not mine"<sup>39</sup>, she acknowledges that her daughter belongs to God. The lower she felt the presence of God, the harder she prayed and asked for her mercy. Adams, in the preface of *In Love with Christ: The Narrative of Sarah Edwards*, affirms that Sarah's narrative is indeed a testimony of God's extraordinary work in her life, and consequently in other's life. According to Sarah, the path to a devoted life is simple; one merely needs an open heart willing to accept God's love. She demonstrated this love through Salomon's words, emphasizing the word "lovesick"<sup>40</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> Edwards, *In Love with Christ: The Narrative of Sarah Edwards*. In *In Love with Christ: The Narrative of Sarah Edwards: Edited and Annotated by Jennifer Adams*, Chapter 4.

<sup>39</sup> *Works*, Vol. 1: ccxxi.

<sup>40</sup> "Sustain me with raisin cakes, refresh me with apples, because I am Lovesick" Songs of Song 2:5.

Unlike the members of contemporary spiritual movements like The New Light Movement<sup>41</sup>, she never claimed that she had received direct revelations from God. She highlighted the necessity of analyzing the nature of the heart, since it is the source of all knowledge. Edwards prioritized experiencing God through senses, – especially the heart. Scholars from the times of revivals had extremely radical opinions about female enthusiasm – as they referred to Kingsley – for instance an Anglican minister noted that “women, children, servants, and Nigros are become (as they phrase it) Exhorters”<sup>42</sup>. As a result of the continuous debates about “enthusiasts” or “exhorters”, Jonathan Edwards in the *Faithful Narrative* introduces two women’s spiritual experiences from Northampton as examples of true Christian *female piety*<sup>43</sup>. According to recent academic discoveries, Sarah Edwards was the *inspiration* for *female piety* that Jonathan Edwards described.

In the introduction of *Feminine Spirituality in America*, Amanda Porterfield argues that “Sarah Edwards assumed the fortunes and dilemmas of public virtuosity ... In time of spiritual crisis, she explored both the power and the painful contradiction of that role”<sup>44</sup>. She later assumes that, both Mrs and Mr Edwards’s narratives provide a genuine insight into the relationship between the ongoing social and religious experiences. Porterfield attributes Sarah Edwards’ success as a writer to her ability to withdraw from society occasionally. In her narrative, in 1742, she shed light on the main reason why she preferred solitude over hypocrisy, “how great a part of Christianity lies in the performance of our social and relative duties to one another.”<sup>45</sup> Sarah Edwards’s attitude towards the people in Northampton had a theatrical quality. Since she attempted to create a flawless image in order to set an example in the congregation. Porterfield’s assertion that Sara Edwards was an artist and that her life was art seems to be realistic, as her theatrical self-construction positioned her as a conscious representative of Christian womanhood, as evidenced by her narrative<sup>46</sup>.

Furthermore, she details several contemporary issues, such as the general suffering that came along with the Great Awakening, and descriptions of her husband's fellow ministers, for

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<sup>41</sup> A movement inside of the Baptist congregation.

<sup>42</sup> Minkema, Brekus and Stout, *Agitations, Convulsions, Leaping, and Loud Talking: The ‘Experiences’ of Sarah Pierpont Edwards*, 506.

<sup>43</sup> Piety: strong religious belief manifested in one's lifestyle

<sup>44</sup> Amanda Porterfield, *Feminine spirituality in America: From Sarah Edwards to Martha Graham* (Pennsylvania: Temple University Press, 1980), 39.

<sup>45</sup> Edwards, *In Love with Christ: The Narrative of Sarah Edwards*. In *In Love with Christ: The Narrative of Sarah Edwards: Edited and Annotated by Jennifer Adams*. Chapter 2.

<sup>46</sup> Porterfield, *Feminine spirituality in America: From Sarah Edwards to Martha Graham*, 47-48.

instance, Reverend Samuel Buell<sup>47</sup>, who frequently appears in her memoir. During the times of the Great Awakening, the narratives of Both Sarah and Jonathan constantly elaborates on the judgmental attitude of the townspeople, Sarah continuously “felt such an entire emptiness of self-love, or any regard to any private, selfish interest of my own”<sup>48</sup>. Additionally, Sarah’s narrative contains meditative parts about Reverend Samuel Buell or Reverend Chester William<sup>49</sup> the visiting preachers when Jonathan was serving in a different place. She refers to them as “their lectures, sermons and frequent visits to her house, where they engaged in prayer, counselling and religious conversations, were occasions for emotions so strong that she leaped up, felt cold, exclaimed aloud, and grew faint”<sup>50</sup>. Therefore, she could not hide her disapproval towards their presence, especially that of Reverend Chester Williams, as she highlighted “Mr. W – came in, (...) and spoke with a somewhat light, smiling air, of the flourishing state of religion in the town, which I could scarcely bear to see. It seems to me that we ought greatly to revere the presence of God, and to behave ourselves with the utmost solemnity and humility.”<sup>51</sup> During the stay of Reverend Chester William, the memoir of Sarah Edwards concludes her second rebirth in Christ. In reference to Porterfield’s theatrical note on Sarah’s conversion, her second rebirth was affected by the “performance” of conversion stories she heard during Reverend Chester William’s sermons. The phrase “performance” is essential in conveying the magnitude of her compassion for the locals. Therefore, as Ellison highlights “the resolution of those tensions is also necessarily public or dramatic”<sup>52</sup>. Jonathan Edwards, in the second part of the *Some Thoughts* alludes to Sarah’s superiority over the people in Northampton, as demonstrated by her external obedience and internal indifference.

Based on her personal narrative and the opinions of Jonathan Edwards and Sereno Dwight, one may argue that she not only performed, but much exceeded the required female roles of the eighteenth century. On the one hand, she was responsible for the education and discipline of their eleven children. Sarah defined her major responsibility, according to her own narrative, as assisting her husband in his spiritual ministry. Sarah’s devotion laid the foundation to the upcoming generation of evangelical women. Her daughters were high intellectuals due

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<sup>47</sup> 1716-1798, A minister in Long Island, the place where Bathsheba Kingsley was sent to exile.

<sup>48</sup> Edwards, *In Love with Christ: The Narrative of Sarah Edwards*. In *In Love with Christ: The Narrative of Sarah Edwards: Edited and Annotated by Jennifer Adams*, Section II, Chapter, 5.

<sup>49</sup> Minister in Hampshire, Massachusetts Bay, Lived 1718- 1755.

<sup>50</sup> Edwards, *In Love with Christ: The Narrative of Sarah Edwards*. In *In Love with Christ: The Narrative of Sarah Edwards: Edited and Annotated by Jennifer Adams*. Section II, Chapter 5.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., Section II. Chapter 4.

<sup>52</sup> Julie Ellison, “The Sociology of ‘Holy Indifference’: Sarah Edwards’ Narrative.” *American Literature* 56, no. 4 (1984): 10.

to their educational background; they were able to influence a lot of families through their primary devotion to God than to their families<sup>53</sup>. Furthermore, Jonathan Edwards personal narratives detailed a time when the family, after the sudden death of Jerusha, their daughter, moved from Northampton to Stockbridge, to Native Americans. Jonathan Edwards, in his letter to his father, details her wife's work there as follows: "My children are well-pleased with our present situation. They like the place much better than they expected. Here, at present, we live in peace, which has of long time been an unusual thing with us. The Indians seem much pleased with my family, especially my wife"<sup>54</sup>. Therefore, her memoir was confirmed by Jonathan Edwards letter, since he mentioned her devotion several times.

The "Experiences" of Sarah Pierpont Edwards was an integral part of the Great Awakening, on several levels. On the one hand, she set an example of a domestic, typical housewife, who puts her family's personal well-being as a priority, instead of her own. Furthermore, she was aware of the fundamental reasons of her own suffering, and agitative periods. Her convictions seem to have been shadowed by the external circumstances. On the other hand, her personal life paints a confusing picture. Her ability to compose such a description of her current mental and physical state was uncommon in the eighteenth century, especially if one was born to a female body. On the other hand, Sarah Edwards, based on the testimony of the visiting ministers, her husband and the testimonies of her descendants, her intelligence and the ability to react appropriately in difficult situations were two of the few attributes that distinguished her from the rest of the community. Sarah appeared to be gregarious on the surface, but as her records indicate, her natural environment after a period of time was to retreat from the community.

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<sup>53</sup> Edwards, *In Love with Christ: The Narrative of Sarah Edwards*. In *In Love with Christ: The Narrative of Sarah Edwards: Edited and Annotated by Jennifer Adams*, Section II, Chapter, 1.

<sup>54</sup> Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 16, *Letters and Personal Writings*, ed. by Paul Ramsey (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1957), 421.

### 4.3. Influences on Sarah Edwards narrative

As being a daughter of a minister, Sarah's perspective about the unity of body, soul and the inherited sin was influenced by the theories of John Calvin, and the Puritans, who considered the body to be evil, and they recognized the importance of incarnation by admitting that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Through these serious agitative periods that Sarah Edwards detailed, she developed a "new sense" or "sense of the heart," as Jonathan refers to it: "divine and supernatural light which gaze the enlightened a spiritual understanding that was deeper than knowledge that came by merely intellectual cognition"<sup>55</sup>. However, this "new sense" contains several main influences that should not be interpreted in solely itself.

On the one hand, it encapsulates the footprints of John Locke's ideas on experience, she urges the personal relationship over the presence of an intermediary (other than Jesus). On the other hand, Quetism<sup>56</sup> had a significant role in developing her "sensation". Sarah borrowed Quietist values and traits from Jeanne Marie Bouvier<sup>57</sup>, also known as Madame Guyor, who urged the idea of being completely ripped of the old nature of the heart and being subsumed in God's heart. Although it is worth mentioning that Mrs Edwards herself was not known as an active follower of Quietist teaching, the influence of Madame Guyor in her memoir is tangible.

Interestingly, Sarah transformed her physical body in unity with the divine; in which the divine presence is the Light in her sinful nature. Her physiological agitations were regarded as a source of new religious identity and leadership, and this was described as a metamorphosis by some researchers, who referred to it as Quetist "enthusiasm"<sup>58</sup>. Sarah Edwards' experimental and personal experiences with grace could have had a significant influence on her husband's perspective on the physical experiences of the Holy Spirit. Recent scholars suggested that this was evident when the revivals in Northampton resulted in the physical intervention of the Holy Spirit, such as agitations and trembling.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 496.

<sup>56</sup> Quetism is as known the "pure love" movement; according to Minkema Quietists' belief that true Christians should seek the annihilation of the self in the Glory of God". Minkema, Catherine and Harry, *Agitations, Convulsions, Leaping, and Loud Talking: The 'Experiences' of Sarah Pierpont Edwards*, 502.

<sup>57</sup> 1648-1717.

<sup>58</sup> Minkema, Brekus and Stout, *Agitations, Convulsions, Leaping, and Loud Talking: The 'Experiences' of Sarah Pierpont Edwards*, 502.

Therefore, the above listed influences were subconscious, however, the traces of the Lockean sensationalism, and revivalism – the terms discussed in chapter 5.1. – were all emerged in her narrative. Since Calvinists and Puritans were primarily seen the body as evil – especially the female body – the bodily manifestation of the Holy Spirit was hardly acceptable. Regardless of the deceptiveness of the body, according to Minkema, the proper use of body could serve as a deeper intuitive understanding of the divine manifestation in human form. Sarah Edwards, in her narrative, referred to it when she encountered God, “I knew that the foretaste of glory which I then had in my soul go to Him”<sup>59</sup>. Her experience of conversion consisted of mostly implicit and detailed bodily experiences.

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<sup>59</sup> Edwards. *In Love with Christ: The Narrative of Sarah Edwards*. In *Love with Christ: The Narrative of Sarah Edwards: Edited and Annotated by Jennifer Adams*, Chapter 2.

## 5. Sarah Osborn (1722-1796)

### 5.1. General introduction

Sarah Osborn was one of the most influential female missionaries of the evangelical movement, that happened in the first half of the eighteenth century. Her unique narrative voice depicts daily obstacles and significant historical events, such as the Indian French war, from the perspective of a schoolteacher. Her memoir contains insights about her conversion, and the diary entries are predominantly devotional in nature. However, her memoir omits details about her daily chores. Amongst other notable scholars, Mary Beth Norton is regarded as being the most authoritative secondary source on Sarah Osborn. In her documentary history, *Women and Religion in America*, she addresses the ambiguity concerning a different Sarah Osborn. She was accused of witchcraft and died in 1692 in a Boston prison<sup>60</sup>. In any case, the name similarity indicates no shared features. Sarah Osborn was born in London in 1722 and when she was eight years old, her family immigrated to Boston. Nathaniel Clap,<sup>61</sup> who was based in Newport had influenced the young Sarah in terms of her religious affections, despite of her parents' disapproval.

First-generation evangelicals like Sarah Osborn from Newport were no longer willing to surrender themselves to Puritan doctrines, therefore, her narrative chronicles the emergence of evangelicalism through her own experiences in the period of great revivals. At the age of twenty-nine, Osborn began writing her memoir in chronological order. Her challenging life circumstances included a "turbulent childhood," "suicidal crisis," and the loss of loved ones, as well as poverty and chronic illness, all of which contributed to her spiritual enlightenment<sup>62</sup>. Despite these hardships, she never faltered in her faith and was able to attract new "enthusiasts" with her unique style of articulating her religious convictions to the world.

Additionally, she sought to obtain a greater understanding of her own spiritual pilgrimage, which was primarily affected by the ongoing spiritual awakening, and economic problems as well. On the one hand, as it has been previously indicated, the spiritual rebirth in the Great Awakening, the convergence of Calvinism and Protestant Reformed doctrines that resulted in evangelicalism, had transformed her, and inspired to lead a devoted lifestyle. On the

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<sup>60</sup> Mary Beth Norton, "Reflection on Gender in Early America", interview by American History TV, Worcester, October 25, 2018, video, 23:45. <https://www.cspan.org/video/?452718-1/reflections-gender-early-america>.

<sup>61</sup> 1667-1745, Newport.

<sup>62</sup> Brekus, *Sarah Osborn's Collected Writing*, 15.

other hand, as a teacher with a dozen of students, she encountered financial challenges on a regular basis. Consequently, she wrote a memoir to remind herself of the wealth that comes from God and to develop her Christian identity through writing. Reading Osborn's memoir was challenging, even though she was literate, she never used proper punctuation, and at certain points, the text is similar to a never-ending stream of consciousness (Appendix A)<sup>63</sup>. Osborn made an inexplicable effort to find significance and connection between ongoing wars, slavery, and God's will. Her testimonies were published both in her lifetime and posthumously in 1755 by Reverend Samuel Hopkins in *The Nature, Evidence, and Certainty of True Christianity*<sup>64</sup> (Appendix B) as setting an example of a devoted life. He also published parts from her memoir, and some of the letters written to Miss Susana Anthony<sup>65</sup>.

Osborn formed the "Religious Female Society" during the First Awakening decade in the 1740s, which became the cornerstone of Newport's First Church. This group of women sustained Clap's ministry and later served as the centre of the Great Awakening revival in the years 1766 and 1767. Under the name of "Religious Female Society," She welcomed men and women, African Americans, slaves, and even Baptists into her home. Interestingly, one of Osborn's letters from 1767 to a minister in Connecticut, called Joseph Fish, she defends her public leadership of worship and study groups. In spite of her declining health, groups and individuals continued to gather at Sarah Osborn's house even after she had stopped leading devotional groups and attending church<sup>66</sup>. In 1758, the first African American woman was baptized in the First Congregational Church, as documented in the archive (Appendix C).

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<sup>63</sup> Brekus, *Sarah Osborn's Collected Writing*, 18.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>65</sup> Miss Susana Anthony was a close friend of Sarah Osborn, often wrote letters to each other.

<sup>66</sup> Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, "The Spiritual Pilgrimage of Sarah Osborn (1714-1796)," *Church History* 61, no. 4 (1992): 408-21.

## 5.2. The Memoir of Sarah Osborn and contemporary influences on it and her roles

### 5.2.1. The Memoir of Sarah Osborn and her roles

The first written record from her memoir was a letter<sup>67</sup> to a Congregational minister, to whom Osborn confessed her sin that she had stolen money from her parents in order to escape with her first husband, at the age of seventeen. Unfortunately, her father died before she could have confessed her sin, so instead she confided in her mother<sup>68</sup>. At the age of twenty-nine she married to her second husband, a tailor, Henry Osborn<sup>69</sup>. Sarah Osborn's memoir consciously, or perhaps, subconsciously encapsulates both the secular and religious eighteenth century trends. To mention a few examples from the secular influences, the Lockean experimentalism, and the elevated tone of the sentimental novels, however, the most notable influences could be traced in religious texts, such as the King James Bible and John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*.

As previously indicated, Sarah Osborn's narrative did not detail domestic duties such as scouting floors, making beds, or kneading dough into bread, but rather describes school curriculum, prayers, and all the activities that contributed to her relationship with God. Therefore, it is a little surprise, that her narrative relies heavily on biblical imagery. There are two major biblical imageries that she emphasized through her memoir. The bride and groom, which, according to Northrop Frye, is one of the primary images to apply to emphasize the unique kinship between Christ and his followers<sup>70</sup>. And the shepherd, which appears as the protector of her soul. When Osborn uses biblical imagery, her narration abruptly shifts from third to first person, implying a more intimate experience. Osborn's memoir writing was a process of self-discovery and revelation of God's profundity, with the plotline revolving around the concepts of "sin" and "redemption"<sup>71</sup>. She attempted to reconstruct a linear written record of her life; however, her memoir contains several omissions and information that she was ashamed to tell, for instance, her son's death. Samuel's sudden death at the age of eleven left a significant mark on her life since he was not willing to repent of his sins. Osborn was afraid for

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<sup>67</sup> May 5, 1742.

<sup>68</sup> Brekus, *Sarah Osborn's Collected Writing*, I.

<sup>69</sup> He was a widow, and had three children, while Sarah Osborn was twenty-nine years old and had a son, who was ten years old.

<sup>70</sup> Northrop Frye, "The Bible and English Literature by Northrop Frye," Full Lectures 5: Sexual Imagery: The Bride and the Bridegroom (lecture, University of Toronto, October 7, 1980).

<sup>71</sup> Brekus, *Sarah Osborn's Collected Writing*, 5.

his soul since she “could discern no evidence of a work of grace wrought on his soul, for which I did plead from day to day”<sup>72</sup>.

Unlike Sarah Edwards, Osborn was a well-known writer during her lifetime. Her publication, as well as character, was a unique and integral part of female writing history – albeit anonymous – and Christian history. Regardless of her position, Sarah Osborn and his husband, Henry, had serious financial problems, as they could barely pay the bills of the boarding school that they ran together. Osborn referred to their situation in a letter written to Joseph Fish in 1759, as “a poor, overloaded, weak animal crouching under its burden, do I only imagine myself so”<sup>73</sup>?

Since Osborn believed that women were subordinated to men, she might have consciously tried not to have a male voice. Knowing that such famous ministers, like, Jonathan Edwards, in the *Miscellanies* clearly divided the attributes of men and women, “man had been created to be strong in body and mind, with more wisdom, strength and courage,” while women are naturally “weaker, more soft and tender, more fearful, and more affectionate, as a fit object of generous protection and defence”<sup>74</sup>. Women were taught that they need constant protection and were created to seek the help of men. Therefore, Osborn cultivated a mere “affectionate” female voice under the influence of two significant women, one is the above-mentioned Elizabeth Bury, and the other is Susana Anthony, a close friend of Sarah Osborn. They shared a genuine and powerful bond, and sent letters to one another. Even their writing reflected the social inequalities between women and men. As female believers, they were limited, as seen by their self-portraits, which included the usage of terms like “weak,” “child,” and “feeble”<sup>75</sup>.

Due to their unstable socioeconomic condition, she possessed only six books at the end of her life, however, all of these six books could be traced in her writing style. She was carefully copying the writing styles of other authors, including John Bunyan, Jonathan Edwards, and even the King James Bible. Nonetheless, her writings exemplify the characteristics of American, French, British, and German authors, such as Karl Heinrich von Bogatzky,<sup>76</sup> a German hymn writer, and James Hervey,<sup>77</sup> who followed Methodist teachings. Further

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>74</sup> *Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University*, The “Miscellanies”: (Entry Nos. a-z, aa-zz, 1- 500) (WJE Online Vol. 13).

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> 1690-1774.

<sup>77</sup> 1714-1758.

instances of contemporary influences are Cotton Mather<sup>78</sup> and Elizabeth Bury<sup>79</sup>. Osborn repeatedly emphasized throughout her narrative her admiration for such writers as Elizabeth, as she alludes to it in the following way: “I have always reaped much benefits myself by reading the lives and experiences of others. Sometimes they have been blessed to convince me of sin; sometimes to scatter doubts; and sometimes raised my affections into a flame”<sup>80</sup>. Ultimately, John Bunyan's depiction of his personal experiences with God in the *Pilgrim Progress* laid the foundation for her style as well.

The King James Version of the Bible had without doubt the greatest influence on her narrative, as she refers to it: “But the God that has fed me all my life long does know what I need and will supply all my need, too. Let Satan or unbelief say what they will; he never yet made me ashamed of my hope, nor he never will. He has said he will never leave me nor forsake me”<sup>81</sup>. There are numerous biblical allusions throughout the text. First, “the God that has fed me all my life” described Israel’s blessings after its trials. Second, “My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ”. After that, the Pauline letter to the Hebrews “Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee”. At times, it is impossible to discern if the phrases she uses are her own or are taken from the Puritans way of detecting sin. However, her narrative demonstrates the essence of compassionate narration, and the lamentation of women weaknesses, and most empathetically the Bible’s eternal meaning and its reflection in her life, as she concludes it “My life was sweet and pleasant”<sup>82</sup>.

Sarah Osborn is generally shown as a soldier of God in her memoir. According to his memoir entries, the most significant event in her life was the loss of her eleven-year-old son. In spite of her bleak mental state, this was the moment when she felt the closest presence of God. Similarly, to Sarah Edwards, Osborn also highlighted a “sense of his goodness to me in a thousand instances”<sup>83</sup>. As a soldier of God, she felt compelled to preach the Gospel, but due to her gender, she was unable without incurring the wrath of her community. Even her Reverend did not recommend of her teaching them since she primary gather people in order to pray. When

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<sup>78</sup> an American Minister.

<sup>79</sup> A stepdaughter of an elected prime minister. Converted in 1664; was a well-educated lady who studied languages like Hebrew and French, also mathematics, philosophy, anatomy, and medicine; began to record her “experiences” in her Diary in, 1664

<sup>80</sup> Brekus, *Sarah Osborn's Collected Writing*, 27.

<sup>81</sup> Brekus, *Sarah's Osborn Collected Writing*, 151.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 68.

she started to organize these gatherings, slavery, in her eyes, was amongst the wills of God. She encouraged Afro-American slaves to convert to Christianity. Her house served as a shelter to people from the peripheral strata of society, including women, children, black slaves, people from different congregations, youngsters and adults, fundamentally anyone, but white clerical men. She later recognized, however, that there is something wrong with slavery after seeing Christianity as a representative moral model. Seemingly, it was her opinion, since the rest of the community was extremely cautious, due to the biblical story of Moses, who led the Israelites out of captive to the Promise Land. Based on the words of Apostle Paul, that say women must “keep silence in the churches” many disagreed with Osborn’s praying groups since church elders considered that she stepped beyond her position by sharing her own interpretation of the Bible. As her close friend, Joseph Fish, referred to it that she “had stepped beyond her line.”<sup>84</sup> Both Sarah Edwards and Sarah Osborn were subjected to the wrath of their communities because of their activities. In her previously mentioned letter, she eventually asks related question from Joseph Fish “Would you advise me to shut up my mouth and doors and creep into obscurity?”, therefore in these disputed opinions, while her inner drive was so strong, she was fearful “Sometimes I am tempted thus to do, but hitherto I dare not”<sup>85</sup>. Another cause for public criticism was that she welcomed persons from practically all social spheres including Baptists, who advocated for extreme ideals, by stating that infant christening is not a biblical law. Soon after, during the British occupation in Newport, Sarah was left alone after the death of her husband Henry. Osborn, in her letters – those were dictated to someone since Osborn became blind and unable to walk in her last years – to Hopkins and Joseph Fischer appears as a faithful soldier of God, who knew that the war was nothing, but God’s will. Osborn left her possessions to the Frist Congregation Church in Newport.

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 241.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 241.

### 5.2.1 Contemporary influences on Sarah Osborn's personal narrative

Catherine Brekus's defined precisely the intertwined relationship between the Enlightenment and evangelicalism, by saying that "evangelicalism emerged with the eighteenth century in dialogue with Enlightenment and certain ideas, especially the first-hand experience as the basis of knowledge were really vowing into evangelicalism"<sup>86</sup>. Therefore, one must conclude that treating the various phenomena in the eighteenth century as strictly separated and free of overlapping ideas, or influences, is misleading. It is particularly important to highlight these ideas in connection with female missionaries, since apart from the religious spheres, education, and the right to speak was limited.

Four major influences of the Enlightenment on evangelical revivals are worth noting. Given the preceding chapter's emphasis on experience with Sarah Pierpont Edwards, the same remains unchanged for Sarah Osborn. On the one hand, the Enlightenment is not only the age of reason, but the age of experience as well, which was introduced by John Locke<sup>87</sup>. According to him, man comes to the world with a White Paper, also known as Tabula Rasa. Empirical thinkers inside of the church insisted on the primacy of empirical evidence over ecclesiastical authority or inherited practice in establishing knowledge. Thus, the empiricism-influenced tendencies within evangelicalism may be traced back to the emphasis on experience through their senses, their rebirth in Christ. As it is presented in Sarah's memoir as the following: "How do I know this God is mine, and that I myself am not deceived? By the evidence of a work of grace wrought in my soul"<sup>88</sup>. The empirical faith is evident, despite the fact that it was deliberate incorporation into her diary entries and letters. Neither of them – Sarah Edwards and Sarah Osborn – were direct supporters of Enlightenment principles. On the other hand, Brekus points towards one of the most influential legacies of the eighteenth century, which was individualism. A new sense of self-determination came into focus because of territorial expansions and shifts in political domains.

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<sup>86</sup> Catherine A. Brekus. "Sarah Osborne's World", interview by Margaret M. Mitchell, Divinity School, Chicago, January 15, 2014, video, 14:12-27.

<sup>87</sup> In Essay II, he defined what it means to him: Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper void of all characters, without any ideas. How comes it to be furnished? . . . To this I answer, in one word, from experience . . . Our observation, employed either about external sensible objects, or about the internal operations of our minds perceived and reflected on by ourselves, is that which supplies our understandings with all the materials of thinking. These two are the fountains of knowledge, from whence all the ideas we have, or can naturally have, do spring".

<sup>88</sup> Brekus, *Sarah Osborn's Collected Writings*, 111.

Brush Hindmarsh, in *Reshaping individualism: The private Christian Eighteenth-Century Religion and the Enlightenment* concludes<sup>89</sup> states that the collective conversion experience was transformed into an individual conversion experience. It stood against the Puritan commonwealth. The autonomous individual, according to Enlightenment philosophers, had the liberty to choose his own government, seek his own financial interests, and worship as he saw fit, as Sarah Osborn's narrative gives an insight to it "I'll tell you truly what God has done for my soul"<sup>90</sup> or "God the Father manifested himself to me", or "God made with me an everlasting Covenant"<sup>91</sup>.

After all, throughout the second part of the eighteenth century, both industry and agriculture, as well as demographics, underwent substantial changes. People began relocating to new areas or abandoning their corporate towns in search of new opportunities. In the climax of these changes – not necessary to the right direction – humanitarians were the ones, who build hospitals for the sick, cared for women and children, and all in all, the ones who attempted to make the best out of the worst. Meanwhile, the government turned a blind eye on these issues. Thus, the eighteenth century's first half can be separated into two distinct periods. The first half is defined by an anti-humanitarian attitude, while the second half seeks to restore it, as evidenced by a collection of philosophers from many sociological strata, such as churchmen, economists, poets, and writers, who applied a humanitarian approach to jail reforms and slavery.<sup>92</sup> What the Humanitarians and the evangelicals had in common, was their belief in the essentially good human nature, although it must be noted, that evangelicals also considered human nature to be originally sinful. Regardless of the difference, the aim was common: to create a better world to live in. Therefore, evangelicalism was influenced by the spirit of humanitarianism, though it had a different approach, that is the preaching of the Gospel to people. It placed the major focus from the external to the internal, heart centered world.

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<sup>89</sup> Brush Hindmarsh. "Reshaping Individualism: The Private Christian, Eighteenth-Century Religion and the Enlightenment", in *The Rise of the Laity in Evangelical Protestantism*, ed. Deryck W. Lovegrove (New York: Routledge, 2002), 74.

<sup>90</sup> Brekus, Sarah Osborn's Collected Writings, 111.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., xxii.

<sup>92</sup> Frank Klingberg, "The Evolution of the Humanitarian Spirit in Eighteenth-Century England," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 66, no.3 (1942):.262-263.

Based on the previously listed influences, one could conclude that Christianity was transformed in numerous ways by Enlightenment ideas, but most notably by liberal Protestantism and evangelical Protestantism, which focuses heavily on personal experience. These ideas are constantly appearing in her memoir by her strong drive to understand and justify the ongoing warfare between the Indians and the French troops, she concluded it as a direct attack on God's Promise Land. Based on the book of Revelations, Osborn, and many of her contemporaries saw the Catholic Church as the "beast" who wants to destroy the continent. Though women were allowed to write epistles, journals of their everyday life, these were merely for the sake of their own amusement. The personal experiences of Sarah Osborn were published both during her lifetime and after her death, which made her to break with the constraints of the women writing tradition.

## 6. Conclusions

Catherine Brekus states that “historical change always emerges out of the hopes, and strivings of ordinary people,” as it happened both in Sarah Edwards’s and Sarah Osborn’s life. Fear of the community’s judgment motivated Edwards to establish a self that is proper in any social context, parallel to being subjugated by the Holy Spirit. Based on my research and Jonathan Edwards’ opinion, that women are naturally weaker, I am convinced that Sarah Edwards broke with the constraints of traditional femininity both intellectually and physically. Without a doubt, both Sarah Osborn and Sarah Edwards were regular people with noble objectives.

Nonetheless, they performed a significant role in the life of their community. As it was stated in Chapter 3.1. evangelicalism in the first part of the eighteenth century was characterised by two major movements. The so called “Old Light” and “New Light” movements. Sarah Osborn was an integral part of the “Old Lights”, while, based on her experiences, Sarah Edwards was attributed to the “New Lights.” On the one hand, Sarah Osborn’s case, this split is explicitly expressed in a letter to Joseph Fisch. She regarded the New Lights as “disorderly people” and considered that this new approach will “open its door to disorders and confusion”<sup>93</sup>. On the other hand, Sarah Pierpont Edwards advocated for a heart-centered religion, which in itself, is not sufficient to draw such a conclusion. However, based on the definition of Catherine A. Brekus, the representatives of the New Light wing of evangelicalism, did not deny logic and rationality, thus, they acknowledged that preaching needed to touch both the heart and the intellect. What fuelled my conclusion was a quotation by Jonathan Edwards: “Our people don’t so much need to have their heads stored, as to have their hearts touched.” Therefore, based on Professor Brekus’ opinion, Sarah Edwards by prioritizing individual religious experiences over the religious dogmas could be associated with the New Lights of evangelicalism. However, their narratives required further investigations; thus, it is crucial to mention the contemporary influences since they had significant roles in their religious devotion.

Based on secondary literature, and on their own narratives, I concluded that the roles of women were mainly restricted to domestic spheres. However, both Edwards and Osborn, went beyond the lines of a traditional woman in the eighteenth century. According to Sarah Edwards’ written records, her husband conversed with her on an intellectual level frequently. Therefore, her role as a simple representative of female piety was extended to an equal partner. As in

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<sup>93</sup> Brekus, Sarah Osborn’s Collected Writings, 211.

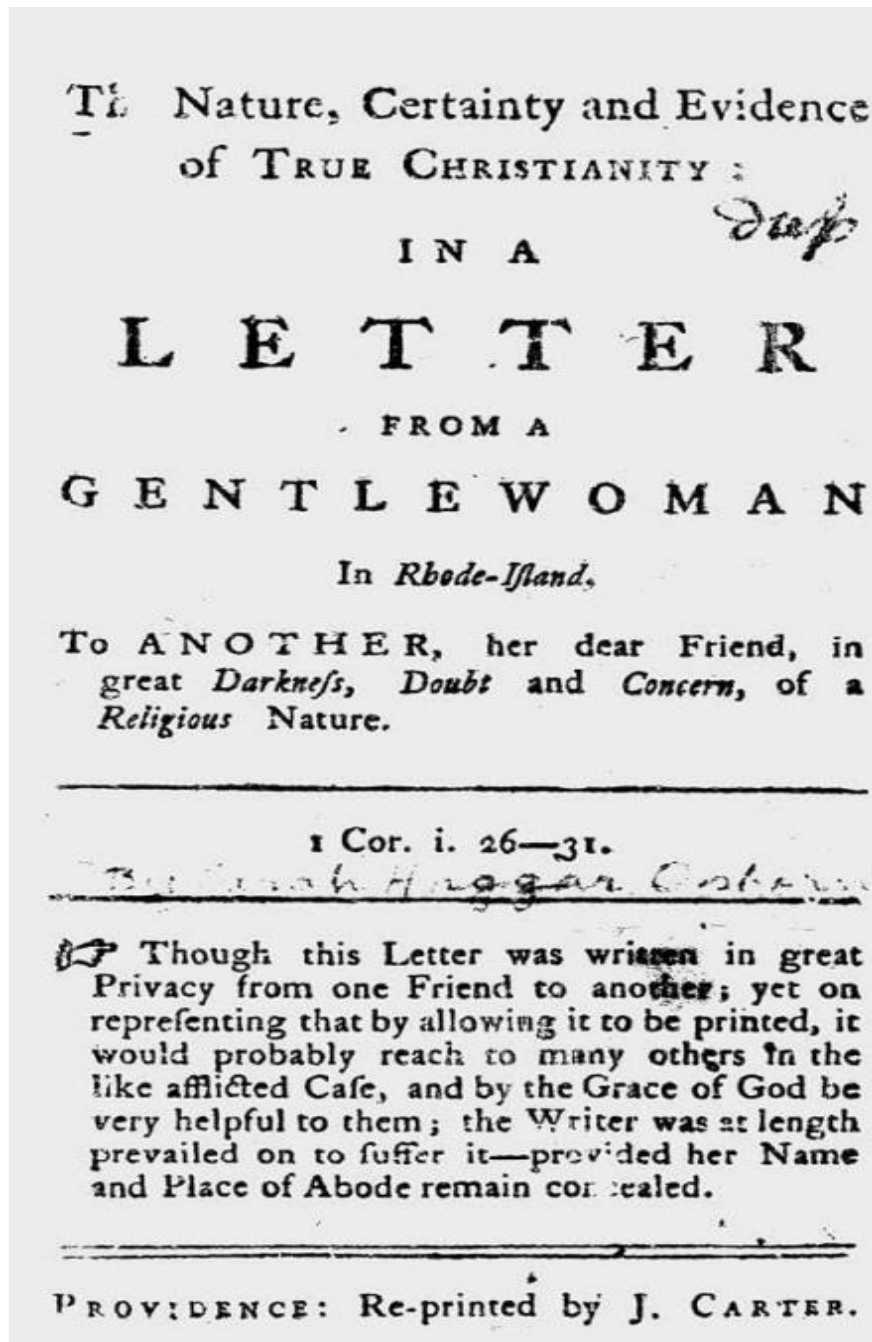
contrast to Sarah Edwards, Sarah Osborn did not get a proper education, but still her life circumstances and devotion to God moved her towards self-development. After her first marriage that resulted in her poverty, she started teaching, but since the lack of enough practice, she appears as an outstanding preacher who – with her love and will to spread the Gospel – attracted a lot of people on a weekly basis. On one side, there was a mother, who was desperate to keep her child alive and maintain a family, on the other side, a strong character, who was not fearful of the reception of her actions since she serves God. Additionally, Sarah Edwards introduced in her narrative, a New Sensation in her Heart<sup>94</sup> – a Lockean influence. However, Jennifer Adams in the preface of *In Love with Christ: The Narrative of Sarah Edwards. In Love with Christ: The Narrative of Sarah Edwards: Edited and Annotated by Jennifer Adams* refers to Sarah Edwards's periodic agitations as depression. I strongly disagree with her since depression generally has a detrimental effect both physically and mentally. Based on her narrative, Sarah Edwards refers to the outcomes of these periods as a cleaning process adding that she felt better all the time following the recurring overwhelming agitations. Additionally, Jonathan Edwards also highlights that Sarah has an extremely strong character. A person who suffers from depression is hardly able to maintain a reckless image till very old age.

To conclude, since the primary sources were strongly subjective, it was necessary to take into consideration their contemporaries' perspectives about them. As I looked deeper into Sarah Edwards narrative, I became convinced that she was even stronger than her husband described her. His admiration for Sarah Edwards is excessive and appears to be genuine in his letter to his father. Similarly, to Edwards, Osborn also had positive male validation in her life, because of her friendship with Reverend Samuel Hopkins, who testified Osborn's undeniably humble faith in his letters. The validation of men, in this regard, in the eighteenth century was unprecedented. Both Jonathan Edwards and Samuel Hopkins encouraged them to be careful with their actions, which is a sign that with proper background support they could have been prevented female preaching missionary work in America centuries before. Jonathan Edwards accomplished this by emphasizing St Paul's statement that women should keep their voices quiet. Therefore, I concluded, that they were indeed unconventional representatives of female devotion to God. Through hardships, both Sarah Edwards and Sarah Osborn demonstrated persistence and set a model to the forthcoming women generations. They indeed paved the road for female preaching in America by setting an example.

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<sup>94</sup> Minkema, Catherine and Harry, *Agitations, Convulsions, Leaping, and Loud Talking: The 'Experiences' of Sarah Pierpont Edwards*.





Brekus, A. Catherine. *Sarah Osborn's Collected Writings*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2017.

## Appendix C

The conversion of a "Negro Woman".

|      |                 |                                                                                                                                                 |
|------|-----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 128. | Aug. 8. 1756.   | Bapt. Ruth, Daughter of Richard Whitehorse                                                                                                      |
| 129  | Oct. 10. 1756.  | Bapt. Mary, Daughter of Russell & Mary Hubbard of New-London.<br>W. B. R. H. married & gave off Daughters - no settled Ministers at New-London. |
| 130  | March 6. 1757.  | Bapt. Pleg, the son of Aaron Seabury.                                                                                                           |
| 131. | March 6. 1757.  | Bapt. Martha, Daughter of Daniel Donham.                                                                                                        |
| 132. | March 13. 1757. | Bapt. Benja. Willson Coggeshall, son of Nath. Coggeshall junr.<br>who made his Confession & was rec'd. by the Chh. the 9th Instant.             |
| 133  | Mar. 13. 1757.  | Bapt. Sarah, Daughter of Billings Coggeshall, who made<br>his Confession & was rec'd. by the Chh. the 9th Instant. Vis Confess. recorded.       |
| 134  | April 10. 1757. | Bapt. Eliz. & Mary, Daughters of Simon Newton                                                                                                   |
| 135  | May 29. 1757.   | Bapt. John, son of James Westgate.                                                                                                              |
| 136  | June 26. 1757.  | Bapt. Phillis, a Negro Woman & Servt. of Mr. Tim. Allen                                                                                         |
| 137  | July 17. 1757.  | Bapt. Thomas, son of Tho. Holmes                                                                                                                |
| 138  | Aug. 7. 1757.   | Bapt. Eliz. a Daughter of Josiah & Susanna Brown.                                                                                               |
| 139  | Nov. 14. 1757.  | Bapt. Susanna, Daughter of Richard & Susanna Cole.                                                                                              |
| 140  | Dec. 11. 1757.  | Bapt. Caleb, son of Caleb Hacker                                                                                                                |
| 141  | Dec. 25. 1757.  | Bapt. Susannah, Daughter of Abraham Foster                                                                                                      |

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