



The World of Hannah Heaton: The Diary of an Eighteenth-Century New England Farm Woman

Hannah Heaton, Barbara E. Lacey

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An ordinary eighteenth-century New England woman, Hannah Heaton left an extraordinary document as her legacy. Over a period of 40 years, from the Great Awakening through the Revolutionary War, this farm wife and mother kept a diary recounting her experiences. Now published for the first time, Heaton's diary offers an unparalleled revelation of one American woman's experience of the birth of the nation.

Much of her diary records Heaton's spiritual struggles, beginning with her conversion during the Great Awakening and her separation from the established Congregational church. Pious by nature, she recalls her childhood fears of the devil, who at night tempted her away from prayer and told her in a whisper to hang herself. Deeply concerned over her own salvation and that of those she loved, Heaton found comfort in the act of writing, feeling that such self-examination brought her closer to God.

Hannah Heaton was devoutly religious and intensely self-aware. Spiritually isolated from her husband and children, and often at odds with her neighbors and church community, she found solace in her journal, which was at times her only friend. She loved her husband deeply, but nonetheless regretted marrying a nonbeliever and yearned for him to become a true spiritual partner. He tolerated her religious convictions but occasionally grew frustrated and even hid her spectacles so that she could not read the Bible.

A staunch patriot, Heaton carefully recorded her impressions of the Revolutionary War. Believing the fight for independence was part of God's plan, Heaton, who before the war had scarcely taken note of the political world around her, began to write at length about imperial policy and military engagements. As she wrote of the national struggles, however, she remained equally interested in the intricate details of her own private life: her relationships with kinfolk and neighbors, her domestic struggles, and her personal experiences with disease and death. Heaton's unabridged diary, edited and annotated by Barbara E. Lacey, is an extraordinarily valuable source for scholars and students of colonial history, women's studies, and religion in America.

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