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Women rising: The American Revolution and evangelical thought

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Abstract
This project explores the events leading up to the American Revolution such as the Great Awakening and the Seven Years War through the works of Hannah Heaton and Esther Edwards Burr's diaries, as well as Sarah Osborn's writing. Thus, by looking at the religious views of women during this time, this paper explains the trend of revivalist and evangelical uprisings and the religious break from authority for marginalized members of society. This paper argues that female evangelicals found religion and prayer an active way to participate and promote themselves in the American Revolution.

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ABSTRACT

This project explores the events leading up to the American Revolution such as the Great Awakening and the Seven Years War through the works of Hannah Heaton and Esther Edwards Burr’s diaries, as well as Sarah Osborn’s writing. Thus, by looking at the religious views of women during this time, this paper explains the trend of revivalist and evangelical uprisings and the religious break from authority for marginalized members of society. This paper argues that female evangelicals found religion and prayer an active way to participate and promote themselves in the American Revolution.
INTRODUCTION

The first piece of Sarah Osborn’s writings that exists is a letter she wrote to the Reverend Eleazar Wheelock, the eventual founder of Dartmouth College. At the time he was still just a Congregationalist minister, and the year was 1742. Osborn was writing to thank him for giving her the courage to confess a sin she had committed nearly a decade ago. What was the sin? At seventeen years old she had stolen thirty pounds from her parents after they had refused to give her money to marry Samuel Wheaton. Despite having gone years without the confession, when Osborn finally pleaded guilty, her mother forgave her.¹ This story is indicative of the woman Osborn was, she was spirited and independent, but also pious and loving. More importantly she represents the story of many women of colonial America, an individual who defied expectation, while still maintaining a great faith.

Marginalized members of society and religious groups such as women found religion and prayer an active way to participate and promote themselves in the American Revolution and political ideology of the time. Osborn’s story is a narrative of many individuals in colonial America who found freedom and agency through religion. This project examines the significance of New England evangelical religious practices leading up to the American Revolution. The primary goal is to understand religious trends and popular agency in colonial New England through the eyes of three women: Esther Edwards Burr, Hannah Heaton, and Sarah Osborn and how their conversion experiences contributed to greater emotions of agency and sisterhood community.

¹ Sarah Osborn’s Collected Writings. ed. Catherine A. Brekus (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2017), 1.
According to historian Susan Juster, the First Great Awakening in the eighteenth century uprooted preconceived notions of hierarchy and puritan ideology that had previously influenced many colonists. Puritans were traditionally considered persons to be bound by time, ritual, and place. However, evangelicals were considered to focus on the individual, and the ability to be saved by grace alone instead of good works. Juster argues that evangelicals had four unique religious principles, an individual relationship with God, a relationship with one another through the meetinghouse, congregational autonomy (independence from normal hierarchy), and emotional fever. These elements of change would not have been possible without the participation of women. Due to their limited resources this participation often took place through their writing, which was a way to symbolically draw them away from the drudgery of their home life and into the political atmosphere of a changing religion and nation. By inspiring themselves and one another they began to speak out. Burr would debate with her friend Prince. While Heaton would attempt to convert Native Americans. Osborn would also communicate with a friend and discuss with a local male religious leader, all the while helping those less fortunate around her.

The thesis of Juster’s work is that colonial America was traditionally gendered and masculine in its power dynamic, however the relationship of evangelical Christianity and its break from authority allowed for a unique moment in history where women were granted agency through church structure. In turn, this thesis will argue that not only were women inspired by the events of the Great Awakening, but also the American

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Revolution, to pursue more agency and authority. This pursuit of agency is expressed through the writings of Burr, Heaton and Osborn, who represent a larger trend of female empowerment and literature during the American Revolution. As women began to write for themselves and to one another this was in itself an action of rebellion. A break from authority inspired by their commitment to God and desire to record their relationship with God. However, this inspiration also resulted in discussion and thought. In a male-dominated world where women were silenced for speaking their opinions, God, one another, and the paper they wrote on were eager listeners. Encouraging one another or simply themselves through faith and literature they began to seek a divine world on earth. This work will expand upon the arguments of Juster by exploring the three specific examples of Burr, Heaton and Osborn.

Furthermore, historian Linda Kerber argued that according to evangelicals, “No building erected and dedicated by man could contain the spirit of God.”¹ No longer were religious individuals dependent on what man had created, if God was free so were elements of hierarchy and structure.² Evangelical conversion experience was not only feminine, it was also inherently positive and expressive. Kerber adds that there was a general belief that women had less patriotism than men.³ But as Kerber argues this was simply not true; Burr, Heaton, and Osborn certainly display characteristics of dedication to the colonies war efforts. The fate of the colonies often consumes their journals and literature to one another. They also express compassion for the individuals involved in the war efforts and pray for their wellbeing. These women also support their husbands

² Juster, Disorderly Women, 34.
³ Kerber, Women of the Republic, 35.
while they are away fighting. Osborn specifically works while her husband is unable to especially as his health deteriorates after serving in the war.

Kerber argues that the separation between the domestic and the political world deteriorated after the American Revolution. This work will display the elements leading up to that separation, and the women who through their efforts represented the shift towards female advocacy and political participation. Additionally, Kerber discusses that the war did not create new ideology for women, it simply put them in new positions. Burgess, Heaton, and Osborn display these new positions. Burr through the beginning stages of political thought and commentary from a woman’s eyes. Heaton and Osborn through their increased efforts in their homes, and their continued labors to create a faith filled history of the events during the American Revolution.

Other scholars such as Nancy F. Cott explore the contrast of domesticity and home life in comparison to the world. Through this contrast gender roles were defined. This work will expand upon this idea and display that through their writing women were leaving the traditional role of their domestic life and achieving a new-found advocacy through their writing. Cassandra A. Good details the extent to which letters influenced women’s involvement on the political stage, through sharing opinion and indirectly influencing a husband or friend. Good explains that friendship and passing letters were ways in which women could become politically active. This is certainly true through Reverend Fish and Osborn’s relationship. Osborn would share her thoughts with the

minister regarding spiritual matters and he would listen. But this is also certainly true in female-to-female communication such as Burr and Prince, who would both share their opinions with one another. Although this opinion sharing could not shape actual policy, it showed a willingness to engage with policy. Same with Heaton who was acting as an unofficial historian for the American Revolution.

Many female evangelicals were breaking from traditional expectations of hierarchy, they were forming new groups with new meanings of space and ideology. Through these new meanings and perceptions these groups were able to make new rules: through these new rules they were able to change traditional hierarchy. Conventionally, churches held a display of power, even the seating arrangements in Puritan meetinghouses were constructed around age, wealth and gender. Additionally, Juster adds that the symbolic hierarchy of church structure before the Great Awakening encouraged social stratification through education. However, revival ideology changed all of that as it allowed the young and old, women and men, rich or poor, educated or uneducated to stand as one group in a space that was without hierarchy.11

Scholars such as Patricia Bonomi also emphasize the importance of churches as meeting spots and rally points; they were often the largest buildings in any town.12 While other historians such as Benjamin Carp argue the importance of space, expanding upon the notion of churches and extending the power of space to towns and domestic spaces.13

This thesis, in a similar fashion, places emphasis on the importance of women’s work

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11 Juster, Disorderly Women, 24.
both inside the domestic sphere and their desire to exit this sphere, to join a more public one. It displays both the importance of space as Carp has done, but also exploring the importance of female companionship and writing as historians like Juster, Kerber and Cott have done.

Through joining religious movements, women achieved newfound agency as they too were given the opportunity to attend places of worship on equal footing as their male counterparts. With this break down of traditional authority the power of voice usurped the power of place, and as gender norms and educational expectations dissolved, women utilized their voices, taking roles in church disputes and voting on church practices.14 This is exhibited through the efforts of Burr, Heaton, and Osborn through their writings. Their journals acted as voices, and these voices were not passive. Burr would strengthen the female community through her letter writing, while Heaton strove to incorporate her voice in her small New England town, and lastly Osborn who would teach school children and lead prayer meetings when possible.

As evangelicals continued to confront their own cosmology, the colonies confronted notions of war and republican ideology. These changing circumstances placed women in unfamiliar positions, positions where the old way of thinking was no longer considered practical or useful.15 One such example of female patriotism and spiritual activism was Hannah Adams, who in Revolutionary America asserted that although the men folk could fight the physical war, women ought to fight the spiritual one.16 Although this is a long way to women’s equality, these ideas did lead to organizations

14 Juster, *Disorderly Women*, 34.
that would raise money for troops, continue moral upkeep and enlarge women’s political and educational horizons.

Colonial cosmology might not have provided a complete theory of agency for women, but it certainly saw changes that many women gladly embraced so that they could feel less judged in their church settings and embrace a more holistic and supportive God. Many of these notions would follow these women throughout their conversion experiences and continue to represent fear and anguish. The lack of traditional church structure and focus on individual conversion experience in the lives of Esther Edwards Burr, Hannah Heaton, and Sarah Osborn’s religious practices in contrast to more traditional Puritan religious practices granted themselves greater theories of agency in the colonies.

In summary, this thesis explores the lives of three significant evangelical women who recorded their experiences through journal entries either to a friend or for themselves. These women were not writing simply to share their feelings, but to make history as individuals who recorded the events of the American Revolution and discussed their own political opinions. In a time that was seeped with patriarchal notions and male dominated political discourse, women were finding a way to engage with religion and advocacy by writing. This writing was not passive, these women prayed and worked just as many individuals did during the war. They supported their husbands when they were injured, engaged with one another to encourage academic discussion and attempted to convert those around them. These actions were not inactive, they were revolutionary. In their own way these actions were slowly creating a new and emerging republic in America. One that allowed women to participate.
ESTHER EDWARDS BURR

Esther Edwards Burr’s original letter-journal is identified as “The Journal of Mrs. Esther Burr addressed to Miss Sarah Prince of Boston, October 1754-September 1757” and it houses Burr’s thoughts. Her journal was written as a series of letters collected and sent off once a month to a dear friend Sarah Prince, who would in turn send her own commentary. Unfortunately, Prince’s letters do not survive.17 Burr represents the early stages of women’s advocacy. Her courage and ingenuity can be seen in her desire to write letters to her friend Prince. This is the first step of many that women took to commit their words and thoughts to the pages of history. Although Burr did expand much further than her desire to discuss her faith, she still represents a significant step. Following her death, women like Heaton aspired to not only to convert to evangelical Christianity, but also to leave the churches their husbands attended. Burr marks an important moment in women’s advocacy, for she is the birth of the American Revolution and the revolution of women’s agency.

The turning point in evangelical Christianity where the agency of women began to be realized occurred shortly before the Revolutionary War. Alive before the apex of the American Revolution and only at its foreground of military action (with the French and Indian War) Burr displays the first steps that women took; in this she also displays its flaws. She was admittedly still reliant on her father and husband’s belief systems. However, she was bold enough to think for herself through her narrative with Prince and through that narrative the reader learns that women found religion and prayer an active

way to contribute and encourage their agency as individuals. Even if at the beginning stages the agency was not as concrete as later attempts, it was still a movement in which women were no longer confined to the complete erase of character that previous societal and religious conventions had supported. Jannette Hassey argues that evangelical feminism is often associated with beginning in the late nineteenth century, but she considers this a mistake, the seeds were planted much earlier. She argues that in any setting where religion experiences a revival (like the Great Awakening) women are able to obtain more independence and agency. Like the American Revolution, the stirrings began many years before the battle, and Burr is a wonderful precursor to the eventual unique revolution of women's agency in colonial America.

Burr is a significant woman and individual in Revolutionary America. Her father was Jonathan Edwards, a famous evangelical preacher, and her son was future Vice President of the United States Aaron Burr. Fittingly, Esther's childhood was surrounded by the Great Awakening, and dinner table discussion centered around the spread of God's grace. It was during these critical years of her upbringing that she solidified her faith and the belief that true religion came from the heart. Importantly, her initial decision to write letters with her friend was made to monitor the women's spiritual health. Through keeping this correspondence Burr and her friend were inspiring one another and promoting each other's enthusiasm and self-esteem.

Burr was born in Northampton, Massachusetts, on February 13, 1732, and was the third child of Congregational minister Jonathan Edwards. Burr came from not only a long

line of religious history but a line of strong women: a grandmother who was said to be more learned than her husband, who often led women’s prayer groups, and a mother whose conversion experience was documented and recorded as the model experience for Christians to follow. Although little is known of Burr’s years in Northampton, it can be said that they were pious and harmonious years, which would mark a stark contrast of what was to come.22 As a child, she was said to have a lively spirit and strong imagination. She was also described as having a good amount of inquisition and intelligence, all the while maintaining a great and studious faith.23

Born at the beginning of the Great Awakening, Burr saw the movement rise, inspired by her father and other famous preachers who urged the revivalist spirit. Burr’s mother embodied religious sentiment and focused her attentions on crafting the model Puritan home, while her father, Jonathan Edwards left to battle the resisters of evangelical Christianity through his writings. Her mother had an intense eighteen-day experience prompted by her husband’s critique of her lack of faith. After which she emerged at peace with herself and God. This experience profoundly influenced how Burr would view her faith as an adult. She was often prone to seeing spiritual misgivings as moral failure. Some of her own journal remarks about her feelings of despair with God were eerily like those of her mother. This led Burr to seek a perhaps unobtainable desire for release through God as her mother had found.24

At the tender age of twenty, Burr married Aaron Burr, Sr. an individual who shared her religious and spiritual fever. A man of remarkable passion, he was said to have

marched all the way from New Jersey (after having only meant Esther once before) with the express purpose that she would be his wife. He accomplished his goal before his weeklong visit ended. Within two weeks, Esther was on her way to Newark to be married.25

Yet Burr felt lonely in her new marriage given her husband’s busy schedule. In fact, her very first recorded entry remarks her feelings of loneliness, and fear for the return of “Mr. Burr.”26 It was not until her friend Sarah Prince arrived in New Jersey, that Burr felt less alone. Naturally their friendship was a product of the Great Awakening, much like themselves. They had known each other since they were little girls because her father, a preacher in Boston, was a supporter of Edwards. During this time the women became friends. Burr also became pregnant with her first child and her loneliness was gone!27 Although the birth of her child was certainly important, the inspiration of female companionship was an agency obtained without the help of a man, its significance would continue to grow as the colonies experienced revolution later.

Although Burr might not have noticed at the time, she was already forming advocacy through her original notes to Prince. In response to a letter her friend had sent, Burr urged her not to feel that their letters are boring or dull. Rather, she reminded her friend that her observations can be attributed directly to the teachings of heaven.28 Osborn and Heaton also urged each other that their day-to-day livelihood was in fact divine, thus dispelling any notion that one had to be a literal warrior for Christ, or a preacher to

achieve divinity. Instead, one needed to be a dedicated advocate of the faith, and through these letters, the women certainly confirmed their dedication.

Burr’s time spent in New Jersey during the early years of her marriage are documented by her continual discussion of her faith with the women around her and her dear friend Prince. In a journal entry in November of 1754, Burr discussed a woman named Miss Joans who offended her by speaking radically in a letter, warning of the dangers of demons among the earth who take the shape of preachers such as George Whitefield and other Methodist supporters (confirming attack of her father’s teachings). Joans criticized and cursed the preachers to wander in the wilderness and be eaten by crows for leaving their calling. Whitefield was a figure Burr likely remembered from the early revival travels, one which Burr saw her father create from infancy to full fervor. Burr was inevitably a supporter of someone dedicated to her father’s teachings. It was not just an insult to Whitefield, but the entire upbringing of Burr. Despite Burr’s disgust, this is still language that she herself will go on to employ to describe her own enemies. Therefore, for the religiously minded evangelical of the time, it was improper to cast one’s own preachers to the wilderness, but less so to cast those who were enemies. One just had to be sure of which. With this careful distinction, Burr began to see the events of the French and Indian War in a similar way. It was certainly fine to damn an enemy, but not one’s own group of believers. Similarly, Heaton and Osborn, found it reasonable to support their own friends and family as warriors, but call the British and Native Americans hateful or barbarous. The distinction was not one of action, but what guided the action.

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29 Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 64.
Joans continued to be a figure of contempt for Burr as well as her husband, who was said to have remarked that Miss Prince and his wife’s letters were much worthier of sharing than anything that Joans could write. Burr also assured Prince that she would be sure to remark if there was ever a time that Prince’s discourse became offensive, and she requested that her friend do the same for her own writings.\(^{30}\) Prince and Burr were displaying that their writing should be valued and analyzed. Also having the women make note of their communications and critique one another’s work displays a dedication to significant cosmological care as opposed to mere letter writing. This is displayed in Heaton’s writing with her concern for future readers, and Osborn too who would write to her own friend. Women were beginning to write not just as communicators but as keepers of the faith. What could be recorded would be for the sake of souls everywhere, and future generations’ salvation.

Later in November of 1754, Burr praised Boston, comparing it to a holy mountain of praise, clearly pleased with the experience her friend Prince was having in the city.\(^{31}\) Although in previous letters, the wilderness was a metaphor for sin and danger, it easily shifted once more to a mountain of holiness. Additionally, two days following Burr’s praiseful declarations, she was once more saddened, writing only a simple sentence for her day: “Nothing worth writing except that I [feel] a little more poorly than yesterday.”\(^{32}\) Clearly, Burr is a complex individual. Much as her mother had experienced an ebb and flow of faith, Burr followed suit, displaying that evangelicals were indeed emotional agents: complex individuals whose faith was not a constant but a journey.

\(^{30}\) Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 68. 
Heaton and Osborn experienced similar triumphs and defeats that displayed the complexity of female thought and the dedication to record the experience for future viewers. Perhaps had the women been friends, their words would have comforted one another, seeing as many of their problems were similar in nature. This bond of sisterhood furthers the argument that women as agents were multifaceted individuals, not just content on pondering cooking or washing. Instead they explored the very dimensions of faith. Even when they have no specific friends to write to, they are still recording for themselves. For example, Mary Cooper, a destitute woman in Long Island, recorded in her journal that her life had only gotten worse since she was married, but as she grew older, she was grateful for the haven that death would provide.33

However, these years were not without their own sufferings. The French and Indian War concerned Burr, who was preoccupied with fears of Indian attacks near her parents' home. She believed the victories of the French and Indian allies were God’s way of punishing the impurities of society.34 She further remarked, “my time is not my own but God’s.”35 It was often that women were expected to care for children and the household. These tasks were not exciting or thought provoking, in fact they were time consuming and boring. This drudgery added to the feeling of helplessness that many women felt. That was until they were able to convert their domestic spheres into areas of agency through their letters that were meant to be recorded both for one another and future generations. Through writing to a friend, Burr was no longer trapped, her voice was travelling. In comparison, Heaton did the same, seeking to transcend time by

34 *Journal of Esther Edwards Burr*, 16.
intending her voice for future generations. And Osborn who was able to transform her
own home into a place of agency.

Burr was active in writing her specific remarks about the war, not always making
them a focus of her letters, but she was unafraid to relay her opinion when necessary. In
January 1755, she criticized the lack of gunpowder in New York, and the advantages of
the French who have taken all the guns from New York.36 When specifically remarking
on the success of the military on July 10, 1755 she cited that although she was happy to
hear about the victory; she was even happier and more comforted by what the victory
meant. She assumed that God had once again bestowed His grace upon the colonists,
forgiving them for their previous transgressions.37 Given her era and temperament, Burr
never commented as fully as Osborn who went as far as to denounce the colonists’
enemies, calling them varying names and unholy slurs. But Burr certainly exhibited a
desire to discuss. She, unlike Heaton, had a companion to share her thoughts with.
However, Heaton concerned herself with her future companions who might read her
work. Little did any of the women hope that their works would be read hundreds of years
later, save for Heaton who wrote directly to her readers Though it is unknown why
exactly Heaton believed her work would be written, as she never discussed her belief
directly. However, it is a testament to her rebellious nature.

Later in July, Burr remarked on the death of General Edward Braddock,
commander of the British forces during the French and Indian War, and the sins of the
colonists. She truly believed that her sins as well as that of the colonists were great and
even more aggravated than her enemies'. She even remarked that it would be just if God

36 Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 86.
37 Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 133.
were to throw them into the hands of the enemy.³⁸ Then, in her next journal entry, she remarked on a sermon that she heard relating to the sins of the colonists and their "backsliding," and that in light of recent events they should all learn to wholly depend on God.³⁹

All in the course of a month, Burr had maintained her convictions in a faithful God and His influence, then slipped backward, believing that once again she and the colonists are sinners. Burr is certainly the most eager of the three women to believe in the sin and despair of the colonists. Given her upbringing and the traditional religious belief, it is unsurprising that her agency and optimism was hampered by the traditional teachings of her childhood. Another woman of the early era of colonial American echoes a similar concern. Jane Turell, in her diary entries, took note of God's judgments and His mercies. She equated herself to a mourner in Zion because the evil colonists were provoking God's judgment, which she believed took place through earthquakes and storms.⁴⁰ Again, it is through her own writing that she recorded these events.

A few months later in August, Burr looked back once more on the passing of Braddock and the continued fight against the "barbarous Indians." She was frustrated because she has heard that men were critiquing General Braddock following his death. Her distaste for the Native Americans set her apart, as Heaton was interested in them, and Osborn went as far as to preach to those marginalized people. As the later women grew more enlightened marginal members of society began to mean all marginalized people, not just women. However, given the earlier time period of Burr, she remained hostile

³⁹ Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 137.
⁴⁰ The Memoirs of the Life and Death of the Pious and Ingenious Mrs. Jane Turell, Who Expired at Medford, March 26th, 1735 (London: Oswald, 1741).
toward Native Americans as this sentiment was common. Eliza Lucas Pinckney, another letter writer of the early eighteenth century, shared similar stories. She wrote to her friend in England that her family was continuously assaulted by the Native Americans. Still, like all the others, she praised God for the hope He provided, especially noting the help of the doctors, who aided in containing the spreading smallpox. There is, however, one unique case in which a woman of the eighteenth century was less dismissive of the Native Americans: Mary Jemison. Jemison was captured during the French and Indian War at fifteen years old, but chose to remain with her captors for many years. She found companionship in the women of the tribe, even calling them her sisters; they taught her their language and helped her assimilate. Jemison was illiterate, but through the help of an English man when she was eighty years old, she was able to tell her story. Still, the overwhelming trend remains that the bond of sisterhood gave women hope, and the power to write gave them a voice, even when the voice needed to be assisted.

Burr took pity on the men who died after having left their homes and safety for the wilderness to fight. She, however, stood firm in her belief that the hand of God was shown and that there was nothing that could be done. Although Burr's emotions might be extreme, switching from one moment of happiness to another moment of sadness, she remained sure in the cause of these successes and failures: God. The three women were equal in their rocky emotions, subscribing to the idea of wandering to light back to darkness. Another woman who felt these intense emotions was a new convert, Elizabeth

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43 Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 141.
Ashbridge. Ashbridge led a life full of hardship but also hope, living in Philadelphia she was abused by her second husband. However, her newfound conversion to Quakerism gave her hope, and her abusive husband enlisted in the British army, and promptly died in action. She considered the luck uncanny and decided it was surely an action of god given her newfound conversion.44

Later in December of 1755, Burr again turned her troubles to God. She wrote: “But after all we are in God’s hands and this comforts me, and he will be Glorified by us and off us. This is really a comfort that God will lose none of his glory, whatever becomes of me or mine.”45 Furthermore, in September 1756, she challenged that the devil or all the powers of earth and hell can do their worst, because the Lord reigns.46 This showcases the difficult relationship many people had with their faith during this time: the consistent denial, then acceptance of their life and circumstance with God. Again, the women dealt with much of this framework in the only way they knew how, in relation to the events that occurred in their day-to-day lives. Cott argues that religion provided women with an outlet for spiritual hope.47 Through combining her faith with the events leading up to the American Revolution, Burr found a unique way to remain positive and engaged. This engagement continued as the war grew nearer in the writings of Heaton and Osborn.

Burr was also determined not to let the onset of war or her feelings of isolation hinder her ability to run a proper household. Her faith in God and ability to manage her household continued with increased passion. Having had her first child, Sally, a year

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44 Some Account on the Early Part of the Life of Elizabeth Ashbridge (Philadelphia: Kitts, 1807), 44-47.
45 Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 177.
47 Cott, Bonds of Womanhood, 126.
previously, Burr was a busy woman. Not all of her letters focused on apocalyptic questions of faith and concern; others were more menial and express the frustrations of a sick child or unhelpful servants.\textsuperscript{48} However, even simple tasks such as caring for her new but sick Sally are still left to God. Burr noted that she can trust her daughter’s health in the hands of the Lord. She wished well to her friend, and wrote that her family is well, and that she prayed for those around her.\textsuperscript{49}

Cott also adds that women were perceived to have attributes of "sensibility, delicacy, imagination, and sympathy."\textsuperscript{50} Perhaps it was these qualities associated with womanhood that made many women adept recorders of the events in colonial America, seeing as they were better equipped through gender roles to focus on the emotional aspects that affected individuals during these times of struggle. Burr even remarked during the early stages of war that it would be wonderful if were people to engage in conversation about their souls and to focus inward on themselves to aid them during conflict.\textsuperscript{51} Many of the things that women were beginning to write about and consider, were things they wished their more obtuse male counterparts would consider as well.

On another occasion, she complained to her friend that an individual who had come to visit her husband and home had "mean thoughts of Women" and that he claimed women did not know what friendship was. Luckily, Burr continued to add that she had talked him silent, as she used the evidence of her own friendships to prove him wrong.\textsuperscript{52} Another woman, Charlotte Brown, a nurse during the French and Indian War, kept a

\textsuperscript{48} Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 105.  
\textsuperscript{49} Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 106.  
\textsuperscript{50} Nancy Cott, Bonds of Womanhood, 129.  
\textsuperscript{51} Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 77.  
\textsuperscript{52} Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 257.
journal during the early stages of the conflict. She complained that she was often looked down upon by the Dutch who claimed she “could not be good to come so far without a Husband.”

Throughout colonial America, being a woman, was never associated with competence or worth: it meant being less than a man. Women during this time were not only encouraged to remain in the home, both physically and mentally, and they were scolded when they did not. Letter writing and journal keeping was a way for them to engage with their thoughts without the critical bearing of the male opinion. The influence of writing helped Burr, Heaton, and Osborn identify with a larger sense of the world, and while focusing on the internal they were no longer confined. With religion, the companion drudgery was lessened, and spiritual perseverance expanded, shifting the focus of women’s lives from not just the home but also those around them. Their writings were a continued dialogue of faith and companionship.

By spring 1757, Burr’s letters to her friend Prince were shorter, and by September, tragedy stroke. While returning from a funeral sermon, Burr’s husband contracted malaria and died three weeks later. This was a large test of Burr’s faith, which she continuously remarked on to friends and family. In another year, her father, the great Jonathan Edwards was dead, his wife (Burr’s mother) followed a few months later. Through these difficult times, Burr’s writing encompassed themes of religion, work and sisterhood.

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As her children grew up, Burr concerned herself with the teachings of the Puritan work ethic, making sure that her children were not too prideful or disobedient. She ensured that they received the education that befit their social class, while ensuring that the household was kept in good condition. Her daily life was spent entertaining visitors, feeding and housing her children, organizing household staff and dealing with emotional experiences like that of what her mother had experienced all those years ago. As Martha Ballard remarked in her journal in 1795, “a woman’s work is never done.” Something that many women could relate to throughout colonial America, no matter social status or age, was the drudgery of womanhood. Something that helped many women break from these frustrations was to share in them together, as journals and letter writing accomplished.

As many New England women found, the home helped to link gender roles assigned to the day-to-day upkeep and domesticity of women. The home was supposed to be a peaceful place, and also a woman’s place. Although this form of peace could provide a good foundation for religious piety, it also alienated women from the opportunity to discuss politics in the outside world. Politics were viewed as the selfish endeavors of men. But by letter writing, women were still discussing political situations while never truly leaving their homes or engaging in the “selfish behavior” reserved for men.

Furthermore, Roxanne Harde argues that autobiographical practice was a way for women to place themselves in history. Defining their own right to have a part. By analyzing her faith, Burr insisted that her voice did matter. Harde also argues that women were

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58 Diary of Martha Moore Ballard, 1785-1812, in Charles Elventon Nash, The History of Augusta (Maine) (Augusta, Me.: Nash and Sons, 1904), 348.
59 Cott, Bonds of Womanhood, 67.
beginning to form understanding of religious love and connection through female companionship.  

It was through shared experiences that sisterhood and companionship were created. Sisterly relationships helped to enforce religious traits of piety and shared instruction in spiritual matters as well as encouragement. Much as Burr expressed feelings of businesses and hopelessness, she could also share in on the life journeys of her friend. They acted as supporters of one another’s spirituality and life goals. For example, when Sarah Prince began her own courtship, Burr provided sisterly advice as well as religious morality, criticizing her friend for playing what was deemed for acting to flirtatious and immature. Despite the teasing, this relationship and letters helped to keep Burr less isolated in her home.  

Burr even reminded her friend how engaging their friendship was, and how it kept her from feeling sad: “I am of late very low spirited. I wish you was here, you would soon cure me with your inlivening conversation.”

Similarly, Eliza Lucas Pinckney, in her own letters, wrote to her friend that the days spent visiting her were her happiest days, for others were spent tending to her family’s estate, with no company or companionship.

By the late eighteenth century, women’s correspondence to each another represented a new self-awareness and idealization of female friendship, one that encouraged: “conversation, reading, reflection, and writing.” But these trends were long in the making much before they were common practice. These trends are displayed early

63Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney, 4.
64Cott, Bonds of Womanhood, 160.
on with Burr and Prince, both of whom viewed the changing narrative of colonial America through the Great Awakening and French and Indian War. These continued to be displayed through women such as Osborn and Heaton whose experienced firsthand the ever-changing American consciousness through the American Revolution. As well as through the continued recording, be it journals or letters, women were beginning to think for themselves, and through thinking for themselves, creating new agency that was previously denied to them. Though letter writing took place in a woman’s home, it was a way to bring women from the isolated domestic sphere to the political and Revolutionary sphere outside of the home.

Upon Burr’s death, her good friend Prince wrote a eulogy remembering Burr. She emphasized the great comfort her friend had brought her, and how for many years they bared their souls to one another. Through their writing, they had engaged in lovely conversations with one another, and through these conversations, they also had learned patience and friendship. She ended by noting that now the only individual she can turn to is God. It is through this final link that we can see that when a woman lost her female friendship, she was only left with God. This highlights the importance of a faith-filled relationship through letter writing. It is not through a husband or a man at this time that a woman looked to express herself or to feel less isolated. It was instead through a female friend or God. In this case the evangelical faith and rise of female companionship were the ways in which women in colonial America increased agency in which they develop a newfound desire to communicate with one another on political matters. Although at the time of Burr and Prince this sphere was limited, they were beginning to see the benefits

of women's religious piety and sentimentality which allowed them to view events with an insightful and dedicated interpretation. Through this interpretation, colonial America began to engage with women as agents and thinkers, a sphere that was previously denied to them.
HANNAH HEATON

This thesis argues that disregarded members of society, such as women, found religion to be a dynamic way to participate within the political discourse of Revolutionary America. Burr is representative of a woman on the beginning of a much larger movement, a trend that had yet to fully surface. However, her relationship with Prince did encourage the two to maintain a friendship that discussed more than housework. Other women leading up to the American Revolution would continue that trend. Although a poor farm woman with few friends, Hannah Heaton showed that it was possible for women of varying social statuses to participate in the narrative. Heaton displays both similarities with Burr, such as introspective religious thought, but also differences, such as her lack of female friendship and social status. Heaton’s nature led her to take a more dynamic and forthright approach toward her religion. As the wife of a farmer in the colonies, she was sure to know hardship and dedication to work. She viewed her faith as yet another challenge and dynamic of her life. Like Burr, when it came to her opinions, Heaton was anything but quiet.

The opening lines of Hannah Heaton's diary read: “I was born I believe in the year 1721 at meaxox belonging to south Hampton on long island... My father was a religious man. It was his custom to read before prayr and he would tell us children that if he read anything that we did not understand to ask him what it ment and he would stop and tell us.”66 Typical of faith-based narratives, the goal of Heaton’s work was to be preserved but also to be evidence for a faith-founded community, displayed in her initial

discussion of her own family's history of religion. Lastly, it shows that Heaton possessed a strong sentiment to explain and understand the Bible, her father having cast the initial role as both spiritual teacher and encourager. Faith was meant to be shared and taught, but also recorded in journal form, much as Burr had recorded her life of faith through letters.

Heaton's work is unique. At times her writing is scarce, and other times, overflowing. Her day-to-day life was not always the most extravagant, she was concerned with her community, the farm, and her faith. Although Burr's writing examines the life of a wealthy evangelical woman, Heaton is a broader representation of women's life in Revolutionary America. However, parallels can still be drawn between the two women including their desire to share their faith within their community, a concern for the colonies, and a dedication to the spiritual power of the Great Awakening. Apart from her own recording of her life, little is known about Heaton. What is known are mere marks to the complexity of the woman she portrays in her own writings. Heaton was the eldest child of Jonathan and Temperance Cook. She was born in 1721 and married in October 1743 to Theophilus Heaton, Jr. of New England. Hannah and Theophilus had two children, Jonathan and Calvin, who other than their brief service in the American Revolution spent their days in the tradition of their parents, as farmers. However, Heaton proved that her life was complex through her journals. She hoped her work would be published, at times referencing her Christian readers; she also compared herself to Moses writing the exodus to his children. Throughout her earlier writings, Heaton developed

67 World of Hannah Heaton, 139.
68 World of Hannah Heaton, 3.
her strong narrative of inner faith that will continue until her death. She frequently recorded that a moment of God's light is worth more than many lifetimes on earth.69

Heaton, like many evangelicals of the time, focused on her inner self; events outside her control such as the Revolution were meant to be examined from an innermost perspective. She wanted this focus and writing to provide her the assurance that she often felt when she was most pure with God. Should she ever forget those occasions, they would be documented forever in her journal.70 Heaton, however, was strong willed and sometimes she couldn't help becoming involved with the outer world. Upon marrying her husband, she was welcomed into his home and church; however, Heaton disagreed with the minister, so she left the church and begin associating with separatists who met at one another's homes. She was then put on trial for breaking the Sabbath, but continued to profess her dedication to her new church and disproval of the old. During this time, she continued to rely on her inward peace, writing that Moses was willing to turn down the riches of all of Egypt for the love of the Lord. She did not want to stand with a church that she believed was leading individuals to hell. Shortly after the trial, many of the men who had judged her fell ill, including the minister. Heaton only saw this as further vindication.71

Heaton was a bold woman; she often fought with her husband and sons over matters of religion. Just as Burr stood up to the rude individual in her home, Heaton was constantly picking fights with individuals over matters of faith. In that same vein, she found it difficult to make female friends. Heaton, like Burr, struggled with the

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69 World of Hannah Heaton, 17.
70 World of Hannah Heaton, 248.
71 World of Hannah Heaton, 91.
overwhelming chores assigned to women. In 1753, she wrote: “I can get but little time to write having no woman kind with me in my family.”72 Although Burr advanced much in sisterly companionship, it is through Heaton’s work that history gained yet another politically active and dedicated female voice. Heaton took what would be letters to a female friend, and voices them directly to not only herself, but also with the hope that in the future there will be more readers. Although her writings began as a simple recording of her faith, a minister’s sermon convinced her that matters of faith and the events of the American Revolution were one in the same. It was Burr’s desire as well to record her faith, but having died before the American Revolution, it is not always clear what she would have said. However, it is likely that she too might have been inspired by the trends that Heaton found inspiring.

Perhaps due to Heaton’s isolation within the mainstream church community and the inward-facing notion of evangelical faith, Heaton often turned to herself and the Lord as her sole comfort. She looks often on those who are sinners: “O how it loocks to me to see siners going so merrily in the road to hell…while I sit mourning alone for myself and them.”73 Heaton remarked once more on feeling helpless, unable to stop herself from sin or protect those around her from sin.74 Israel and Zion continued to be common references for Heaton, much as many religious individuals (such as Burr and Osborn) found solace in biblical comparisons. As Burr had referenced her time being that of God’s, Heaton casts much of the struggles of her helplessness and inability toward God.

As women who could not occupy more public platforms, feelings of powerlessness were

72 *World of Hannah Heaton*, 46.
73 *World of Hannah Heaton*, 46-47.
74 *World of Hannah Heaton*, 53.
to be expected; however, the reaction to evangelical religion transferred a new element of
supremacy and capacity that the women had not experienced previously.

Heaton also relished the faith that God would make the world right. She struggled
with her relationship with Native Americans; she wrote in 1754 that there were reports of
towns being attacked and individuals being taken captive by a group of Indians. She cited
the aggressors as “cruel and barbarous enemies.” She argued that the colonists were
“backsliding” and thus deserving of the attacks. She also, as Esther Edwards Burr had
done, referenced the backsliding of God’s children and the time of great judgment. She
mentioned a specific occasion: “Once while I had such a sense of god’s justice in
destroying new England that my mouth was stopt I could not pray.” Many women truly
believed that the sin of the colonists was very great. Molly Gutridge, a woman in
Massachusetts, wrote a poem about the distressing situations of war in which she
recorded that God was gracious, but that sin was the cause of all the damage done by
war.

Heaton, however, began to pray for those around her; she encountered a woman
who although she remarked was unfriendly, was found to be worthy of salvation. Once
Heaton got home, she spent much time praying for the woman. Later, she received
another visitor, a woman whom Heaton described as being far from God. Heaton prayed
that the woman might leave so that Heaton wouldn’t have to listen to her. Lucky for her,
God answered her prayer. Despite Heaton’s isolation and continued lack of female
companionship, she did pray for individuals and this showed her desire to reach from

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75 World of Hannah Heaton, 62.
77 World of Hannah Heaton, 71.
outside herself, just as Burr had done through Prince. Heaton continued to record her life in the colonies and interject her will on those she encounters.

Moreover, in the framework of the American mind, evangelicalism can also be considered as a movement, with loose ideas and practices. In this movement, there were direct connections to seventeenth-century Puritans who viewed God’s sovereignty as incredibly important, but also had a dark view on their own humanity as well as a vivid view of the afterlife. They valued the Bible and a continued reliance on the everyday outcomes of their life. They also emphasized being saved, and as mentioned previously, concentrated on the individual conversion. They defined true religion as a matter of the heart. This is evident in Burr’s relationship with her friend Prince. In Heaton’s case, there is no specific relationship that she kept close at her heart, Instead, and perhaps in testament to her bold nature, Heaton kept the world close to her heart. She remarked that she set aside several hours a day to pray for those around her. Many religious-minded women did the same through their journal writing and prayer. A planter’s daughter in South Carolina during the Revolution, Eliza Wilkinson remarked: “We trusted in more than feeble flesh and Blood, and our Dependence was not in vain.” Many women didn’t see prayer as a lack of accountability, but as a way to seek the most secure protection for themselves and those around them.

Heaton was certainly concerned with matters of the heart. Nicole Eustace notes that during the eighteenth century, many Americans began to embrace more compassionate and sympathetic approaches to both themselves and those around them.

78 World of Hannah Heaton, 83.
79 Eliza Yonge Wilkinson, Letter (Spring 1780), microfilm from the University of Georgia Library, 2010.
On one occasion, Heaton had a sense that her husband had drowned because he had not returned from a fishing trip. Heaton described the sense of sudden overwhelming longing. She felt compelled to begin praying out loud for her husband. As she was praying, she began to hear God respond. And she began to listen. Realizing that the devil had tricked her into feeling anxious for a husband whom God had just confirmed was safe, Heaton began to praise God instead, directing her feelings of anxiety from her husband instead to the Lord. Later, she assumed God would reveal his intention in a dream to her that evening, and he did, she awoke to tell their children that their father would be home shortly, and he was. His homecoming was a reminder to her that through her prayer and search for God’s guidance, she had gained reassurance and potentially helped her husband in the process.

Heaton displayed a large dedication to the heart, and a reliance on God’s power in the everyday. She was not alone in this belief. Catherine Brekus argues: “evangelicalism was a heart-centered, experiential, individualistic, and evangelistic form of Protestantism that was intertwined with the rise of the modern world.” Although a woman, Heaton was finding newfound ways to obtain control over her life. Human agency was also emerging and breaking down preconceived hierarchies, many people were experiencing great changes in politics, economies and science, which led their preconceived notions to no longer be relevant. Nature became a set of laws and this changed the way in which people viewed the universe. With a changing landscape a traditional New England farm woman could experience the changes of the Great Awakening just as Burr had, all thanks

81 World of Hannah Heaton, 46.
82 Catherine A. Brekus, Sarah Osborn’s World: The Rise of Evangelical Christianity in Early America (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2013), 11.
83 Brekus, Sarah Osborn’s World, 26.
to the revival mentality and individualistic encouragement that swept New England in the eighteenth century.

When Heaton was put on trial for her disregard of her husband’s church, she compared herself to Jonah in the belly of the whale. Her husband was specifically angry at her after the trial because it cost him much in court fees. Heaton, however, remained planted in her beliefs and, instead, called upon the Lord to give her guidance to stay on her course. Furthermore, she asked that God forgive those who put her on trial for they knew not what they did.84 Heaton’s trial, which occurred in 1755, was a defining moment for her as a person and as a woman of faith. Inspired by evangelical teachings, she was confident enough to stand up for herself at trial and solidify her own frameworks of religion. For Heaton, if one was not with her they were against her.85 As mentioned, she struggled with female companionship, however she was grateful to the people who were with her in the separatist church. She often recorded her dreams and a recurring character was a woman from Heaton’s church who taught her to trust God and avoid tears.86 Many evangelicals also began to associate themselves as renewed individuals who were no longer constrained by the bondage of society.87 As a woman who was marginalized from her husband’s church and companionship, Heaton’s focus on the inner self and workings of heaven were much of a great comfort. For other women, such as Burr or Osborn who had less trouble communicating female friendships, it was an action of rebellion together: way for women to discuss theological concerns with one another. In both cases,

84 World of Hannah Heaton, 82.
85 World of Hannah Heaton, 81.
86 World of Hannah Heaton, 83.
87 Juster, Disorderly Women, 83.
evangelical women were beginning to ponder faith, and while pondering faith, also explore the Revolutionary actions of colonial America.

Heaton was often not given the right to profess her faith to her children, however she wrote once that she was given “uncommon liberty in prayr.”\textsuperscript{88} That was short lived; a few days later, she explained that her husband had said such awful things to her that she wouldn’t dare write them down. She worried that her family, like many others, was headed down the path of hell. In response, she did not attend dinner the following evening, probably because she did not wish to see her husband, but also because she decided her time was better spent fasting for God.\textsuperscript{89} Just as Burr had often turned to Prince for solace, Heaton was turning to God, developing a narrative of rebellion from one’s husband to that of holy matters.

The following day, she remarked on her individual prayer and the power of God that came over her. Regardless of what her husband or community thought of Heaton, she found her own individual power through her faith. Women were beginning to find inspiration through the support of God; it could be argued that giving one’s life to God is giving up power but in the case of many women it was a way to take control of their own lives. As Burr had found her letters to Prince a comfort and exploration of her heart, many women did the same. Nancy Cott argues that many women found writing as a source of spiritual wealth and as a way to monitor one’s progress with God. Women were beginning to utilize religion to induce self-expression.\textsuperscript{90} Through the pages of their letters or journals, their introspection included only their own thoughts with God or each other.

\textsuperscript{88} World of Hannah Heaton, 113.
\textsuperscript{89} World of Hannah Heaton, 117.
\textsuperscript{90} Cott, Bonds of Womanhood, 15-16.
whereas their household life was constantly stunted by that of their husband's and their own beliefs.

According to Heaton, 1770 was a time where Christians were far from one another. Although she refused to name the individual, she cited that she was betrayed by someone she thought to be a friend. According to Heaton, they had disgraced her name publicly. Heaton was known for having little time for female companionship, so it can be assumed that this is perhaps a member of her faith, seeing as much of her free time was devoted to church activities. This was also around the time that Heaton was reaching a new height in her ministry. She was beginning to participate more in church and reach out to individuals, and preach her own variations in sermons. Women were beginning to outnumber men in the church and, slowly, they were also beginning to take a more active role in educating their children in matters of faith. The Great Awakening helped to inspire more lay people who no longer conformed to traditional congregations.

This is shown by her own explanations in her journal. She thought there was too much “rubbish” keeping Christians from building with one another. She spoke of inequality and the poor who suffered as a result. She, however, held the belief that God was trying to help his children and that their suffering was for grander things to come. The time leading up to the American Revolution was certainly a time of disunity among Christians. Many felt threatened by the Church of England which continued to encourage British political control. This fear was extremely relevant for Osborn, yet it can be

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91 World of Hannah Heaton, 120.
92 Bonomi, Under the Cope of Heaven, 123.
93 World of Hannah Heaton, 121.
assumed that Heaton, as a woman of the time, was confronted by these fears as well. The disunity of Christianity was certainly prevalent. Heaton maintained that she believed it was her duty from God’s word to keep a journal and spiritual history of her experiences. She compared God’s record of creation to her own journal.95 Some of Heaton’s more complex ideas and attention to detail might explain her desire to record a history of faith. For example, she was sure to record when an individual preached, and how many people were in attendance. She also recorded what the sermon was about and what passages in the bible were referenced.96

She began to make sermons of her own in her diary, and she grew bolder with her sermons and deliberately reached out to people. For example, in 1772, she heard word of a Native American man who had been sentenced to death for killing a white settler. Heaton immediately went to him to see if she could offer him companionship. However, she was frustrated to find that he was “stupid and uncensored.” She left the jail feeling as though he did not listen, but still wishing that God would have mercy on him.97 Actions such as those further convinced Heaton that the colonies were doomed to a fate of sinfulness. However, she did seek solace in a Native American preacher who convinced her to continue to show mercy.

So when the man she went to visit was scheduled to die, she attended. She was delighted to see that he lifted his hands in prayer moments before his death. Yet she was unable to watch the final moment when he was killed. Later in the week, her good works continued and though she had little money herself, she offered a poor man some of her

95 *World of Hannah Heaton*, 139.
96 *World of Hannah Heaton*, 125.
97 *World of Hannah Heaton*, 135.
own funds. But these funds came with a price: she preached to him and encouraged him that things will get better. Through these actions Heaton was beginning to insert herself into the lives of those around her. She was beginning to believe that she could impact change on marginalized people through her continued belief. Heaton had experienced her own freedom through religion and found it useful to share that freedom with others, encouraging other marginalized individuals to explore their own faith.

Like Burr who would often remark on her displeasure with the current actions of colonists, Heaton also felt compelled to extend her womanly virtue. Furthermore, like other women of the faith, she did so with a sensitive and inquisitive nature, different from that of the perceived selfish male counterparts. Women were often forced to keep their opinions to matters of the household which were separate from the sphere of men, politics and often public forums regarding religion were barred from women. Women, however, began to take their own initiative to mobilize, but this mobilization was often done outside traditional networks such as voluntary church structures.

When Heaton took it upon herself to preach to those around her, she was creating her own voluntary network. Likewise, Osborn would do so through education and time spent with her church. Burr even strove to create sisterly relationships with those around her. All these structures, although outside of tradition, were distinctly feminine and revolutionary. Women sought to understand and relate the events around themselves and create a network in which they could discuss the events of colonial America without the typical male oppression of traditional church settings or household dominance.

98 World of Hannah Heaton, 135.
99 Carp, Rebels Rising, 223.
Heaton also grew more vocal about the American Revolution. Even leading up to the Revolution, in 1772, she complained that newspapers were constantly recording horrible things: that men were turned against one another, churches were continuing to split, and that natural disasters such as earthquakes were rampant. Inspired by a sermon she listened to that declared that the colonists like the Israelites must go to war, Heaton saw war as imminent; thus Heaton began to involve political commentary in her writing as well. For her the teachings of religion were the law, and this meant that linking war and religion was now a way in which she would make sense of the events surrounding her. As shown, Heaton believed it was her duty to record the religious history of the colonies to future readers; the sermon inspired her to believe that this history included the upcoming Revolution.

In 1774, she found out that her sons had joined the war effort, and she felt the desire to pray for not only them but the rest of the colonies. She recorded that she was laboring for family peace. Heaton had always seen herself as a keeper of the family faith, specifically when she worried that their souls were in danger of sin. She specifically asked, “O God spare this threatened north america.” As with most things in life, Heaton prescribed her opinion quickly, the British were wrong and deserved to be vanquished by God for their sins. However, displeased with the removal of her husband and children, Heaton was given a sense of freedom. Household life often worked to disempower women, bringing them down with its long list of chores and duties each day. The household ground was often a war zone between man and woman in a struggle

100 World of Hannah Heaton, 136.
101 World of Hannah Heaton, 154.
102 World of Hannah Heaton, 155.
103 World of Hannah Heaton, 160
Heaton certainly struggled with her husband over their disagreements with religion. With the absence of men in her life, Heaton began to ponder some of the events around her. Similarly, Burr was often most reflective when her husband was away on work, and Osborn would begin much of her writing after her husband left for battle. With the absence of a male presence, many colonial women were free to ponder ideas of the soul that they had already been developing, but with the addition of a larger scale narrative, war.

Heaton was quick to equate events of the Revolution to events in ordinary life, as things that were divine. Burr had made similar parallels during the French and Indian War; both women often saw signs of loss among the colonies as signs for sinfulness. Both viewed their own perseverance as a peacekeeping device with God. Unfortunately, Burr only saw the beginning of Revolutionary stirrings not the ending, so it is difficult to know what she would have remarked on. As Keith Griffin notes, many religious individuals during the war felt that God not only judged the actions of a nation, but also of the individual, and that the two were connected. A nation, because of its individuals, could represent national sinfulness or national blessing. Thus by women such as Burr, Heaton, and Osborn recording their own thoughts and prayers, they influenced a nation with the hopes that others such as their friends, God, or future generations would see their efforts.

War is a unique notion in relation to religious women; both Burr and Heaton remark on it, they pray about it, and they worry for what it might mean within their

104 Carp, Rebels Rising, 144.
communities, yet they are removed from it. Although prayer might be deemed a passive action by some, the enthusiasm that many evangelical women and marginalized members expressed throughout the Revolution had to be coupled with some sense of organization; in many cases, this is where religion comes in. Both strong-willed women, Burr and Heaton involved themselves in war through their faith. This was done by prayer and recording. Heaton believed that her prayer was active. She had seen the signs in the people she tried to help and evangelize throughout the years. Prayer was not inactive. For though she had given the poor man her money, she had also preached to him. According to Heaton one could only be saved through spiritual means not physical. Although the money probably helped the poor man, in Heaton's mind, her prayer was more useful to him. Therefore, by praying for those involved in the Revolution, she was in fact helping. Furthermore, by recording it, she was doing as she had done with the ministers' sermons, keeping an active narrative of the world around her. It is active because it is not simply a record, but also a commentary, where she voiced her opinions without fear of rebuke or censorship. Just as Burr always confined in Prince, specifically noting the comfort of a willing to listen ear, Heaton found comfort in her own journal.

As a New England farm woman, Heaton displayed an overwhelming enthusiasm for the Revolution. Heaton continued to perceive herself as a religious recorder for the upcoming events. She was quickly involved more so when her husband joined the war efforts. She prayed to God, asking that He allow her to see the end of the war so that she might see the greatest glory in New England.106 Thus by her hopes to see the end of the fighting, she established hope to see the opportunity to continue to record

106 World of Hannah Heaton, 181.
the end of her own life's work: her religious history journal. She had often expressed a strong sense of agency. She often attributed others salvation to her action of prayer or preaching. It is only natural that she might equate earlier experiences such as the salvation of the Native American, the poor man, and other women around her, to her relationship with God. If God was good enough to save people spiritually, why wouldn't God also save those physically in battle due to her prayer? Wouldn't others one day read her work and feel inspired by the goodness of God?

Despite Heaton's husband's return from fighting, she was more concerned with saving those around her. She mentioned praying for a man who had attempted to steal clothes, again she referenced God's will hoping that God would allow the individual to have clothes.107 Once more, Heaton displayed her complexity; every thought that she had was recorded, no matter how big or small. Despite the Revolution raging around her, she was still concerned with the soul of a thief. The pedestrian upbringing of Heaton provided her with a unique insight into individuality of the human condition. In turn, this insight allowed her to practice what she preached. Most evangelicals, Burr and Heaton included, believed that the sins of the colonies were partially responsible for any hardships they experienced, and while Burr was content to remark, Heaton believed she could convert.

Again, a communal mentality was experienced throughout the colonies, despite Heaton's previous remarks that the colonies were disparate. In September 1776, a public day of fasting was enacted. However, Heaton had little to say about the positive effects of the fasting, seeing as her next entry showed that she worried about the death around her.

107 World of Hannah Heaton, 170.
She began to lose her neighbors, many of whom were individuals who ten years prior had urged against her religious practices and pursued her removal from church.\textsuperscript{108} In Burr’s writings, readers often see a sense of optimism, the anxiety-ridden Burr found comfort in God’s control, whereas Heaton often felt only further turmoil and frustration as she struggled for the solidified reassurance that she so desperately craved.

As Heaton had always done, she was unafraid to remark on current events, much as Burr had done. As many women saw their letter writing as maintaining a spiritual history, it was their duty to remark. Heaton was also content like Burr to remain trapped in the misgivings of sinfulness and sorrow. Straying from her action of recording and more so coming from the heart, subscribing to the stereotypical ideas of hysterical female evangelicalism. In February of 1776, she referenced that God was simply cutting down his children, but that they should not be afraid because “tho it lookt so dark than the disciples had when Jesus was in the grave.”\textsuperscript{109} In 1779, she thanked God that he did not allow the British to burn down New Haven, specifically saying: “But a good god did not suffer it.” She feared that the British would come into her own home, but luckily, she was spared from the wrath.

After the “enemy” was gone, she spent some time fasting and praying, so that she might meditate on death and hell in order to find herself closer to the “angels hand.”\textsuperscript{110} Finally, the day she had hoped for occurred, in 1781, when she recorded the victory in Yorktown. However, Heaton was quick to remind her loyal readers that many individuals celebrated the victory with debauchery instead of praising the Lord. She, however, sought

\textsuperscript{108} World of Hannah Heaton, 177.
\textsuperscript{109} World of Hannah Heaton, 180.
\textsuperscript{110} World of Hannah Heaton, 194.
to lead by example and confessed her faith and happiness to God for the saving of the colonies.\textsuperscript{111} This sentiment was similar to many religious-minded individuals when celebrating military victories. Margaret Hill Morris from New Jersey also remarked upon debaucheries and celebrations during the war: “Can we call ourselves Christians when we act so contrary to our masters rules?”\textsuperscript{112} The overwhelming trend for many faithful individuals was to continue to preach God’s goodness even at times of victory.

With the close of the war, Heaton was still surrounded by her questions of God and her own faith. Her views were still relatively pessimistic, but also sporadic; as always, Heaton was overwhelmed by sin but grateful that God loved her despite this. Heaton became once more concerned with some of the local grievances in town, perhaps as an outlet to continue to record the history of the turbulent time. Heaton also continued to hope for her husband’s conversion, after all this time he remained dedicated to the initial church, the one Heaton was brought to trial for leaving.\textsuperscript{113} These fears were exacerbated by her age. She began to realize that she was getting closer to her death. Heaton also struggled near the late 1780’s to attend religious meetings due to her pain and weakness in her back and hips, testaments to a long and harsh life, though she does not complain at length. Instead, she characteristically focused on her sin of being unable to attend the services.\textsuperscript{114} Heaton often recorded that many days she was “poor in body low in mind,” any of her physical ailments are often seen as flaws in her spiritual being and not simply the failings of an aged body.\textsuperscript{115}

\textsuperscript{111} World of Hannah Heaton, 204.
\textsuperscript{112} The Revolutionary Journal of Margaret Morris of Burlington, New Jersey (Philadelphia: n.p., 1778).
\textsuperscript{113} World of Hannah Heaton, 228.
\textsuperscript{114} World of Hannah Heaton, 237.
\textsuperscript{115} World of Hannah Heaton, 251.
By the 1790's, Hannah was nearing her end, her body was deteriorating, but she remained faithful. She was eager at her death for God to come to her, so that she may die in faith just as she has lived in faith. She wrote verses, small rhymes: “wings of love reach the mentions of the sky and take my seat above.”¹¹⁶ For someone with a doubtful life, Heaton appeared to be on her death bed. That was until the next passage where she once more was certain that the devil was trying to distress her mind, she struggled to feel the embrace of God as she spent her final hours on earth.¹¹⁷ But her final words to her diary remain true as she hoped that the snare was broken and that she has escaped. Lastly, she asked that God still keep her from sin.¹¹⁸

Just as in other areas of their lives, religious individuals looked to God’s decisions as the reason for events. Why would war be any different? In a world where farming was dedicated to the success or failure of local weather patterns, Heaton like Burr was quick to rely on the promise of regularity and control through a higher power. The way in which various individuals channeled their faith varied through what type of response they desired; Burr chose female companionship, and Heaton, who craved acceptance and wanted to share, sought a voice to listen. However, it cannot be denied through these women’s journals and evangelical faith that a shift was occurring: a shift toward political thought and participation in marginalized individuals through faith. The radical elements of evangelicalism that granted Heaton the courage to leave what she believed was a repressive church environment would also inspire her to seek new experiences, thoughts, and opinions. Through Burr and Heaton’s insightful journaling, a shift toward radical and

¹¹⁶ *World of Hannah Heaton*, 276.
¹¹⁷ *World of Hannah Heaton*, 277.
¹¹⁸ *World of Hannah Heaton*, 278.
shareable female thought and conviction emerges that allowed marginalized individuals
to participate in the American Revolution.
SARAH OSBORN

One of the leaders of evangelical feminism was Sarah Osborn, a schoolteacher in Newport, Rhode Island. She exhibited the spirit of underrepresented individuals engaging with the political narrative of Revolutionary America, while also redefining social expectations of colonial women. Osborn was a strong-willed individual who defied expectation, and in 1743, she decided to write a memoir. She was inspired by the Great Awakening and wanted to share her conversion experience. This conversion experience would mark the rest of Osborn’s life, and encourage her religious fever throughout the two conflicts she lived through. Osborn was passionate though, and this passion extended from an early age; despite being a school teacher, she had only received three months of formal education. While recording her day-to-day life, she rarely wrote about her domestic work or classes; instead, she focused on a higher power: the Lord.

Born in England in 1714, Osborn immigrated to the colonies as a young girl. She would eventually form her home in Newport as both a wife and mother as well as schoolteacher. Osborn lived in England until she was eight years old; her father during this time was already living in the colonies. Her mother kept her in boarding school where she recorded that she was often taught about religion, but never felt that she could absorb the teachings. At the tender age of eight, she boarded a ship with her mother and sailed for the new world, and recorded that at that time she had felt her faith slip even more. However, as was a trait of her later years, she resolved to persist in finding her faith once more. She remembered being alarmed when a local girl (a friend of hers) had

119 Sarah Osborn’s Collected Writings, 13.
120 Sarah Osborn’s Collected Writings, 21.
121 Sarah Osborn’s Collected Writings, 2.
died; she felt lucky that she herself although a sinner was spared from God’s wrath.  

When she turned eighteen, she married for the first time and this is when she said she began to learn the sin of disobedience. Her husband, she said, was controlling, but luckily seafaring; although she missed him, she often enjoyed the times when he was gone.  

Much as Burr had time to write when her husband was off visiting colleges, Osborn, too, found solace in alone time. A year after Osborn married, she gave birth while her husband was at sea. When he returned, she feared that she would have another child. However, God, she wrote, did not make it so. This time when her husband left he did not return; he died at sea.  

Her life was one continued tale of woe and suffering: a chronic illness, a front row seat to the two early American conflicts, and by the end of her life, the reading that was once her passion was taken from her as well. She died nearly blind and with limited mobility. Historians have suggested that it was likely that Osborn had rheumatoid arthritis or multiple sclerosis. Like Burr, Osborn also sent letters about her faith to a dear friend, Susanna Anthony, as well as a male companion, Joseph Fish. Just like Burr and many other evangelicals, Osborn saw letter writing as a way to seek the Kingdom of God on earth through human compassion and companionship. Osborn saw the continued recording of her life as a way to document her experience with God, and the letters she sent to friends and family as a way to document their stories as well, all the while building the kingdom of God in New England. This is similar to Heaton, who

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122 Sarah Osborn’s Collected Writings, 10-15.
123 Sarah Osborn’s Collected Writings, 17.
124 Sarah Osborn’s Collected Writings, 18.
125 Sarah Osborn’s Collected Writings, 3.
126 Sarah Osborn’s Collected Writings, 4.
127 Sarah Osborn’s Collected Writing, 27.
strove to record the evangelical history of colonial America. Osborn represents a crossroads between the other women profiled, as her writings attempted to accomplish the goals of both.

When the American Revolution arrived, Osborn saw yet another event that represented and confirmed her passion for a spiritual and literal rebirth of the American colonies. Like Burr who had seen signs of God’s justice in the French and Indian War and Heaton who had connected the events to the Revolution, Osborn felt that the American Revolutionary experience was one of both political and spiritual rebirth. She often wrote to her various friends about her opinions on the Revolution and what it meant in relation to God. This theorizing was not typical of a woman, let alone a woman of her status. Writing, to many Puritans, was considered a stereotypically masculine experience. But through the works of Burr, Heaton, and Osborn, it is evident that there were women who were perfectly happy to break the mold. Just as it was revolutionary for Burr to write letters to a friend, and for Heaton to believe that her writing could be saved for future generations, Osborn believed both. Osborn, like the other women, was very dedicated to recording her work; she too hoped that it would serve as a testament to her faith.

It was a good thing that Osborn was faithful because her life, like Heaton’s, was hard. Osborn had to become a schoolteacher to provide for herself because her first husband died at sea. Unfortunately, even the teacher’s salary was not enough, and she also had to work as a seamstress and a baker. Throughout these trying times, one theme is certain: Osborn is faithful to God. Osborn never believed that she was capable of

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128 Sarah Osborn’s Collected Writing, 6.
overcoming hardship without God. Although Burr's life was one of more obvious privilege, she never believed her good fortune capable without God either. Heaton, too, who was more downtrodden and, like Osborn, believed that her best hope of success was through faith in God's work.

In 1742, it would seem as if Osborn’s suffering would be lifted by the marriage to Henry Osborn; however, it only furthered her work load. Her husband was unwell, and unable to work in any capacity. This meant that Osborn, like Heaton and Burr, was weighed down by household chores, defined as women's work; but unlike them, she was also met with the chores of men as the sole provider of her family's income. Many women felt burdened by the roles of running a household, both Burr and Heaton confess in the hardship. Although it was rare to both run a household and conduct business, some women did just that. An English woman, Eliza Lucas Pinckney, who had moved to the colonies to help her parents with the plantation, describes how difficult it was to manage an estate as her brother, she complained, had no sense for business, so she hoped to rely on the goodness of the season.129

Osborn's writing relied on two main characters: herself and God. Due to her family's financial burdens, she was unable to write privately. She often had to close the curtains of her bedroom once her husband woke up from the day and write hunched over the bed.130 Like the other women this was a way to leave the household environment. Although Osborn rarely had time to leave apart from her teaching at the school, she was able to leave mentally. Escaping the desires of her husband and chores, she focused on

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129 Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney, 7.
130 Sarah Osborn's Collected Writings, 10-11.
what she wanted, which was to theorize about religion and the political events unfolding around her.

As was the tale of many evangelicals, Osborn recorded memories of early godly experiences; in 1743, she writes of a time as a child that she had, against her parents’ wishes, paddled a canoe on a nearby lake. Having gone against her parents, no one knew that she was out there. Soon the young girl found herself stuck, in a muddied and low bottom, perhaps the very reason she had been urged against paddling in the first place. Seeing no sign of immediate salvation, but instead the sureness of death, Osborn turned to prayer, and through her prayer she had felt a renewed conviction. She yelled as loudly as possible to her neighbors who, after some time, heard and rescued her. She cited this experience as her opportunity to learn the sinful nature of the human spirit, but also the continued self-preservation. From that day on, she swore to renounce sin as best she could.131 Burr and Heaton, like Osborn, also strove to protect themselves from sin. Much of their efforts were exhibited by keeping records of their experiences so that they might learn from them. Specifically, in Burr’s case, she acknowledged the amount that they were learning from one another.

Little else is known of Osborn’s childhood, save for the anecdotes she tells that are linked to her faith like the row boat. However, the years leading up to the American Revolution were not kind to Osborn. In 1744, she lost her only son, who, at eleven, while working as an apprentice, contracted consumption. Osborn struggled most of all with the question as to whether her son Samuel was saved or not. This was a question she herself struggled to understand for her own life, and as a mother, this devastated her. However,

131 Sarah Osborn’s Collected Writings, 9.
through these intense moments, this was how Osborn learned to seek solace in biblical stories and relate them to her own life. She referenced the bible and how Mary wept for her brother Lazarus as Osborn now did for her own son.132 Just as Heaton had often compared herself to Jonah in the belly of the whale, or the colonies to the Israelites, divine connections aided evangelical women to feel less alone. And beyond that, these connections helped them to feel relevant; they were no longer lost, but instead, their own characters living out their own biblical stories.

This is an emerging theme that only intensified with the start of war: Osborn as a woman of faith would always position her life experiences with that of the biblical narrative. Leading up to the French and Indian War, Osborn lost two of her favorite preachers, and her husband Henry was forced to declare bankruptcy. During this time, she strived to search for a “hidden God” that, despite the hardships of her life, remained with her and fortified her reserve.133 She was not, however, a hidden wife; she, if anything, reversed many gender roles and took a very active approach in her husband’s financial woes. She encouraged him to take inventory of what they owned and met with local merchants in town to encourage them to purchase some of their goods. She was always very concerned with owing anyone money when it was not necessary.134 Osborn, during her time of financial and spiritual woe, prayed for her students salvation as she feared they were noisy and unruly; although being a teacher was one of the few jobs Osborn could obtain as a woman, it was estimated that she made less than half that of her male counterparts.135

132 Sarah Osborn’s Collected Writings, 71.
133 Sarah Osborn’s Collected Writings, 78.
134 Sarah Osborn’s Collected Writings, 62.
135 Sarah Osborn’s Collected Writings, 79.
Then, right before the war, Osborn experienced one portion of good news: she was to become a published author. Her pastor had arranged for a letter that she had sent in 1753 to a friend to be printed. In true fashion, Osborn did not discuss the details or public response of the letter. However, her financial woes for the time were lessened. Osborn’s friendship with the Reverend Fish was one of financial and spiritual support. It was clear that, when possible, he did what he could to assist Osborn through helping spread her words, offering advice through letter writing, and loaning her books so that she could further her education. Just as Burr and Prince had supported one another. The very nature of her friendship with Reverend Fish is a display of Osborn’s willingness for change and female empowerment. Letters between men and women who were not husband and wife were often seen as illiberal. However, any opportunity for a woman to discuss their personal feelings without the scorn Burr had experienced, were, in themselves, small revolutions.

Letter writing, in general for many women, was a way to share political opinion that was not open to them in the public forum. Although women were not allowed public speeches, they were allowed conversation, and this was how they expressed their political belief. Much as Burr and Heaton had expressed their political views either with friends or through writing, Osborn found ways to participate by writing letters to her friend who did help her both by listening and providing guidance of his own. By Osborn branching

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136 Sarah Osborn’s Collected Writings, 108.
137 Sarah Osborn’s Collected Writings, 84.
138 Good, Founding Friendships, 106.
139 Good, Founding Friendships, 169.
out to the friendship of a man, she was representing the potential for a new republic, one where men and women could have friendships that were closer to equality.\footnote{Good, *Founding Friendships*, 189.}

Obviously, Osborn was not one to sit idle. Many of the colonists, Osborn included, believed they were dealing with a religious crisis in New England because of the growing popularity of Anglican worship.\footnote{Brekus, *Sarah Osborn’s World*, 22.} In 1756, France and Great Britain declared war against each other, and this war was intense and gruesome. Sarah Osborn viewed the war as a battle between God’s chosen covenant people and the “Antichrist,” as she thought of Catholics as the so-called beast that was spoken of in the book of Revelation. France, in her opinion, had not entered the war just to gain land or fight, they had entered it with a grand idea to destroy the preconceived city upon a hill and create, instead, a Catholic country.

Worst of all, Osborn had the fear that the Protestants would be forced to bow down to the Pope.\footnote{Sarah Osborn’s Collected Writings, 119.} This threat was incredibly horrifying considering that many individuals had recently experienced incredibly powerful moments of conversion. Many evangelicals, like Burr and Heaton, had just experienced newfound happiness and faith through spiritual change that was already considered radical by members of their community; they were threatened once more by the Catholics and other groups. Burr often recorded her fear of Native American attacks, and Heaton struggled to practice a faith that was different than her community’s. In an already unstable time of faith, they needed to rely on God even more, to secure their faith and community.
Expressions such as the “whore of Babylon” were used in relation to the papacy. Many colonists expected the battle with France to be long and intense, which was exactly what happened. Some individuals, such as Sarah Osborn, referred to their communities as the “British Israel.”\textsuperscript{143} In January 1757, she referenced the Israelites’ story and asked that Christians and ministers be granted a comfortable living safe from famine; but, either way, she thanked God for his grace which strengthened her through her hardships.\textsuperscript{144} Although Osborn was not a participant in the fighting, she established an active role in her prayer through God; she was participating not in the traditional sense, but in a very personal and pure sense. Much like Heaton, Osborn would see the fighting through the financial strain it brought to her family and through the men she knew that fought, like her husband’s son Edward. Revival thought often encouraged the ideology of personal faith experiences and conversion; through her own personal narrative, her continued prayer was a participation of its own.

Heaton and Osborn both had few other options of participation, and although Osborn could not fight in the French and Indian War, she could engage with it and link the battles she watched occur to the battles that the Israelites had experienced in the Bible. When Heaton and Osborn prayed or fasted, they were participants in a nonviolent, and in their own views effective, fight against sin. Likewise, Burr who surrounded herself with the words and messages of her father and husband, participated through her education of faith and preservation. As Burr remarked, women were of a different temperament than men. The prevailing ideology of the time believed women to be less aggressive and more faithful. By calling upon a higher power and seeking to know both

\textsuperscript{143} Brekus, \textit{Sarah Osborn’s World}, 203.
\textsuperscript{144} \textit{Sarah Osborn’s Collected Writings}, 121.
God and fellow evangelicals, these three women and many more like them were in fact literary warriors in their own right, and later revolutionaries.

In February 1757, Osborn referenced her minister sermon about Zion’s troubles and the power of the antichrist prevailing. But she was reminded by the preacher that Christ strengthens them, with the promise that God will help his people escape the troubles of Satan.\(^{145}\) Shortly after this, she praised God for being the king of saints and exalted His glory over the entirety of the earth, asking where she herself would be, as well as where the Jews would be if they were not brought to safety. Furthermore, she asked when the antichrist would fall.\(^{146}\) Again, Osborn connected herself to larger events, but was still experiencing her own life with them. It is not so much about one brandishing a gun, but instead wielding a steadfast faith that believed all things were possible through God.

Although the incredible notion of war was alarming in the broader sense, it also impacted Osborn in a more personal sense. During the French and Indian War, her second husband’s eldest son (Edward) was shot. She asked in a letter to a friend Joseph Fish that the Lord take care of her son, not just his earthly body but also his soul. She claimed that God is just and that He will utilize His will as He sees fit, but that all things through him will be done wisely and well.\(^{147}\) In a true reverse of gender roles, Osborn was working and her husband was not. The blockade of the French had made it difficult for her husband to receive goods to work, so it was up to Osborn to provide. Her husband had not worked for several years and it was not until 1758 that he got a job as a warden of

\(^{145}\) *Sarah Osborn’s Collected Writings*, 123.

\(^{146}\) *Sarah Osborn’s Collected Writings*, 126.

\(^{147}\) *Sarah Osborn’s Collected Writings*, 143.
the harbor.\textsuperscript{148} During this time, Osborn also helped an enslaved woman convert to the First Church of Newport, becoming the third black member.\textsuperscript{149} Just as Heaton had attempted to convert the Native American man she encountered. During this turbulent time, Osborn through her family members like many other women, was experiencing the war on all fronts. She felt the financial struggle, she felt the death, and most of all, she felt the passion in her soul for a hope of a better tomorrow. A better life that inspired her to continue to teach, convert, and pray.

Osborn was clearly a woman who didn’t conform to the beliefs of the time; she often remarked that she didn’t feel that the soul had a gender. Also, perhaps given her own financial status, she never discriminated against someone do to their social position in life. She only saw the ability for a black woman or Native American to convert as more evidence of God’s goodness and salvation. When she read books that catered to a man’s exploration of faith, she was quick to adapt it to her own exploration, for any conversion or discussion of faith didn’t need to be gendered when it concerned the soul.\textsuperscript{150} As Susan Juster argues, evangelicals believed that once they were reborn they were not bound to the confines of society; they believed that they now existed on a superior plane of spirituality.\textsuperscript{151} Much as Heaton had believed herself to be morally superior through her actions of conversion, many evangelicals believed themselves to be above the world. This gave many women the inspiration to speak out and record their opinions about religion and other political thoughts. These thoughts encouraged the

\textsuperscript{148} Sarah Osborn’s Collected Writings, 120.
\textsuperscript{149} Sarah Osborn’s Collected Writings, 121.
\textsuperscript{150} Sarah Osborn’s Collected Writings, 33.
\textsuperscript{151} Juster, Disorderly Women, 83.
spread of evangelical thought as Burr had conducted through female companionship, and Heaton through attempted conversion.

To add to her sorrows, on August 19, 1757 she learned that Fort William Henry was taken by the French the previous Tuesday. She asserted that the justice befalling her was deserved and that she hoped in the future God would “appear and make the Antichrist and the heathen know that Zion’s God has not forsaken her, though he hast scourged her.” Suddenly, all the things that she had feared had come to fruition; not only had she lost a loved one, her own colonies were also suffering. To claim that women were not involved in the war because they were not fighting, is certainly not true in Osborn’s case or many of the others. Heaton, too, would wait in anguish for the return of her husband and sons. Both sorrows during those two weeks were felt thoroughly by Osborn, which in her time of need, turned her towards prayer. Although this may appear to be the logical response of any individual of the time, Osborn felt that her response was specific. This was not voyeurism: this was commentary. There were many political writings and spiritual writings in colonial America that remarked on such things; sadly it was less likely that a poor woman’s work would be published over that of a more influential man.

Much as Heaton had believed herself to be a spiritual historian, Osborn, too, was recording the history of the colonies while also asking God for help. Many of the women felt that their lives couldn’t be changed without the help of God, so, too, a war could not be won without the intervention of God. By praying to God for the salvation of the colonies and warding of the temptation of Satan, Osborn was participating. Wars are not

\[^{152}\text{Sarah Osborn's Collected Writings, 145.}\]
specifically fought on the battle front; they are also fought by the citizens who support the war efforts. These women were also acting as historians, as Heaton and Osborn wrote with the intention to record for future generations. Meanwhile, Burr acted as a theologian in a way following in the footsteps of her father and husband, as she remarked on the events of her time.

Despite her hardships, Osborn remained faithful and hopeful. In 1759, she praised God for helping her and those around her keep their religion and liberty, she was still loyal to the crown at the time, and she praised King George for his perseverance during the difficult time, but this perseverance was God’s will, not his own. She also went on to praise God for the worthy generals, whom she specifically cited as having performed valiantly. But in all this she still requests that God help her to cheerfully approach her difficulties, and when they are too great for her that he may help and direct her life. Just as she believed that she alone was not capable of salvation, she doubted that the colonies could be successful without the intervention of God. Her journals’ insight provide a very personal approach in that they connect her faith to her day-to-day life experiences, but at the same time, they create a larger narrative of the population and their experiences, in which she prays for all. Just as Heaton found her influence on the world through recording and conversion, and Burr through female companionship, Osborn continues this narrative. Osborn’s narrative is both one of conversion and companionship bringing an intersection between the other two women’s ideologies and goals.

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153 Sarah Osborn’s Collected Writings, 170.
154 Sarah Osborn’s Collected Writings, 172.
As a woman who had experienced multiple hardships, her faith however was still intact, and perhaps, at times, one of her few comforts on her difficult journey. Five years into the French and Indian War, Sarah Osborn wrote: “O Let us build upon the dear the sure foundation Christ Jesus all the Good works we can O Let this be ever as oile to our wheels to make them run swift inasmuch as ye did unto them ye did it unto me.”

During this time, Sarah Osborn and others were experiencing intense bouts of poverty and starvation. But throughout these intense bouts of starvation, the religious remained faithful and hoped that through their perseverance and belief in God, they would see the end of the suffering. She also continued to expand her own education and conviction. Through this she began to preach at her home, inviting African Americans to come and listen. As the world around her began to shift and Revolution emerge, Osborn had her own miniature revolution.

In the Pequot Wars in the seventeenth century, colonists justified the destruction of the Native Americans by considering their war a just war, or even at a stretch a holy war. Colonists would often see themselves as the saints that they idealized, as they battled for their morality against tyranny, as well as their ever-important spiritual wellbeing. They justified military actions in incredibly violent wars, especially in conflicts with the Native Americans, with the hope of salvation from an approving God. This method of thinking would eventually lead them to break from their king who had traditionally been believed to be appointed by God. In summary, as Keith Griffin argues,
evangelicals during this time began to justify military action by accepting it as a just war. They would point to the very neutral law of self-defense, and lastly the intervention of God for his covenant people.\textsuperscript{159}

Women were often perceived as the individuals responsible for moral upkeep, so while men might have felt that a holy war meant that they must go and fight, women felt the desire to pray and remark through their writing. It is not as though women were not willing to share or become involved. Osborn, Burr, and Heaton were always willing to express their feelings in relation to the military conflicts going on around them; they wrote to women, preached to those who would listen, and recorded for themselves their own opinions. It was just that unlike men who spoke about the war and what it meant, it was rare that anyone wanted to listen to women do the same. Nonetheless they formed their own agency through their writings to the people who would listen and perhaps not just a person, but also God.

The colonists emerged from the French and Indian War with the French giving up power and, in their minds, the Indians defeated as well, both being enemies of God. Yet both Osborn and Heaton expressed interest and concern in the salvation of the Native Americans. Striving to covert and share their faith with them. But as time continued, the British, due to their Anglican belief system, began to appear even more sinister than previously believed, while the pious colonists began to increase their saintly image of themselves. Benjamin Carp explains that the French and Indian War brought economic depression and instability to the colonies, thus leading to the controversial periods of the Stamp Act crisis, Townshend Acts, Tea Act, and Intolerable Acts. These actions resulted

\textsuperscript{159} Griffin, \textit{Revolution and Religion}, 2.
in a series of heated reactions to the British and the legality of their commands.\textsuperscript{160} He adds: "While religion did help contribute to the political decisions of many city dwellers, the urban environment also called for flexibility."\textsuperscript{161}

Osborn, as resident of Newport, experienced both the hardships of financial instability, but also the excitement of urban citizenship. Being a poor woman, she was never admitted into the discriminatory halls of theological academia. Yet she was not deaf to the rumors and public opinion that flowed through town. She clearly wanted to participate in the conversations but lacked the ability to do so. Still, she associated with the ministers of her church and held her own opinions. Much like Burr who was willing to talk theologically with her friend Sarah Price, Osborn did the same with her own diary and her letters to her friends. Both women strove to put themselves in the narrative of human thought through their belief and continued practice of evangelical Christianity. Carp adds that if it were not always for political mobilization, houses of worship remained areas for individuals to assemble in some aspect. But the flexibility of the time, especially in larger New England towns, coupled by the emotional and economic distress of the French and Indian War instigated emotive feelings from many colonists.\textsuperscript{162} This was furthered by the individualistic expression of conversion experiences among evangelicals in their own break from authority to finding their own collective successes.

Thomas Kidd even references an emotion felt by many during this period of religious break from authority, that there was "'No King but King Jesus.'"\textsuperscript{163} Sarah Osborn echoes this sentiment writing: "O, thou glorious high priest though Satan resist, snath this

\textsuperscript{160} Carp, \textit{Rebels Rising}, 11.  
\textsuperscript{161} Carp, \textit{Rebels Rising}, 133.  
\textsuperscript{162} Carp, \textit{Rebels Rising}, 133.  
\textsuperscript{163} Kidd, \textit{God of Liberty}, 33.
brand out of the burning... O, thou King of Kings.” Kidd also acknowledges that many Americans became united through public religious beliefs as their personal faiths and beliefs were too diverse to unify. Further, one thing they all could agree on was disestablishment from authority, while the religious evangelicals would want this so they could preach freely, and rationalists and deists would want freedom so they could establish their own enlightened government. This would create a unique moment in history, where the religious and rational agenda aligned amongst the general public to create a much larger movement and inspiration. All three women, reviewed through their diaries, express degrees of conviction for new birth, new thought, and simply change. Change that perhaps a hundred years prior would not have been so sure footed and believable.

Furthermore, Carp adds that although the American Revolution did not necessarily bring significant change for individuals on the margins, it certainly brought them together and created networks of individuals who were creating links of resistance and revolution; thus evangelicalism did break down authority for many individuals. These “little revolutions,” as Carp calls them, expanded the meaning and depth of the American Revolution, even if they were not the primary factors. Lastly, arguing that the urban religious experience created communication and at times political mobility between marginalized religious citizens encouraging them to experiment with not only their conversion experience, but also with newly formed spiritual organizations.

164 Sarah Osborn’s Collected Writings, 147.  
165 Kidd, God of Liberty, 6.  
166 Kidd, God of Liberty, 55.  
167 Carp, Rebels Rising, 141.  
168 Carp, Rebels Rising, 142.
Heaton had attempted to convert those on the margins around her, and Burr had created networks of women's correspondence. So, too, did Osborn, both with her limited networks and conversion attempts.

During the emerging American Revolution, Osborn was a full and convicted supporter. As Linda Kerber asserts although the American Revolution didn’t create a new ideology for women, it did place them in new and unwarranted settings. Osborn was clearly able to adapt to such changes through her faith and through her role in her home, by both supporting her sickened husband and supporting the Revolution. As a woman who herself had experienced rebirth, it was only natural that she would want to see it in her nation as well. In December 1776, British troops came to Newport; they desecrated churches including Osborn's own parish. When her husband was too weak to flee when the British troops had entered their town, she remained with him even though half of the town fled. This, like other actions in Osborn's life, shows that she was unafraid and willing to remain strong-willed with the faith of God. She was ready to support her husband despite the turmoil around her. A loyalist woman experienced a similar trial, when evolutionary individuals began looting her parent's home in Philadelphia. Anna Rawle, with the other women, began to flee to the cellar for protection, but at the last minute, decided to run back towards the home and light some lanterns, which scared off the intruders.

170 Sarah Osborn's Collected Writings, 219.
Much as Burr had feared for the destruction of her parents' home during the Native American attacks, Osborn also did the same, but this time she feared the British. Many other women were in similar situations, but they protected their homes. They proved that on the rare occurrences that the war came to them, they were ready. Despite this, Osborn remained faithful; she believed that God was good and that hopefully this was part of God's plan for rebirth. If throughout her own life she could impact change and influence spiritual conversion, then the nation could experience its own birth. Hardship was nothing new to Osborn who was now, thanks to the British, a widow. As the Revolution continued, Osborn wrote little, save to pray to God and record her visions of heaven as she advanced in age. She lived to see the end of the American Revolution, but unfortunately it is unknown about her true thoughts her writing most likely hindered by her inability to grasp the writing instruments and the continued failing of her sight.

During December 1778, Osborn was concerned as to when God's mercy would arrive, the circumstances at the time containing a seemingly endless parade of his anger, and difficult defeats for the colonists. Shortly after this, a friend of hers who was born in Africa, then brought to the colonies to be "saved" and wished to be a missionary, was killed, which further led her to question God's plan. Despite the heavy disappointments she wrote: "during the worst of the fighting she had been as safe as Noah in the ark, Daniel in the lion's den, and the three men in the fiery furnace." In a way, Osborn was going through her own biblical stories finding that through success and defeat they are still pious. Osborn was also participating in the Revolution by assisting those around her.

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172 Sarah Osborn's Collected Writings, 318.
173 Sarah Osborn's Collected Writings, 324.
174 Brekus, Sarah Osborn's World, 199.
175 Brekus, Sarah Osborn's World, 300.
She was also recording about the Revolution. She was also breaking gender roles by supporting her husband when he was unable to work. Other women did the same and attempted to support the troops as well. Esther De Berdt Reed organized a movement to get individuals to donate to the Continental army at the end of the war, and to support the soldiers for their patriotism. Reed’s broadside called upon the noble virtues of women during the Revolution, expressing how women remained proud and kept the morality of their husbands up. While they also protected their homes, and made sacrifices for the cause, such as making do with less supplies.176

Furthermore, people have portrayed evangelicals as reactionary individuals who were backwards and in opposition of rational thought, and, at times, there was evidence to support such accusations.177 However, historians have also acknowledged the involvement of women in the evangelical movements of the time period: “they were reverent believers in progress who dreamed of a millennial age of peace and prosperity, but they denied that progress was possible without God’s grace.”178 Much as Sarah Osborn saw her inspiration and salvation through God, others did as well, like Burr and Heaton. Successes were not possible simply because of hard work or perseverance, they were possible because God allowed the hard work and perseverance to happen. When Osborn had previously thanked God for the worthy generals it was because they were only worthy because of the Lord.

Evangelicals continued the Puritan argument that for every cause and incident; God was the reason, even when evil things occurred, there was a purpose. Even death

was ordained by God, or, in the inverse, life and survival. Suffering was something to be attributed to the punishment for sin. This was Sarah Osborn's belief when her husband died, that she simply needed to submit to God and accept the action of his death as God's goodness. Furthermore, the story that many individuals subscribed to was darkness to light, suffering to redemption, death to resurrection. This was the type of theme that many colonial individuals clung to in dark times. Hebrew prose contained many parallels, through darkness there was light, and through death, rebirth. Having the Bible as one of their few inspirations the colonists clung to its teachings. They also clung to a belief of the future, in which there would be a second coming. That these parallels would once again be fulfilled as they had been in the Bible.

Given these hopes and emotions, many colonists such as Osborn saw opportunity for mobilization, even it was not physical and more so spiritual. Rhys Isaac points out that there was a double revolution going on in the colonies, one involving religious influence and the other political. Many colonists viewed virtue as not just a desire to practice frugality and ensure political incorruptibility, but also to have strength of the heart. Thus, military ritual was an exercise of self-preservation that was expected to carry over to all citizens. Elements of valor, instead of being considered violent, were Christlike, and the shortages experienced during the Revolutionary War were practices of prudence, the struggles they were facing were the back drop to their own holy war. Just

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as Osborn had related herself to Daniel in the lion’s den, other colonists found themselves relating to the stories and saints that they idealized. Or Heaton to the colonies as Israel.

In the true testament of Osborn’s faith and strong-willed nature, two defining moments near her death shine through the rest. First, her decision to leave her own will. All her possessions were given to the First Church and her diaries were given to a companion with instruction to do with them what he wanted, but that they were more valuable than any of her material goods. Her estate, in the end, was valued at around forty-four dollars and sixty-one cents. Yet her legacy and words would live on forever. Despite being a poor woman, she wrote a will. She wanted it known that what possessions she did have were meaningful. By specifying the care of her diaries, she ensured that what she had worked so hard to protect remained a legacy. Lastly, one of her parting words recorded in her diary summarizes the life she led nicely: “My life, has been a life of wonders.”

184 Sarah Osborn’s Collected Writings, 333.
CONCLUSION

Through the gathered documentation it becomes increasingly evident that women saw themselves as participants in the larger narrative of the colonies, whether that was through their believed sin and its contribution to the punishment from God, or through their continued pious moral upkeep. Religious colonial individuals at this time often believed that military events were either punishment or reward for their own actions and the collective actions of a group. By maintaining their own spiritual perseverance, they would help to keep the entire society holy and protected from the continued wrath of God. Through this framework many individuals often saw the oncoming of battle or break from authority as an event that was predetermined through the past successes or failures of the colonies. This created an overwhelming sense of spiritual significance that would not have been possible if the religious break from authority that instigated a newfound faith in religion and individualist experience had not occurred prior to the French and Indian War and the American Revolution.

Given the primary source findings and research, it is evident that due to the Great Awakening and the Revolution, the 1700's were a period of congregational belief, denominational increase, as well as structural rationalism.\(^\text{185}\) The American Revolution, for example, was a time of increased political thought combined with religious revivalism, bringing a marriage of the two ideologies. Lastly, Charles Cohen argues: “Whatever we call the historical process, we will need to take stock of what supernatural beliefs came to the colonies, how rapidly they spread, how wholeheartedly colonists

embraced them, and by what means they were institutionalized. Doing so, we may give early American religious history a controlling narrative worth the name.186

In conclusion, the findings of this research are that the New England colonists shift to hyper-focused uncovering of political meanings from biblical text, their elect nation beliefs, and events such as the Great Awakening and French and Indian War marked the shift of typical Calvinist ideology to apocalyptic belief. Due to Catholic paranoia, just war arguments, and adherence to natural law, this would lead to revolutionary rhetoric amongst reformed religious New Englanders which would bridge to belief in republican government during the American Revolution.

The above findings are specifically emphasized through the framework of marginalized groups such as women, who years prior would not have found the same opportunities to become active participants in the major events taking place around them. The evangelical focus on the individual as well as God’s natural law, encouraged those who were religious to continue practicing their piety in an effort to continue good fortune through God’s will. If someone’s son was shot, or a general killed, this was a larger narrative that still concluded to individual sin. Through finding their faith, women were also finding their voices, and seeing themselves as individuals who could impact change. The political narrative of the time utilized God as a justifier and cited his influence in achieving the natural right; this popular thought gave women the ability to participate in the situation as well, opening their own political, religious and revolutionary narratives.

Women such as Burr, Heaton, and Osborn began to write things down, sometimes it was to friends and other times it was to future generations. Regardless of the intended

audience there was a hope that their voices would be shared. That women, too, could voice and express political opinions and thought. Women were typically confined to the household and domestic narrative. But through their own writings, they could create a new narrative, one that gave them agency in the events around them. These three women were very special and spirited.

Burr represented the beginning trend of women's friendship and advocacy. By writing letters to one another, Burr and Prince were engaging with political narratives outside of the sphere of their domestic duties at home. Burr being the earliest of the three, dying before she could see much change in the world, still represents the beginning of change. She was certainly aware of the gendered world around her and the spark of evangelical passion rising in the colonies. Burr was never an individual to follow convention. She supported her father and husband's endeavors even when they broke from traditional norms. She was an avid supporter of the colonies during the French and Indian War. But most importantly Burr was a supporter of women and female companionship. She remarks in her diary the injustice of being shut down by a husband's friend, she shares her own viewpoints and she records what goes on around her. By cultivating the female friendship around her and supporting the endeavors of her religious organization, Burr symbolizes the beginnings of female agency.

Heaton, alone and poor in the world, shows that agency is not something that is specifically open to wealthy women and their friends. Heaton and Burr, despite their differences in age and wealth, still show similarities. Heaton, too, was an individual who was spirited. Much of her belief comes with her ability to convert people to believers. She is also very dedicated to the recording of history. Heaton doesn't have a friend to
confide in, but she still shares because she wants people years later to have a narrative of a faith filled woman.

Finally, Osborn who is a mixture of the two others, though poor she manages to scrap together funds by working as a schoolteacher. Osborn often writes to a female friend or Reverend Fish. She is bold in her conversations, the gender of her reader not affecting her choice of words. She, like Heaton, believed that she could affect change through her written word. She often wrote with the hope of future generations reading her work as well. Osborn also believed in the power of conversion and charity. She exemplified in many ways an ideal Christian woman. Yet she also wasn’t afraid to break gender roles. For most of her life, she would work because her husband was unable to. This only further displays her tenacity and vigor for life.

Each woman reviewed is interesting and inspiring, their passions are shown in different ways. Though they come from different time periods and backgrounds, the similarities are still apparent. A desire to be heard outside the home, to view and remark on the world around them and to help. Though women were marginalized within society and often confined to their homes, they proved to be resilient and thoughtful. Burr, Heaton, and Osborn may have lived to see conflict, and some to see the Revolution, but they unfortunately did not see a rise in women’s rights. However, each one accomplished her goal of creating a faith filled narrative and companionship. Each one is now a published author that historians and students may read from. Their stories of history have served as key primary sources, for individuals researching the colonial era of America. Through this their dreams are realized. Women in colonial America achieved agency with their religious writings and companionship with one another. This spirit of agency
survives long after they are gone through their writings and it is through this that history will remember them for their efforts.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


