

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Elizabeth Ashbridge (1713-1755)

Some Account of the Fore Part Of the Life of Elizabeth Ashbridge

Though long known among Quaker readers, this fascinating autobiography did not acquire a larger readership until discussed by Daniel Shea in *Spiritual Autobiography in Early America* in 1968. Since then it has attracted further attention as a very sympathetic early woman's autobiography.

What makes the Account so sympathetic is Ashbridge's vitality and modernity. She in no way fits the stereotype of the Quaker woman, dressed in somber gray and speaking softly in "these" and "thous." She was wild. She eloped. She wanted to be an actress, and delighted her second husband with her spirited singing and dancing. What's more, she writes with spirit, using excited colloquial language. (Once one gets accustomed to the eighteenth-century syntax, her writing is also quite easy to follow.) Yet as a bright, energetic, high-spirited woman, she still had considerable trouble breaking out of gender stereotypes, and that is Ashbridge's modernity.

She becomes a little tamer once she becomes a Quaker. She loses the urge to dance, and eventually alters her dress. But the spirit remains, sublimated in the energy of her faith and her works. She even temporarily reforms her husband.

The Account ends in about 1741 or 1742, with the news of his death. Post scripts by her third husband (Aaron Ashbridge) and other people say that she paid off her second husband's debts, amounting to eighty pounds, and then supported herself by "School keeping" and "her Needle." Aaron was a Quaker, and they married "in the 9 mo. 1746" in Burlington, New Jersey. She also travelled as a visitor to other Meetings. In 1753, she went to visit Meetings in England and Ireland, where she became ill from her exhausting travels. Daniel Shea has discovered from an Ashbridge family genealogy that her name at the time of her last marriage was Elizabeth Sampson Sullivan. He also learned that Aaron Ashbridge's later life "reversed the pattern" of Mr. Sullivan's. "He was twice complained of in the Goshen (Pennsylvania) Meeting for drinking to excess,"¹ and in 1775 the Meeting disowned him.

The text is from *Some Account of the Fore Part of the Life of Elizabeth Ashbridge...*, ed. Daniel Shea, in *Journeys in New Worlds: Early American Women's Narratives*, ed. William L. Andrews (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1990). In his introduction, Shea provides biographical information as well as criticism. Shea's notes have been shortened to save space.

1. Daniel Shea, "Introduction" to *Some Account of the Fore Part of the Life of Elizabeth Ashbridge...*, in *Journeys in New Worlds: Early American Women's Narratives*, ed. William L. Andrews, p. 141.

Reading

Quaker Grey: Some Account of the Forepart of the life of Elizabeth Ashbridge, Written by her own hand many years ago

<http://archive.org/stream/someaccountoffor00ashbuoft#page/n9/mode/2up>