



FOUNDING FEMALES Female Qualifying Ancestor Index

Female Ancestor Number: 243

Name: Samson, Hannah Callender

Dates: (1737 - 9 Mar 1801)

Colonial Society: PA

Date added to ROA: 7-2-2025

Service: Woman of Distinction: Diarist (1758-1788),

noted as one of the earliest and fullest documents written by an American woman

Authority: Hannah Callender Diary, 1758-1788. Vaux Family Papers, 1690-1996, Mss.Ms.Coll.73. American Philosophical Society; Klepp, Susan E. & Karin Wulf, editors, The Diary of Hannah Callender Sansom: Sense and Sensibility in the Age of the American Revolution, Cornell Univ. Press, 2010, pp. vii-x, 1-4, 11-16.

Biography:

At 21 years of age, Hannah Callendar began a journal. It was New Year's Day 1758. In her first entry she wrote "*for my own satisfaction, and to try if a retrospect of my time, may not me husband it more.*" We don't know if the practice of daily writing helped Hannah manage her time more efficiently, but we know she started writing as a single young woman and continued through her marriage, and the birth of five children, until she reached the age of fifty. While many entries contained the minutiae of the day, Hannah also revealed her inner life, illuminating her capacity for empathy and sympathy. These characteristics became prized in the middle to late years of the 18th century, when hierarchy and power started to give way to compassion and affection. An example was General George Washington being celebrated for his humility over his power. Today we also appreciate the diary for addressing topics around gender, race, religion, and consumerism. During its time, Hannah's diary was not private. She shared it with good friends such as Elizabeth Sandwith Drinker and her sister Polly Sandwith. It even inspired Elizabeth to start her own diary.

Hannah Callendar was the only surviving daughter of Scots Quaker William Callendar and his wife Katherine Smith (formerly of Burlington NJ.) William was from Barbados, and engaged in the West Indian sugar trade, which also included the slave trade, for which he would later have a change of heart. Their daughter was well-educated, attending Anthony Benezet's school along with other well-off Quaker girls. She had a passion for French studies which were enhanced under the French schoolmistress Maria Jeanne Reynier. As an avid reader, she also had access to the Library Company of Philadelphia, as both her father



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and husband held subscriptions. She was a highly skilled needleworker, and despite her professed Quaker “plainness” she also held a life-long interest in fine arts, which included painting, prints, sculpture, architecture, and landscaping.

Throughout her life, Hannah labored to conform. As an adult she described herself as occasionally sharp-tongued and argumentative, with “*a hasty quick forward temper [that] I have to gain the mastery over.*” It would be a struggle to obey the Quaker precepts when her impulses guided her to be independent, assertive, and argumentative. She also delighted in humor and mirth, illustrated in her sarcastic accounts of people and places. In 1762 she married Samuel Sansom, Jr. within the Philadelphia Monthly Meeting. He was from an even wealthier Quaker mercantile family than her own. It was not thought to be a love match, but a marriage encouraged by her dying father. Their marriage was witnessed by members of the leading families, Morris, Drinker, Pemberton, including friends such as Elizabeth Drinker, Polly Sandwith, and Elizabeth Hudson Morris. Samuel and Hannah *did* share an interest in all things French and the fine arts, along with a burgeoning interest in the anti-slavery movement. However, we can only imagine the strain of being married to a man who enjoyed the title of “master” within his home. They had five children: William, Sarah, Joseph, Catherine, and Samuel. The household also contained several servants and nursemaids.

In her obituary published in Poulson’s *American Daily Advertiser* (March 10, 1801) it was noted that, “*She was a woman endowed with superior understanding and many talents.*”

Hannah’s original diary was held in a family vault until the early-1990s, when it was donated to the American Philosophical Society. The diary is available through an edition published in 2010 by Cornell University and edited by Susan E. Klepp and Karin Wulf under the subtitle *Sense and Sensibility in the Age of the American Revolution*.