

Sources and Interpretations

Agitations, Convulsions, Leaping, and Loud Talking: The “Experiences” of Sarah Pierpont Edwards

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The document presented here, “Mrs. Edwards’s Experiences in Jan. 19, &c. 1742,” is the earliest-known version in manuscript of a narrative by Sarah Pierpont Edwards that was later published in revised forms, first by her husband, Jonathan Edwards, in 1742, and again in 1829 by the Edwardses’ great-grandson, Sereno Edwards Dwight. An introduction examines the manuscript and considers the printed iterations of it, revealing the changes made to her previously written or dictated words. Sarah Pierpont Edwards’s “Experiences” offers new insights into both her personal piety and the controversies over embodied religious experience during the Great Awakening. The account not only reveals the previously obscured extent of her spiritual transports during a time of personal crisis but also suggests a new valorization of bodily religious experience during the mid-eighteenth century that threatened to undermine the hierarchy of gender and pointed to an alternative conception of selfhood.