



# **Romance, Remedies, and Revolution: The Journal of Dr. Elihu Ashley of Deerfield, Massachusetts, 1773-1775**

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Elihu Ashley (1750–1817) was a twenty-three-year-old medical apprentice in Deerfield, Massachusetts, when he began keeping a personal journal in March 1773. Over the next two-and-a-half years, he recorded, in clear and simple prose, just about everything he did and everyone he saw. Although carefully preserved, the journal was later suppressed by the town historian, presumably because he found some of the entries morally objectionable. Rediscovered by Amelia F. Miller, and coedited by Miller and A. R. Riggs, this document now appears in print for the first time, accompanied by related letters of Ashley's extended family as well as brief biographies of more than 750 people mentioned by the young doctor in his writings.

With flashes of humor and close attention to detail, Ashley describes a broad range of activities and experiences in the small village of Deerfield and the surrounding towns of the Connecticut River valley. Articulate as well as observant, this former schoolteacher conveys a sense of immediacy that brings even the most mundane daily events to life. He discusses medical theory and practice, revolutionary politics, farming, his family, his circle of friends, and amusements ranging from singing and dancing to sleigh riding and bouts of drunkenness. He also writes about his love life, including a dalliance with the older sister of his fiancée, Polly Williams, while the latter is away visiting relatives in the Berkshires.

For Ashley, personal relationships and politics were the prominent issues of 1773 and 1774, as events in Massachusetts drew the province toward rebellion. He discusses the gathering of angry mobs in response to the so-called Intolerable Acts, the stoppage of the courts in Hampshire County, the anarchy that ensued, and the persecution of loyalists, with or without the sanction of law. When the revolution breaks out in April 1775, he describes the departure of companies of minutemen as they set out for Boston to challenge the British Army.

Six months later, in November 1775, the journal abruptly ends. By then, however, Elihu Ashley had already bequeathed to posterity an extraordinary firsthand account of life in rural New England in the years immediately preceding the War of Independence.

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