

Roberts, Elizabeth Bond ^[1]

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By Douglas J. McMillan, 1994

5 June 1801–8 Nov. 1884

Elizabeth Bond Roberts, pioneer, minister of the Religious Society of Friends Quakers ^[2], and author, was born in Surry County ^[3], the daughter of Society of Friends members Edward and Anna (Annie) Huff Bond. In December 1811, when Elizabeth was ten, the Bonds moved to the frontier as pioneers. They settled in a tent on land that they had bought on Nolan's Fork in Indiana Territory (present-day Wayne County, Ind., about midway on the eastern boundary with Ohio). (At the time the territory already had the present boundaries of the state.) The governor of the Indiana Territory, William Henry Harrison, had fought at Tippecanoe Creek against an Indian force led by Tenskwatawa, the Shawnee religious leader and warrior. Although this action eventually secured the Indian Territory for settlers, the Bonds temporarily left their property on Nolan's Fork and moved across the boundary for safety in Ohio through the summer of 1812. They then bought a small farm just back over the boundary in the Indiana Territory, where they lived for another year. When peace with the Indians was restored, the Bonds returned to their land on Nolan's Fork.

Still living in the wilderness, the family and others established a Friends Meeting at New Garden, three miles from Nolan's Fork. For about three weeks Elizabeth attended the Friends Meeting School at New Garden, to which she walked alone through the woods. This was her only formal schooling in learning how to read and write.

At New Garden Meeting Elizabeth Bond married Solomon Whitson Roberts, son of Thomas and Ann Roberts, on 5 Dec. 1816, when she was fifteen; over the years they would have thirteen children, several of whom predeceased her. Her marriage took place in the same year that Indiana was admitted to the Union. The Roberts family continued to live in Indiana near Richmond and in Pendleton, where Elizabeth and Solomon Roberts and his parents were very active in the Ministry of Friends meetings within the limits of Whitewater Monthly Meeting. They had eight acres of land in the green woods where Elizabeth Roberts says she spent "many lonesome hours; but blessed be the name of the Lord, who still dwells with me. He often allowed the light of His countenance to fall upon me." She felt that she had her first divine revelation in 1823 commanding her to speak out for the Lord. After refusing the call for about two years, she became seriously ill and almost died. At that time she "surrendered to the Lord, recovered from her sickness, and was most content." In 1827 she "spoke for the Lord but was uncomfortable; she preferred silence. She lived in poverty often but was blessed with divine visions."

All her life Elizabeth Roberts was against slavery and for the freedom of all with whom she came in contact—whites, blacks, and Indians. In addition to several of her children, she lost her husband, who died on 6 Apr. 1857 at age sixty-two. In March 1871 she was officially recognized as a minister by the Fall Creek Monthly Meeting ^[4]. She then spoke willingly at meetings, traveled to visit other meetings, and helped to establish First-day Schools among Friends.

In spite of her brief formal schooling, she was the author of twelve short pieces *Memoirs of Elizabeth Roberts*, "An Exhortation to the Youth," "How I Have Mourned for the Society of Friends," "A Prayer" (21 Apr. 1845), "Concerning the Condition of the Society of Friends," "A Letter Written to My Cousins, Jehiel and Lydia Wasson," "A Prayer" (three parts—part one, undated; part two, 28 Dec. 1845; and part three, January 1846), "A Few Lines Written for Her Children," "A Short Memorial Concerning Esther Roberts" (a daughter), "Some of the Last Expressions of Milton Roberts" (a son), "A Memorial Concerning My Dear Husband, Solomon W. Roberts," and "A Memorial Concerning Eunice Roberts" (a daughter).

In 1882 and again in 1884 Elizabeth Roberts visited one of her sons and his family in Nebraska. She became sick there in the autumn of 1884 and returned home to Indiana. She died at Fall Creek Meeting, Ind., at age eighty-three and was eulogized on 7 Mar. 1885 at the Whitewater Quarterly Meeting of Friends in Milton, Ind.

References:

Data on Elizabeth Bond Roberts's ancestors and descendants and a diary kept by her cousin, Lydia Wasson (Lilly Library, Earlham College, Richmond, Ind.)

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Donald E. Thompson, comp., *Indiana Authors and Their Books, 1917–1966* (1974)

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McMillan, Douglas J. [10]

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From:

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