

### 038 BOLTON, A. M. – [AQUILA MASSEY BOLTON]

Publisher & Bookseller

Wheeling

Early bookseller in Wheeling; publisher of a small book of religious poetry in 1807 through the Wheeling press office of Alexander Armstrong (014).

Bolton's time in Wheeling was transitory; he was someone who was always looking for the next opportunity, so his life was one ever-changing. Born in Philadelphia from Quaker roots, Bolton attended grammar school there before entering Princeton about 1790. His schooling in both places engendered friendships with some of the nineteenth century's more noted clergymen long before they attained any fame. After Princeton, he studied law and was admitted to the bar, but abandoned the profession for "a commercial life" instead. To that end, he travelled to England, perhaps to build business contacts, returning in 1800. Yet throughout this period, Bolton also formed a predilection for religious thought that would mark the rest of his life, as well as an interest in expressing himself poetically.

By 1807, he had relocated to Wheeling, where established a book and stationery store. That choice seems judicious given his hometown's role of supplying a nation-wide book-trade network and his new home's location at the juncture of overland and water-borne transport in the Old Northwest. This setting also put Bolton in proximity to Wheeling's first press office, that of Alexander Armstrong. An ambitious tradesman like Bolton, the young printer had just arrived from Washington County, Pennsylvania, to establish a shop independent of the legal entailments binding him there. The two found mutual self-interest in Wheeling: Armstrong found a patron for his press; Bolton found a willing press for his unpublished writings. The result was a pamphlet-length poem concerning free will: *The Independency of the Mind, Affirmed*. Arising out of Bolton's spiritual interests, the poem found a receptive audience in a region being settled by various religious communities. It was the first of many such efforts during his lifetime, all engaging a controversial sectarian debate.

However, Wheeling was still too small for Bolton's ambitions. By 1811, he had moved on to Pittsburgh where he became, for a time, a major figure in town. Though regularly listed as a "land conveyance and broker," he was also a partner in a glassmaking firm in 1816. He had a sense of civic responsibility as well, establishing a school for women, helping found a scientific society, and serving as secretary of the Pittsburgh Library Company. But financial problems evidently arose; his glassmaking turn brought him to ruin and he moved on again, at least twice more. His next stop was Dayton, Ohio, his third river-port residence, where he was considered an industrious and respectable citizen from the 1820s onward. Yet that same reputable citizen withdrew from public life in the 1830s, joining a Shaker community near Lebanon, Ohio – a physical manifestation of his life-long metaphysical interests that he defended in an 1841 tract. Still, at the end of his life, he was back among the heathen in Dayton. Bolton is last seen in the public record in a widely-disseminated news story: now in failing health, he was challenged by a local Democratic leader as being "too old" to vote sensibly in the 1856 presidential election; after skewering his critic with a lengthy, erudite oration, Bolton cast his vote for the anti-slavery Republican, John C. Frémont.

***Personal Data***

Born: --- 1773 Williston, Chester County, Pennsylvania  
Married [1]: ?? 1792 Unnamed @ Philadelphia, Pa. (d. before 1820)  
Married [2]: --- 1820 Elizabeth Yarnell @ Pittsburgh, Pa. (d. 1822)  
Married [3]: --- ?? Amelia Babbitt @ Lebanon, Ohio [?]  
Died: May 13 1857 Dayton, Montgomery County, Ohio  
Children: By first wife: Jane (b 1792), Charles, Mary, Phebe  
By Amelia: Denman Ross (b. 1843)

Sources: Imprints; Killikelly, *Pittsburgh*; McVicar, *Life of Bishop Hobart*; Stone, *Life of James Milnor*; *Salem (Mass.) Gazette* 13 Nov 1856; genealogical data from Bolton family charts posted on Ancestry.com (August 2012).