



Elizabeth Packard: A Noble Fight

Linda V. Carlisle

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This biography details the life of Elizabeth Packard, who in 1860 was committed to an insane asylum by her husband, a strong-willed Calvinist minister. Upon her release three years later, Packard obtained a jury trial and was declared sane, but her husband had already sold their home and left for Massachusetts with their young children and her personal property. This experience launched Packard into a career as an advocate for the civil rights of married women and the mentally ill. She wrote numerous books and lobbied legislatures literally from coast to coast advocating more stringent commitment laws, protections for the rights of asylum patients, and laws to give married women equal rights in matters of child custody, property, and earnings. Despite strong opposition from the psychiatric community, Packard's laws were passed in state after state, with lasting impact on commitment and care of the mentally ill in the United States.

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