

ALSO BY
LAUREL THATCHER ULRICH

*Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives
of Women in Northern New England,
1650-1750*

A MIDWIFE'S TALE

*The Life of Martha Ballard,
Based on Her Diary,*

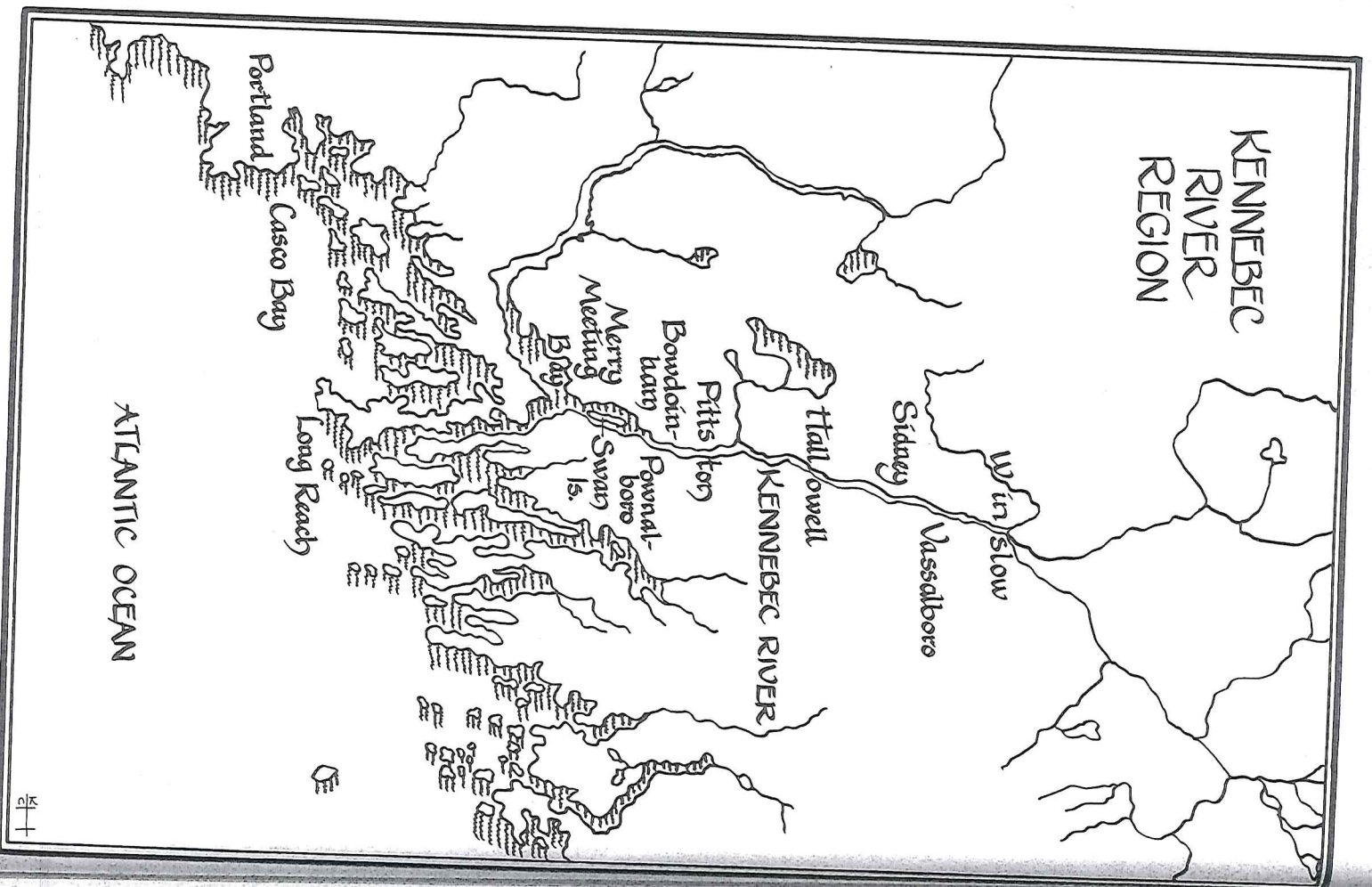
1785-1812



Laurel Thatcher Ulrich



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INTRODUCTION

"a great sea A going"

Eight months of the year Hallowell, Maine, was a seaport. From early April to late November, ocean-going vessels sailed up the Kennebec, forty-six miles from the open Atlantic, bringing Pennsylvania flour, West Indian sugar, and English cloth and hardware, returning with shingles, clapboards, hogshhead and barrel staves, white ash capstan bars, and pine boards destined for Boston or Bristol or Jamaica.¹ In late autumn, ice blockaded the river, sometimes so suddenly that though a man had been expecting it for weeks, he was caught unprepared. One year, on November 25, after the last ships had sailed from the town, Jonathan Ballard pushed off from his father's sawmill with a raft of boards destined for Long Reach on the coast. He got no farther than Bumberhook Point, three miles below, before the Kennebec closed around him. It didn't open again until April 1.²

Hallowell folks remembered openings and closings of the river the way people in other towns remembered earthquakes or drought. In 1785, the year of the long winter, the ice was still firm enough on April 22 to hold a sleigh bearing the body of Samuel Howard, one of the original settlers of the town, to his burying place at Fort Western. Not until May 3 did the first vessels arrive from "the westward," bringing corn and pork to the straitened town.³ People both welcomed and feared the

opening of the river. In bad years ice jams made ponds of fields and rafts of fences, backing up water in the mill creeks that cut through the steep banks on both sides. In good years, the opening water sent mill hands flying through April nights, ripping logs and securing lumber unlocked by the spring thaw. Sometimes the greatest danger was not from the river itself, though high water might pitch a man from a raft to his death before his fellows could reach him, but from the raging creeks on the shore.⁴

In 1789, the river opened on April 7 in a heavy rain that took away the bridge over Ballard's brook, made a breach in the mill dam, and washed out the underpinning of the north side of the house. "But we are yet alive & well for which we ought to be thankful," Martha Ballard told her diary. She was fifty-four years old, a midwife. She and her family had lived at the mills since 1778, seven years after the incorporation of the town. Though she knew little of the sea, she had traveled much on the Kennebec, by water, by ice, and, during those treacherous seasons when the river was neither one nor the other, by faith.

The year Old Lady Cony had her stroke, Martha Ballard crossed the river in a canoe on December 2, pushing through ice in several places. On December 30 of another year, summoned by a woman in labor, she walked across, almost reaching shore before breaking through to her waist at Sewall's Eddy. She dragged herself out, mounted a neighbor's horse, and rode dripping to the delivery. Necessity and a fickle river cultivated a kind of bravado among Hollowell folks. "People Crosst the river on a Cake of ice which swong round from the Eddy East side & stopt at the point below Mr Westons," Martha wrote on December 15 of one year. On April 1 of another she reported walking across on the ice after breakfast, adding dilly in the margin of the day's entry, "the river opened at 4 hour pm"⁵

Martha Moore was born in 1735 in the small town of Oxford, near the Connecticut border in Worcester County, Massachusetts, but the real story of her life begins in Maine with the

diary she kept along the Kennebec. Without the diary her biography would be little more than a succession of dates. Her birth in 1735. Her marriage to Ephraim Ballard in 1754. The births of their nine children in 1756, 1758, 1761, 1763, 1765, 1767, 1769, 1772, and 1779, and the deaths of three of them in 1769. Her own death in 1812. The *American Advocate* for June 9, 1812, summed up her life in one sentence: "Died in Augusta, Mrs. Martha, consort of Mr. Ephraim Ballard, aged 77 years." Without the diary we would know nothing of her life after the last of her children was born, nothing of the 816 deliveries she performed between 1785 and 1812. We would not even be certain she had been a midwife.

In the spring of 1789, Martha faced a flooding river and a rising tide of births. She attended seven deliveries in March and another seven before the end of April, twice her monthly average. On April 23 she went down the Kennebec to visit several families on the west side of the river opposite Bumblehook. This is how she told her story:

[April 23] Clear & very Pleasant. I sett out to go to Mr Bullins. Stept out of the Canue & sunk in the mire. Came back & Changed my Cloaths. Maid another attempt & got safe there. Set out for home. Calld at Capt Coxes & Mr Goodins. Was Calld in at Mrs Husseys. Tarried all night. A sever storm before morn.

[April 24] A sever Storm of Rain. I was Calld at 1 hour pm from Mrs Husseys by Ebenezer Hewin. Crosst the river in their Boat. A great sea & a going. We got safe over then sett out for Mr Hewins. Crosst a stream on the way on fleeting Logs & got safe over. Wonder full is the Goodness of providence. I then prosseeded on my journey. Went beyond Mr Haines & a Larg tree blew up by the roots before me which Cased my hors to spring back & my life was spared. Great & marvillous are thy sparing mercies O God. I was assisted over the fallen tree by Mr Haines. Went on. Soon Came to a stream. The Bridge was gone. Mr Hewin

Here the religious sentiments become a kind of refrain, punctuating and accentuating each stage in the narrative. Such a passage reveals a storyteller, if not a writer, at work.

There are other passages of similar quality in the diary. Yet most of Martha's entries are more mundane. The structure of her diary derives from two workaday forms of record-keeping, the daybook and the interleaved almanac. In eighteenth-century New England, farmers, craftsmen, shopkeepers, ship's captains, and perhaps a very few housewives kept daybooks, running accounts of receipts and expenditures, sometimes combining economic entries with short notes on important family events and comments on work begun or completed. Other early diarists used the blank pages bound into printed almanacs to keep their own tally on the weather, adding brief entries on gardening, visits to and from neighbors, or public occurrences of both the institutional and the sensational sort. ~~Martha Ballard did all these things.~~

The extant diary, which begins in January of 1785, may have been preceded by an almanac of some sort, since she ruled the margins of her homemade booklets and numbered the days of the month and week, using a "dominical letter" for Sundays, according to the almanac form. Whatever its origins, the diary functioned as a kind of daybook. Martha recorded debts contracted and "rewards" received, and some of the time she noted numbers of yards "got out" of the loom and varieties of beans put into the ground. Her midwifery accounts are even more methodical. She carefully labeled and numbered each delivery, adding an XX to the margin when the fee was paid.

Those few historians who have known about the diary have not known quite what to do with it. In his *History of Augusta* published in 1870, James W. North quoted several passages, including the one for April 24, 1789, but he pronounced most of the entries "brief and with some exceptions not of general interest." Although Charles Elventon Nash devoted more than a third of his 600-page *History of Augusta* to an abridgment of the journal, carefully extracting birth records and a sample of almost everything else except unsavory medical details or anything tainted with sex, he too found much of it "trivial and

unimportant . . . being but a repetition of what has been recited many times." Curiously, a feminist history of midwifery published in the 1970s repeated the old dismissal: "Like many diaries of farm women, it is filled with trivia about domestic chores and pastimes."⁹

Yet it is in the very dullness, the exhaustive, repetitious dullness, that the real power of Martha Ballard's book lies. To extract the river crossings without noting the cold days spent "footing" stockings, to abstract the births without recording the long autumns spent winding quills, pickling meat, and sorting cabbages, is to destroy the sinews of this earnest, steady, gentle, and courageous record. Martha sometimes slipped the folded half-sheets from which she constructed her diary into her bag when she crossed the river or waded through snow to sit out a tedious labor, and when she felt overwhelmed or enlivened by the very "trivia" the historians have dismissed, she said so, not in the soul-searching manner of a Puritan nor with the literary self-consciousness of a sentimentalist, but in a plain, matter-of-fact, and in the end unforgettable voice. For more than twenty-seven years, 9,965 days to be exact, she faithfully kept her record. Martha was not an introspective diarist, yet in this conscientious recording as much as in her occasional confessions, she revealed herself. "And now this year is come to a close," she wrote on December 31, 1800, "and happy is it if we have made a wise improvement of the time." For her, living was to be measured in doing. Nothing was trivial.

~~Because so few New England women of her generation left writing in any form, one searches for an explanation for the diary. Although her grandmother, Hannah Learned, was able to muster a clear but labored signature on the one surviving document bearing her name, her mother, Dorothy Moore, signed with a mark.¹⁰ On the male side of the family, however, there is a record of education. Martha's uncle Abijah Moore, who graduated from Yale in 1726, was the first college graduate from the town of Oxford. Martha's younger brother, Jonathan Moore, was the second. Jonathan graduated from Harvard College in 1761, serving for a time as librarian of the college before ac-~~

ceiving a call as pastor of the First Congregational Church in Rochester, Massachusetts. Throughout her life Martha Ballard corresponded with "Brother Jonathan."¹¹

Although her handwriting is crude in comparison with her brother's and less certain than that of her husband, who was a surveyor and mapmaker as well as a miller, her ability to write cursive in any form is itself evidence that someone in Oxford in the 1740s was interested in educating girls.¹² Judging from the diary, that education was quite conventional. Although Martha occasionally "perused" newspapers, she mentioned only one book other than the Bible. On June 25, 1786, a Sunday, she wrote, "I have Red in Mr Marshalls gospel ministry Mystery of Sanctification." The book was Walter Marshall's *Gospel-Mystery of Sanctification*, a work of popular piety first published in London in 1692, though reprinted many times in the eighteenth century. Her concern with the spelling of the title is intriguing; normally, she showed little interest in such matters. Obviously having the book in her hand elevated her consciousness, though it had little effect on the rest of the passage. *Red* remained *Red*.

Martha's choice of reading material was conservative, at least on that Sunday in 1786. She was aware of more modern forms of English literature, however. Her younger sister, Dorothy Barton, had two daughters named after characters in the novels of Samuel Richardson. *Pamela* and *Clarissa Harlowe* Barton were frequent visitors to and sometime inhabitants of the Ballard house, as was their sister *Parthenia*. Classical or pseudo-classical names were still rare in New England in the 1760s, though they became more popular after the Revolution. The Ballards succumbed to the same impulse and displayed an uncharacteristic bit of whimsy when they named their third daughter *Triphene*.¹³

By Oxford standards, the Moores were well educated and ambitious. The family also seems to have had a medical bent. Martha's uncle Abijah Moore was a physician, as were two of her brothers-in-law, including Stephen Barton, the father of Pamela, Parthenia, and Clarissa.¹⁴ The one hint that Martha herself was involved in caring for the sick in Oxford comes from a Barton family story recorded many years later. It survives in two versions.

One explains that during the pre-Revolutionary boycotts, when Stephen Barton was on a committee to see that no tea was bought in the town, he "was wont to put on his hat and go without while his sympathetic wife and her sister, Martha Moore Ballard, made a cup of tea in the cellar for some sick mother in the neighborhood whose sufferings patriotism and loyalty failed to heal."¹⁵ The other version comes from Dorothy and Stephen's granddaughter, a woman christened Clarissa Harlowe Barton, but known to millions of Americans by her nickname, Clara. Clara Barton, the founder of the American Red Cross, later recalled being entertained by her "interesting, precise and intelligent grandmother Barton, telling us of the tea parties she and her sister Aunt Ballard held in the cellar when grandfather was out or *up* and didn't know what was going on in his own disloyal and rebellious home." Although the neighborly ministrations of the first story become "tea parties" in this one, both emphasize Dorothy Barton's independence. According to Clara, the two sisters "hung blankets inside the cellar door to prevent the savory fumes of the tea from reaching the loyal and official olfactories of 'Pater familias.'"¹⁶ Martha's rebellion may have been less serious than her sister's. As we shall see, Ephraim Ballard was himself a reluctant supporter, at best, of the Revolution.

The best evidence of the practical side of Martha's education comes from the diary itself. When it opened in 1785, she knew how to manufacture salves, syrups, pills, teas, and ointments, how to prepare an oil emulsion (she called it an "oil a mulge"), how to poultice wounds, dress burns, treat dysentery, sore throat, frostbite, measles, colic, "hooping Cough," "Chin cough," "St. Vitas dance," "flying pains," "the salt rhume," and "the itch," how to cut an infant's tongue, administer a "clister" (enema), lance an abscessed breast, apply a "blister" or a "back plaster," induce vomiting, assuage bleeding, reduce swelling, and relieve a toothache, as well as deliver babies.¹⁷

She later wrote that she delivered her first baby in July of 1778, less than a year after her arrival in Maine. This statement should not be taken entirely at face value. She no doubt offici-

ated as a midwife for the first time in 1778, but she had probably assisted in dozens of births in Oxford. This was the era of "social childbirth," when female relatives and neighbors, as well as midwives, attended births. Most midwives began as observers, gradually assuming a more active role, until one day, when the old midwife was delayed or willing, they "performed." For Martha, moving to Maine probably accelerated this process. In Oxford, even if she had the ability to practice she may have had little opportunity, since there were many older women in the town. Her own Grandmother Learned was alive until 1777.¹⁸ In Hallowell, by contrast, she was one of the older women in a young and rapidly growing town.

Giving birth to nine babies was also a part of her preparation as a midwife. As one eighteenth-century midwifery manual expressed it, "There is a tender regard one woman bears to another, and a natural sympathy in those that have gone thro' the Pangs of Childbearing; which, doubtless, occasion a compassion for those that labour under these circumstances, which no man can be a judge of."¹⁹ Martha's "natural" sympathy had also been developed through death. Between 1767 and 1770, Oxford lost 12 percent of its population in one of the worst diphtheria epidemics in New England's history. One hundred forty-four persons died, mostly children ages two to fourteen. Martha's uncle and aunt, Richard and Mary Moore, buried eight of their eleven children. Martha and Ephraim lost three of their six children in less than ten days.²⁰ A row of tiny headstones in the burying ground behind the Oxford Congregational Church commemorates the Moore deaths. There are no Ballard stones. Martha memorialized her little girls in the diary she kept along the Kennebec.

June 17, 1786: "this is 17 years since the Death of my Daughter Triphene who Deceast AE 4 years & 3 months."

July 1, 1788: "It is 19 years this Day since the Death of my Daughter Dorothy." (Dorothy had been two.)

July 5, 1789: "20 years since my daughter Martha's death." (Martha was "8 years & 2 months & 28 days" when she died.)

Both of the Ballard sons, Cyrus, twelve, and Jonathan, six, survived the throat distemper. Of the four daughters, only Lucy,

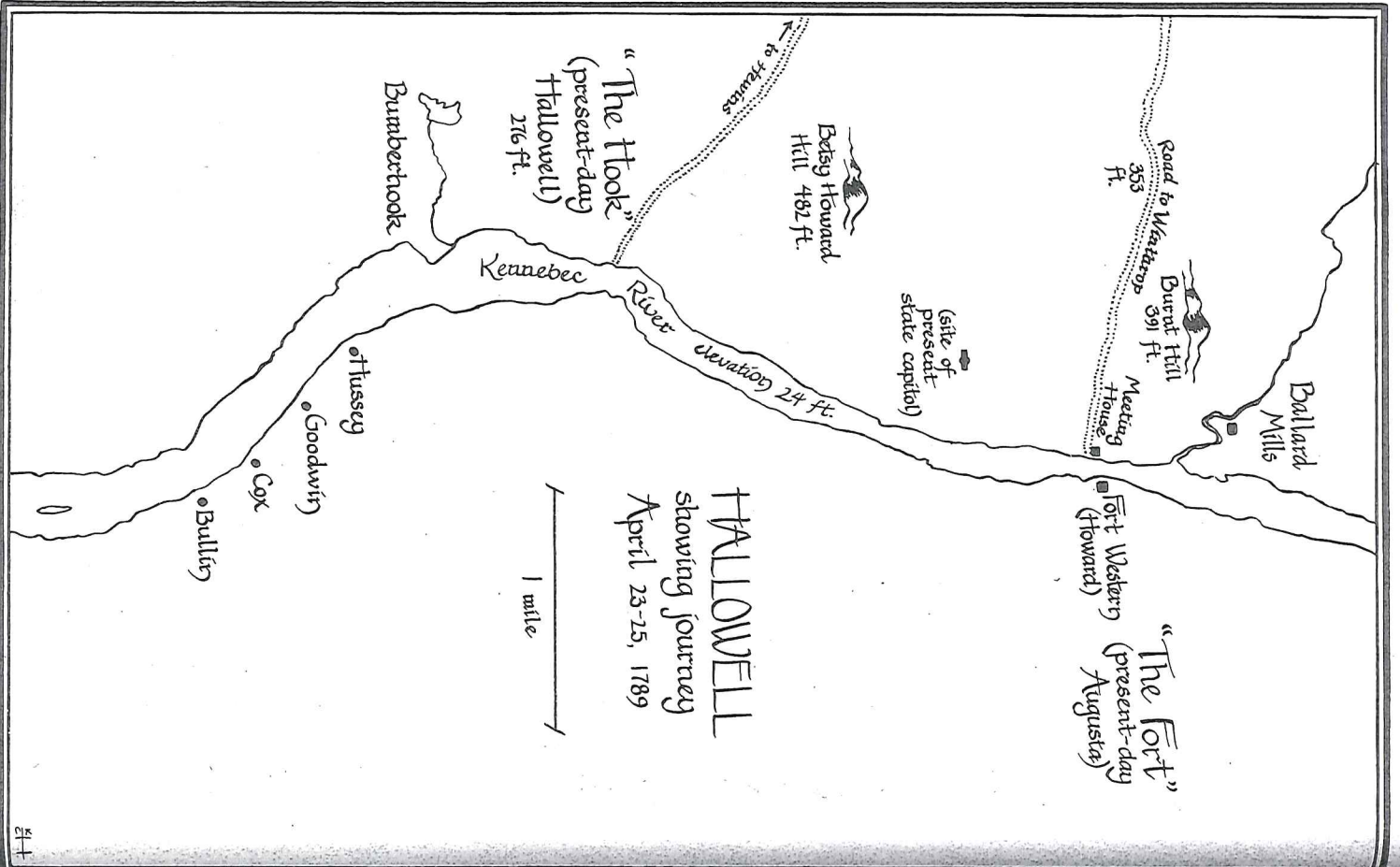
age ten, remained. "It was a very hott day & Continued so thro the summer," Martha recalled in one of the entries remembering Triphene's death.²¹ She had reason to feel the heat in that summer of sorrow. She was seven and a half months pregnant when the first of her daughters died.

On August 6, 1769, amidst death, she gave birth. The baby was named Hannah, for Mother Ballard. Two years later another baby girl was born. She became Dorothy, or "Dolly," for Grandmother Moore, for her Aunt Dorothy Barton, and for the sister who had died of diphtheria. Perhaps there would have been another Triphene or Martha in 1773, but in that year Ephraim Ballard was in Maine searching out a new home. As a consequence, the last Ballard baby, named Ephraim for his father, was born in Hallowell in 1779.²²

When Ephraim Ballard ascended the Kennebec in 1775 in search of new land, he was doing what his great-grandfather had done more than a century before when he left Lynn, Massachusetts, to build mills in the new town of Andover and what his own father had done when he left Andover for Billerica and then Oxford. The Ballards had been millers for four generations in New England, and in three of those four they helped to settle new towns.²³

The French and Indian wars first led Oxford men to Maine. Martha's cousin Nathan Moore, a veteran of the invasion of Canada, was settled in Vassalboro on the Kennebec by 1768.²⁴ Another cousin, Ebenezer Learned, also a veteran, became a proprietor of the new township of Livemore on the Androscoggin River, though he continued to live in Oxford. Ephraim went to Maine for the first time as a surveyor and agent for Cousin Ebenezer, though his interest soon turned from the Androscoggin to the Kennebec.²⁵ By 1775 his brother Jonathan, his brother-in-law Thomas Towne, Martha's brother Ebenezer Moore, and her brother-in-law Stephen Barton had all settled on lands laid out by the Kennebec Proprietors.²⁶ Removing to Maine became another way of remaining in Oxford.

In 1775, there were six incorporated townships along the



HALLOWELL

showing journey
April 23-25, 1789

larger questions in social history. Nancy Norcross suffered lingering labor in an era when old childbirth practices were being challenged in both England and America by a new "scientific" obstetrics promoted by male physicians. Obed Hussey languished in debtor's prison in an age when debtor petitions and even debtor insurrections were convulsing the nation and when some men were taking to the streets or the woods to preserve their property. Ebenezer and Zilpha Hewins married at a time of high premarital pregnancy rates in America, a period when political essayists as well as novelists were obsessed with the theme of seduction. The late eighteenth century was not only an era of political revolution but of medical, economic, and sexual transformation.⁴⁸ Not surprisingly, it was also a time when a new ideology of womanhood self-consciously connected domestic virtue to the survival of the state.⁴⁹ The nature of these phenomena is still being debated in the literature, yet few scholars would disagree that the period of Martha's diary, 1785-1812, was an era of profound change, or that in some still dimly understood way, the nation's political revolution and the social revolutions that accompanied it were related. It is not as easy as it once was to dismiss domestic concerns as "trivia."

Martha Ballard's diary connects to several prominent themes in the social history of the early Republic, yet it does more than reflect an era. By restoring a lost substructure of eighteenth-century life, it transforms the nature of the evidence upon which much of the history of the period has been written. The point can be illustrated by comparing evidence from her book with three documents left by prominent Hallowell men, Daniel Cony, William Howard, and Henry Sewall.

Daniel Cony was the Kennebec's best-known physician. He was studying medicine with his brother-in-law, Dr. Samuel Curtis of Marlborough, Massachusetts, at the time of the Lexington alarm. He marched with the Minutemen, served as adjutant of the regiment of infantry with General Horatio Gates at Saratoga, and according to the town historian "was at the surrender of Burgoyne, but not in any of the battles which preceded that event." He arrived in Hallowell in 1778, the same

holic importance of women in the new republic. On February 22, 1800, he helped organize a parade to commemorate the death of his former commander, General Washington. At the head, following a military escort, were "16 Misses, clad in white, with black hats & cloaks, & white scarfs, representatives of the then sixteen states in the Union. (According to a later account, based on oral tradition, the white scarfs were "fastened on the right shoulder with a black and white rosette; tied under the left arm, with long ends trailing to the bottom of the dress.") Led by the young women, the memorial procession passed into the meeting house, the militia companies followed by judges, lawyers, physicians, members of the fire society, and other dignitaries, "the music playing a dead march, & a detachment from Captain Bowman's artillery firing minute guns during the whole." For the young Daughters of Columbia it must have been an impressive occasion, a ritual identification of their own lives with the survival of the new nation.

Martha attended the service at the meeting house "to commemorate the Death of General George Washington." Significantly, she said nothing at all about the parade of young women, though she noted the presence of "the Lodge of Hallowell, Captain George [unclear] and [unclear] of people." Her life had been altered by the Revolution, but her identity was unrelated to the rituals of republicanism. In 1800, she was far more concerned with the death of Nabby Andros, a neighbor's daughter, than with the demise of General Washington. Her values had been formed in an older world, in which a woman's worth was measured by her service to God and her neighbors rather than to a nebulous and distant state. For Martha, politics was what men did at town meetings—necessary perhaps, but often troublesome and divisive. Though she lived through a Revolution, she was more a colonial goodwife than a Republican Mother. Her story allows us to see what was lost, as well as what was gained, in the political, economic, and social transformations of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

To understand Martha's world we must approach it on its own terms, neither as a golden age of household productivity

nor as a political void from which a later feminist consciousness emerged. Martha's diary reaches to the marrow of eighteenth-century life. The trivia that so annoyed earlier readers provide a consistent, daily record of the operation of a female-managed economy. The scandals excised by local historians provide insight into sexual behavior, marital and extramarital, in a time of tumult and change. The remarkable birth records, 814 deliveries in all, allow the first full accounting of delivery practices and of obstetrical mortality in any early American town. The family squabbles that earlier readers (and abridgers) of the diary found almost as embarrassing as the sexual references show how closely related Martha's occupation was to the life cycle of her own family, and reveal the private politics behind public issues like imprisonment for debt. The somber record of her last years provides rare evidence on the nature of aging in the pre-industrial world, and shows the pull of traditional values in an era of economic and social turmoil.

The heroism is there, too. In the last decade of her life, when the world seemed to be falling apart around her—armed settlers attacking survivors in the woods, husbands and fathers killing themselves, and, in the case of her neighbor Captain Purinton, his wife and children as well—Martha found the courage to continue her work. On April 4, 1812, she rode "on horsback without a pillion" to a delivery. On April 26, 1812, just a month before her death, she attended her last birth.

The structure of the diary forces us to consider midwifery in the broadest possible context, as one specialty in a larger neighborhood economy, as the most visible feature of a comprehensive and little-known system of early health care, as a mechanism of social control, a strategy for family support, and a deeply personal calling. One might wish for more detail, for more open expressions of opinion, fuller accounts of medical remedies or obstetrical complications, more candor in describing physicians or judges, and less circumspection in recording scandal, yet for all its reticence, Martha's diary is an unparalleled document in early American history. It is powerful in part because it is so difficult to use, so unyielding in its daifness.

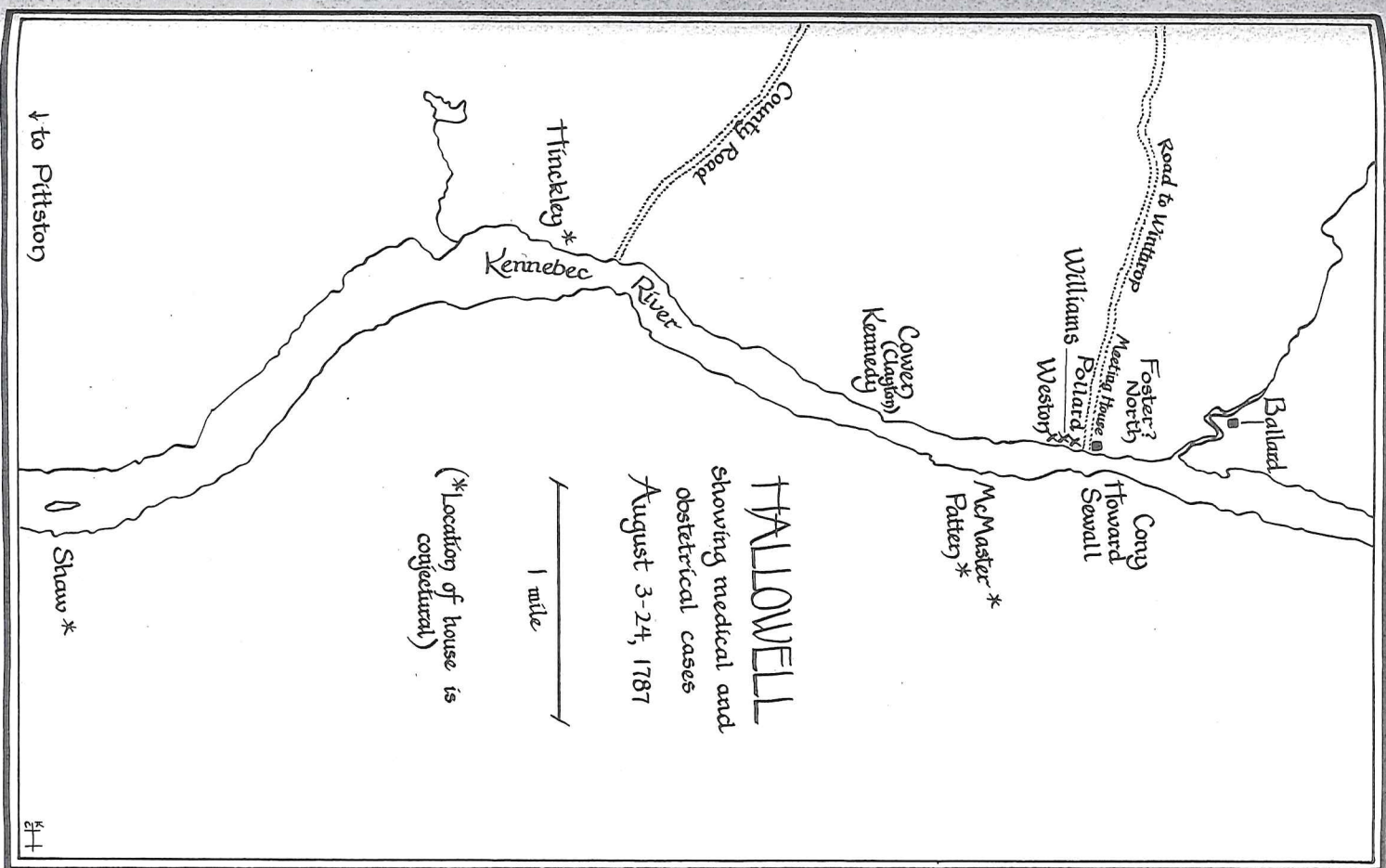
well there. Arrivd at home at 5 afternoon. Doctor Coneys wife delivrd of a dafter Last Evening at 10 O Clock.
Birth James Hindleys son



Martha Ballard was a midwife—and more. Between August 3 and 24, 1787, she performed four deliveries, answered one obstetrical false alarm, made sixteen medical calls, prepared three bodies for burial, dispensed pills to one neighbor, harvested and prepared herbs for another, and doctored her own husband's sore throat. In twentieth-century terms, she was simultaneously a midwife, nurse, physician, mortician, pharmacist, and attentive wife. Furthermore, in the very act of recording her work, she became a keeper of vital records, a chronicler of the medical history of her town.

"Doctor Coney here. Took account of Births & Deaths the year past from my minuits," Martha wrote on January 4, 1791. Surprisingly, it is her minutes, not his data, that have survived. The account she kept differs markedly from other eighteenth-century medical records. The most obvious difference, of course, is that it is a woman's record. Equally important is the way it connects birth and death with ordinary life. Few medical histories, even today, do that.¹

In June of 1787, as Martha's flax blossomed in the field beyond the mill pond, scarlet fever ripened in Hallowell. She called it the "canker rash," a common name in the eighteenth century for a disease that combined a brilliant skin eruption with an intensely sore, often ulcerated throat. The "Putrid Malignant Sore Throat," a New Hampshire physician called it. We know it as "strep," scarlet fever being one of several forms of infection from a particular type of streptococci. Although mild in comparison with the scourges of diphtheria that had swept through towns like Oxford earlier in the century, scarlet fever was dangerous. Martha reported five deaths in the summer of 1787, 15 percent of the canker rash cases she treated.²



every year the town had four times as many births as deaths.¹¹ Even in a sickly season, there was reason for hope as well as sorrow.

In western tradition, midwives have inspired fear, reverence, amusement, and disdain. They have been condemned for witchcraft, eulogized for Christian benevolence, and caricatured for bawdy humor and old wives' tales. The famous seventeenth-century English physician William Harvey dismissed the notorious ignorance of midwives, "especially the younger and more meddlesome ones, who make a marvellous pother when they hear the woman cry out with her pains and implore assistance." Yet a popular obstetrical manual published in the same century dignified their work by arguing that Socrates's mother was a midwife and that "the Judges of old time did appoint a stipend for those women that did practice Physick well."¹²

In the early years of settlement, some American colonies did in fact provide free land, if not stipends, for midwives.¹³ Yet the most famous midwife in early America is remembered for religious martyrdom rather than obstetrics. Boston ministers commended Anne Hutchinson for the "good discourse" she offered women in their "Childbirth-Travells," but when her teachings threatened to disrupt their authority, they condemned and banished her. The Puritans took their contradictions directly from the Bible. The Book of Exodus celebrates the courage of the Hebrew midwives who when told to destroy the male children of Israel "feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them." But the Apostle Paul, while acknowledging the good works of women who "relieved the afflicted," condemned those who wandered about from house to house, "speaking things which they ought not."¹⁴

English midwifery guides also warned against impiety and gossip. "I must tell you, it is too common a Complaint of the modest Part of Womankind, against the Women-Midwives, that they are bold, and indulge their Tongues in immodest and lascivious Speeches," warned one author who styled himself a sur-

geon. Another echoed the language of the Apostle in arguing that a good midwife "ought to be *Faithful* and *Silent*; always on her *Guard* to conceal those Things, which ought not to be spoken of."¹⁵

Samuel Richardson drew upon midwifery lore in creating the character of Mrs. Jewkes, the terrifying woman who holds the innocent Pamela captive in the novel that gave Martha Ballard's niece her name.¹⁶ Charles Dickens exploited the same body of myth to different effect in his comic portrait of Sairey Gamp in *Martin Chuzzlewit*:

She was a fat old woman, this Mrs. Gamp, with a husky voice and a moist eye.... She wore a very rusty black gown, rather the worse for snuff, and a shawl and bonnet to correspond.... Like most persons who have attained to great eminence in their profession, she took to hers very kindly; insomuch, that setting aside her natural predilections as a woman, she went to a lying-in or a laying-out with equal zest and relish.¹⁷

Martha Ballard had at least one thing in common with Sairey Gamp—she was very fond of snuff. Yet in eighteenth-century Maine, it was not necessary to set aside one's "predilections as a woman" in order to perform what Martha once called "the last office of friendship." Her diary tames the stereotypes and at the same time helps us to imagine the realities on which they were based. Midwives and nurses mediated the mysteries of birth, procreation, illness, and death. They touched the untouchable, handled excrement and vomit as well as milk, swaddled the dead as well as the newborn. They brewed medicines from plants and roots, and presided over neighborhood gatherings of women.

Two nineteenth-century novelists by New England women focus on the homely mysteries of village healers, coming closer to Martha's diary than most English literature. Sarah Josepha Hale's *Northwood*, published in 1827, was said to have been based on her own memories of a late-eighteenth-century New

Hampshire town. Hale went out of her way to make clear that, though her gossipy healer Mrs. Watson was a fortune-teller, she was neither a witch nor a hag. No, she was "reputed one of the neatest women and best managers in the village. And many wondered how it happened that though she went abroad so much, she generally contrived to have her own work done in season, and quite as soon as her neighbors."¹⁸

The central character of Sarah Orne Jewett's *Country of the Pointed Firs* is also a good housewife. In the opening pages of the book, Jewett describes a "queer little garden," green with balm and southernwood, presided over by Mrs. Todd. Some of her plants "might have belonged to sacred and mystic rites . . . but now they pertained only to humble compounds brewed at intervals with molasses or vinegar or spirits." Stopping to visit Mrs. Todd at her garden fence, the local physician "would stand twirling a sweet-scented sprig in his fingers, and make suggestive jokes, perhaps about one's faith in a too persistent course of thoroughwort elixir."¹⁹

Hale and Jewett idealized their New England villages—there is no diphtheria or canker rash in either book—yet they grounded their stories in a world Martha might have recognized. One of the central issues for her, as for Mrs. Watson, was how to get her work done at home while spending so much time with her neighbors. Her garden, though less romantic than Mrs. Todd's, also incorporated notions of healing handed down the centuries, and her diary reveals, as does Jewett's novel, the friendly distance between a "village doctor" and a "learned herbalist."

Later chapters will explore Martha Ballard's domestic economy. The remainder of this chapter will pursue Jewett's themes, reaching beneath the story of the August 1787 epidemic for clues to Martha's herbalism and to her relations with the town's other healers, male and female. Hallowell had several male physicians. In the last years of the eighteenth century, these included, in addition to Daniel Cony: Samuel Colman, who arrived at Fort Western in the 1780s; Benjamin Page, who set up practice at "the Hook" in 1791; and Benjamin Vaughan, an

Edinburgh-educated doctor and heir to the Plymouth Company claims, who settled on the Kennebec in 1706, offering himself not as a competitor but as a gentlemanly mentor to the local doctors. In addition, several physicians from neighboring towns—Obadiah Williams, James Parker, and John Hubbard—occasionally treated Hallowell patients. (Martha's brother-in-law, Stephen Barton, practiced in Vassalboro from 1775 to 1787, but spent the next decade in Oxford and died shortly after returning to Maine.)

Martha was respectful, even deferential, toward the men's work, but the world she described was sustained by women—Mrs. Woodward, Mrs. Savage, Mrs. Vose, Old Mrs. Ingraham, Sally Fletcher, Lady Cox, Hannah Cool, Merriam Pollard, and dozens of others, the midwives, nurses, afternurses, servants, watchers, housewives, sisters, and mothers of Hallowell. The diary even mentions an itinerant "Negro woman doctor," who briefly appeared in the town in 1793. Female practitioners specialized in obstetrics but also in the general care of women and children, in the treatment of minor illnesses, skin rashes, and burns, and in nursing.²⁰ Since more than two-thirds of the population of Hallowell was either female or under the age of ten, since most illnesses were "minor," at least at their onset, and since nurses were required even when doctors were consulted, Martha and her peers were in constant motion.

When Martha went to the field to dig cold water root on August 7, 1787, she was acting out the primary ritual of her practice, the gathering of remedies from the earth. Although she purchased imported laxatives and a few rare ingredients (myrrh, "dragon's blood," galbanum, spermaceta, and camphor) from Dr. Colman, she was fundamentally an herbalist. "Harvested saffron," "Cut the sage," "Gathered seeds & Cammomile mint & hyssop": such entries scattered throughout the diary tie her practice to English botanic medicine.²¹ Three-quarters of the herbs in the diary appear in Nicholas Culpeper's *The Complete Herbal*, published in London in 1649 (and reprinted many times

in America). Almost all can be found in E. Smith, *The Compleat Housewife: OR, Accomplish'd Gentlewoman's Companion*, an early eighteenth-century English compendium.²² Martha administered herbs internally as teas, decoctions, syrups, pills, clisters, vapors, and smoke and externally in poultices, plasters, blisters, cataplasms, baths, ointments, and salves. "Find Dolly lame. Poultist her foot with sorril roasted," she wrote on October 11, 1787, and when Theophilus Hamlin came to the house feeling ill, she "made a bed by the fire & gave him some catnip tea." Presumably the warm drink and the fire would cure his cold by contraries. Sympathetic medicine also worked. When Martha used saffron to treat jaundice in newborn children, she was following the ancient doctrine of "signatures," the yellow plant being the obvious cure for yellow skin.²³

There is no evidence in the diary of direct borrowing—she never mentions reading a medical book—yet Martha's remedies obviously rested on a long accumulation of English experience. When she used dock root to treat "the itch" or applied burdock leaves to an aching shoulder, she was following Culpeper's practice whether she knew it or not. ~~Martha's attitude toward the nonlogical concepts that informed his~~ ~~her attitude toward the nonlogical concepts that informed his~~ herbal. She may not have been aware, when she gave a newly delivered woman feverfew tea, that "Venus has commended this herb to succor her sisters."²⁴ But her quiet statement on July 26, 1788, "Dog Days begin this day," associates her with such ancient traditions. Since antiquity, the period in late summer when the Dog Star became visible in the heavens had been linked with illness. The almanacs, which had determined the very form of her diary, perpetuated such beliefs. In fact she had good reason for believing that dog days brought illness, for she consistently made more medical calls in late summer than at any other time of the year. Whether her neighbors were actually more sickly during August and September or simply more disposed to ask for help, we do not know.²⁵

Her remedies are even closer to those in Smith's book. Like the English woman, she accepted the medicinal as well as the culinary virtues of common garden plants like green beans, onions, and currants and of household staples like vinegar, soap,

and flour. On October 14, 1787, for example, she was "Call'd in great hast to see Mrs Hamlin who was in a fit. I walkt there, applyd Vinagar to her Lips, temples, & hands & onions to her feet & shee revivd." And on another day, "Mr. Ballard is unwell. ~~Has taken some soap pills.~~ There is hardly an ingredient in Martha's diary that does not appear in Smith's compendium. Both women routinely used camomile, sage, and tansy. Both employed cantharides and Elixir Proprietas. Both concocted that most famous of all cures—chicken soup. Yet compared to Smith's receipts, Martha's medicines are "simples." The most elaborate remedies described in her diary employ at most three or four plants. In contrast, Smith's recipe for "Lady Hewet's water" contains seventy-five separate plants, seeds, roots, and powders. Nor is there any hint in Martha's diary of the zoological inventiveness that led Smith to recommend setting a bottle of newly made cordial "into a hill of ants for amonth," to combine goose dung, ground snails, and earthworms with saffron, or to wet bandages in the spawn of frogs.²⁷

There is no indication that Martha used cow or sheep dung poultices, as did some New England healers, but she did believe in the curative powers of urine, as on September 23, 1786: "I was Call'd Early this morn to see Lidia Savage who was very ill. Gave her some urin & honney & some Liquoris & put a plaster to her stomach. Went up afternoon. Find her Reliev'd."²⁸ She also accepted the pervasive notion that cat's blood had healing power. When a Mr. Davis came to the house suffering from shingles, she "bled a Cat & applid the Blood which gave him Relief."²⁹ She didn't say whether the cat she bled was pure black without a single white hair, as insisted on by some rural practitioners, but she did record one cure that clearly included the kind of detail which folklorists associate with magic. ~~When her niece was suffering from consumption and all other remedies seemed to have failed, she tried a practice "recommended as very Beneficial by Mr Amos Page."~~ The young woman rose from her sickbed "about an hour by sun in the morn went out & milkt the last milk from the cow into her mouth & swallowed it."³⁰

Even within Martha's practice, however, such cures were ex-

X Herbs, wild as well as cultivated, were the true foundation of her practice. She wilted fresh burdock leaves in alcohol to apply to sore muscles, crushed comfrey for a poultice, added melilot (a kind of sweet clover) to hog's grease for an ointment, boiled agrimony, plantain, and Solomon's-seal into a syrup, perhaps following an old method that called for reducing the liquid by half, straining this decoction through a woolen cloth, then adding sugar to simmer to the thickness of new honey.³¹ Most of the wild plants she used had familiar English names, whether they were escapees from early gardens or New World varieties of Old World herbs. There are few distinctly American names in the diary.³² She mentioned poulticing wounds with basswood, a plant not found in the English herbals, but when she and a grandchild "went to the field and got sennake root," they may have been gathering a local variety of sanicle, a plant Culpeper credited with the power to "stay women's courses" rather than Seneca snakeroot, an American native. (A later entry does, however, refer to "a decoction of snake root & saffron.")³³

The root Martha dug during the scarlet fever outbreak of 1787 was an indigenous plant, however.³⁴ According to a legend recorded in Rochester, Massachusetts (where Martha's brother, Jonathan Moore, was minister), a local man got cold water root from "an Indian named Nathan Hope" during an epidemic of diphtheria in 1754. Eventually it "developed into a wild herb common to all the region."³⁵ Martha may have heard about the root and its uses from Jonathan. Just as likely, the plant had always been "common to all the region," in Oxford as in Rochester, though Indians may well have taught the first settlers how to use it. Its association with diphtheria is suggestive. If Martha had learned about cold water root in Oxford, it is difficult to imagine her preparing her sore throat "tincture" in Hallowell in 1787 without thinking of her own children and the epidemic of 1769.

The eclecticism of English medicine encouraged the incorporation of Indian or African cures. An aura of mystery, if not magic, attached to persons who were otherwise stigmatized in colonial society. Smith's recipe book included "The Negro

Ceasars Cure for Poison" reprinted from *The Carolina Gazette*, and Hallowell patients sought out the "Negro doctress" during her brief sojourn in the town. (Mrs. Parker even borrowed Martha's horse "to go and see the negro woman doctor.")³⁶ There is no evidence that Martha was curious about Indian or Afro-American medicine, however. She noted the presence of the black healer but did not bother to record—or perhaps even to learn—her name. Such attitudes help to explain why her remedies are closer to Culpeper's seventeenth-century herbal than to James Thacher's *The American New Dispensatory*, an early-nineteenth-century pharmacopoeia that attempted to evaluate and incorporate Indian physic.³⁷

In eighteenth-century terms, Martha was an "empiric," a person unconcerned with theory. Her own descriptions demonstrate that her most immediate concern was to make her patients feel better. "I gargled her throat which gave her great Ease," she wrote after preparing the cold water tincture for Polly Kennedy. The same remedy helped her own husband "find relief." The two phrases appear in the diary repeatedly. When one patient was suffering from dysentery, she "administered a Clister which gave her Eas." When Hannah was ill, she gave her camomile and camphor and sent her "into a warm Bed. I hope it will relieve her." Beyond the physical comfort of hot tea or a soothing syrup was the comfort of an idea: Nature offered solutions to its own problems. Remedies for illness could be found in the earth, in the animal world, and in the human body itself. When Martha Ballard applied warmed tow to the neck of little Gideon Barton, she was doing more than assuaging pain, she was confirming the essential order of the universe.³⁸

~~The world is a mystery, however, to describe her as a finding practitioner preserving ancient English remedies lost to professional medicine. Most of the therapies we now associate with "folk" medicine were still a part of academic practice in her time. One of the Kennebec's best-educated physicians, Dr. Moses Appleton of Waterville, Maine, left a manuscript collection of recipes that included, in addition to erudite Latin formulas, a cure for dropsy compounded of parsley roots,~~

horseradish, and mustard seed and a treatment for "the malignant sore throat" that called for applying carded black wool wet with vinegar and salt, ear to ear.³⁹ The most explicit reference to astrological (or, more precisely, lunar concepts) in Hallowell comes from Daniel Cony's family record. One Cony child, the doctor reported, was born on "the first day of the week, the first hour of the day and the first day of the moon," another on "the 5th day of the week, and the eleventh day of the moon."⁴⁰

The technological simplicity of early medicine meant that male doctors offered little that wasn't also available to female practitioners. The stethoscope had not yet been invented. Watches with second hands were so rare that no one as yet counted the pulse (though in a general way most practitioners observed it). Nor did the clinical thermometer exist. Even the simple technique of percussion (tapping the chest and abdomen to discover fluid or masses) was yet to come.⁴¹ A probate inventory taken after the death of Dr. Obadiah Williams included "A Quantity of Medicine & Bottles together with the Amputating Instruments." That brief sentence pretty well describes the medical arsenal available to an eighteenth-century physician—drugs and a few rudimentary surgical instruments. Williams *did* use his instruments. On March 5, 1789, Martha wrote, "There was a young man had his Legg Cutt off at Stirling by Doctor Williams. He brot it to Doctor Coneys & dissected it." Martha didn't observe this dissection, but she did attend four autopsies in the course of her career, carefully recording the results in her diary (see Chapter Seven). That fact alone suggests that Hallowell's physicians considered midwives part of the broader medical community, a subordinate part no doubt (doctors dissected; midwives observed, but a part nonetheless).⁴²

Midwives and doctors shared a common commitment to what Martha would have called "pukes" and "purges." Early medicine merged the two meanings of *physic* as "knowledge of the human body" and as "a cathartic or purge." Because all parts of the body were related, laxatives treated the entire organism, not simply the gastrointestinal system. "I was calld to see Lidia White who has had fits this day, but had left her before I arrivd.

Shee complaind of an opresion at her stomach and pain in her head, I left her a portion of senna and manna." Senna and manna were mild cathartics. When her daughter Dolly was ill, Martha noted that a combination of "Senna & manna with annis seed and Rhubarb . . . operated kindly." She even used manna with infants.⁴³

The emphasis on expulsion derived from the ancient theory of humors, the notion that health was achieved by a proper balance of the four bodily fluids—blood, phlegm, choler (or yellow bile), and melancholy (or black bile). When Martha wrote that Lidia Bisbe was "sick of a bilious disorder" or that Mr. Savage's daughter "puked up a considerable quantity of phlegm," she was expressing that world view, as was Moses Appleton when he recommended black wool "to keep back the humors."⁴⁴ The notion of humors had been greatly enlarged by the end of the eighteenth century, however. As one encyclopedist explained it, the term "humour, in medicine, is applied to any juice, or fluid part of the body, as the chyle, blood, milk, fat, serum." Writing of a "Child who had a bad humour on the head and feet," Martha was using the generic term.⁴⁵ Yet the importance of fluids, their condition, quantity, and means of expulsion, remained central.

When Martha noted that a lanced abscess "discharged a Large quantity," she may have been commenting positively on the effectiveness of the cure rather than negatively on the seriousness of the infection. Festering was also a method by which the body expelled troublesome humors. The application of "blisters," local irritants designed to raise a watery discharge, imitated another of nature's remedies. "Calld to see Mrs Weston. Shee being very unwell I aplyd a Blister, Batht her feet, put on a Back Plaster," she wrote on November 14, 1786.⁴⁶ Baths and plasters, like blisters, treated internal problems with external remedies. They cooled or heated, soothed or excited, according to temperature or contents.

Although theoretically a person might lose too much fluid, most remedies seem to have promoted expulsion. Constipation was dangerous, as was an unhealthy accumulation of bile. Men-

situation, too, could prove troublesome if "obstructed," which is why Martha Ballard "prescribed the use of particular herbs" for a young woman named Genny Cool. What those herbs were and whether they might also have been employed to induce abortion, we do not know. There is no mention in the diary of saving, the best-known English abortifacient, though Martha did gather tansy, a plant associated in some herbals with abortion. In her practice, however, tansy seems to have been employed as an *anthelmintic*, that is, an agent for expelling worms. (Intestinal parasites were common, as we shall see in Chapter Seven.)⁴⁷

The most dramatic of the humoral therapies was bloodletting, a remedy Martha seldom mentioned and never employed. Along the same lines, the latest was already a model for implementation. "Mr Stodard seemd to have more feavour," Martha wrote on February 16, 1795. "Doctor Page Bled him in the feet this morning. He has been bled, phisicked and Blistered before in his sickness." She noted that Dr. Coleman bled one of her patients in the late stages of pregnancy, though it seems not to have been at her request. One home medical guide recommended bleeding "for pregnant women about the sixth, seventh or eighth month, who are plethoric and full of blood," but added that "children bear purging better than bleedings." Martha seems to have preferred purging for both groups. One of the few descriptions of bleeding in the diary involved a horse. "Mr Ballard went to Mr Browns for his mare," Martha wrote. "Had her Bled in the mouth. She bled all the way home & Continued to bleed an hour or two after coming home. We at length filld the incision with fur & it Ceast."⁴⁸

That male physicians leaned toward dramatic therapies was only to be expected. Their status—and fees—required as much. Dr. Cony used rhubarb and senna, as Martha did, but he also prescribed calomel, the mercurial compound Benjamin Rush called the "Sanison of medicine." One historian concludes that in large doses calomel "did indeed slay great numbers of Philistines." The impressive salivation that followed its violent purging was in fact one of the symptoms of mercury poisoning.⁴⁹ Hallo-

well's physicians also used laudanum (a liquid opiate), purple foxglove (digitalis), and the bark (quinine), therapies associated with a newer "solidistic" overlay on humoral therapy.

Unlike humoral therapy, which concentrated on bodily juices, solidistic medicine loosely followed Newtonian physics in attempting to regulate the mechanical properties of "solids," usually defined as blood vessels and nerves. Doctors employed tonics to stimulate bodily force, sedatives to induce relaxation. In practical terms, humoral and solidistic approaches overlapped, since both tried to control respiration, perspiration, and excretion.⁵⁰ Thus, a physician might employ cathartics either to "flush out unbalanced humors" or "to relax the abnormal tensions which had constricted his patients' intestinal fibers." For the patient, the consequences were the same.⁵¹

Whether or not Martha understood solidistic theory, she rejected some of the remedies associated with it. (Here she departed from Smith, who added laudanum to cough syrup and recommended "jesuits bark" for ague and fever.) Martha was dismayed when Dr. Page attempted to use laudanum in childbirth (see Chapter Five). She was also convinced that the use of "the bark" contributed to the death of Mrs. Pillsbury during another outbreak of the canker rash. Martha had been nursing the woman ("The Lady was in a fine persperation the most of the night") when an urgent call from another family took her away. When she returned two days later, she discovered Mrs. Pillsbury "in a kind of delirium; her raising had ceast and her mouth very dry. They informed me shee had been much so through the night past. It is my opinion the use of the Bark was in some measure the Cause." Martha seems to have interpreted the "raising"—that is, the rash itself—as a useful phenomenon, an indication that the sweating had been successful in expelling the ill humor. She did not say who had suggested the bark, though it may have been one of Hallowell's physicians. A published pamphlet on the "Putrid Malignant Sore Throat" argued that "the tonic as well as antiseptic powers of the Bark must render it a medicine not only proper, but highly necessary in this disorder."⁵² Martha disagreed. She seemed pleased when

"Old Mrs Kenny Came and advised to giv her a syring of vinegar & onions and a decoction of Gold thread and shumake Berries. It was done and shee seemd revivd." The revival was temporary. Mrs. Pillsbury died.⁵³

Martha Ballard's dislike of the new remedies did not stem from a general mistrust of physicians—she was quite willing to call them to her own family in serious illness—but from an innate conservatism. She was most comfortable with the doctors when their ideas reinforced the old therapies and the long-standing social arrangements. When one of her own daughters fell ill, she walked to Dr. Colman's to get senna and manna, and when "shee soon became dilirious we sent for Doct Cony who approv'd of what I had done—advised me to continue my medisn till it had operation. She was siesd with a severe Faking soon."⁵⁴ In the world of eighteenth-century medicine, midwives and doctors sought—and generally achieved—similar results

In twentieth-century terms, the ability to prescribe and dispense medicine made Martha a physician, while practical knowledge of gargles, bandages, poultices, and clisters, as well as a willingness to give extended care, defined her as a nurse. In her world, such distinctions made little sense. She sometimes acted under the direction of a doctor. More frequently she acted alone, or with the assistance of other women. ~~In an accident that Daniel Cony's name appears only at the end of the August entries you have read. When scarlet fever broke out in Hallowell in June, he was in Boston attending the General Court. He was back on July 19 to deliver his sister, Susanna Church, of a son, but was soon off to the interior settlements on business.⁵⁵ On July 26 Martha was summoned to his house to treat a servant, Peggy Cool, who was suffering from the rash.~~

~~Ironically, when the doctor did show up in the diary it was in the context of delivery. Martha's quiet entry for August 22, 1787—"Mrs Shaw has Doctor Coney with her"—suggests more than a casual interest in the doctor's whereabouts. Mrs.~~

Shaw was then nine months pregnant, and perhaps in labor, or at least experiencing some of the signs of imminent delivery, when the doctor was called. Why she called him we do not know. Perhaps she was worried about possible complications, perhaps frightened by the recent death of Susanna Clayton. As it turned out, Martha delivered the baby. "Put [Mrs. Shaw] safe to Bed with a daughter at 10 O Clok this Evning," she wrote on August 23, and on the next day added drily, "Doctor Coneys wife deliver'd of a dafter Last Evng at 10 O Clok—that is, at exactly the same time as Mrs. Shaw. It would seem, then, that if his own child hadn't intervened, Cony might have delivered the Shaw baby. Still, whatever her original intent, Mrs. Shaw was apparently satisfied with her midwife: two years and one month later, she summoned Martha again.

Daniel Cony's presence at the bedside of Mrs. Shaw suggests that reverberations of the new scientific obstetrics had reached the Kennebec. Unlike the surgeons of an earlier era, who were called only in dire emergencies, usually to dismember and extract an irretrievably lost fetus, late-eighteenth-century physicians considered it appropriate to officiate at an ordinary delivery. Yet most of them limited their obstetrical practice to eight or ten cases a year, whatever they could conveniently fit into their practice. Significantly, Martha performed at least one delivery for Cony's sister, Susanna Church and another for his sister-in-law Susanna Brooks.⁵⁶

Kennebec doctors were not only part-time midwives, they were part-time physicians. Daniel Cony was a land proprietor and politician as well as a physician—perhaps a politician most of all. A Portland associate complained after a visit, "He had not been in the house half an hour before my head turned round like a top with politics. I would not live in the same house with ... Daniel Coney for ten thousand pounds per annum."⁵⁷ Yet Cony knew how to use one specialty to reinforce another. In a letter to a Massachusetts congressman, he neatly dismissed his political opponents by offering a "chemical" analysis of their behavior. Such men, he wrote, "abound with 'vitriolic acid' with a certain proportion of 'aqua regia.'"⁵⁸ He became a fellow of

the Massachusetts Medical Society not so much because of his medical skills, which by the standards of his own time were ordinary, but because his election to the legislature put him in frequent contact with the gentlemen who ran such associations. He was also a justice of the peace, as were fellow doctors Moses Appleton of Waterville and Obadiah Williams of Vassalboro.⁵⁹ Samuel Colman, Hallowell's second physician, was less involved in public affairs, but almost as distracted. Still single when Martha's diary opened, he lived for a time at Fort Western, eventually opening a store where he sold scythes, hoes, and tobacco, as well as pharmaceuticals.⁶⁰ Waterville's Harvard-educated doctor, Moses Appleton, had similar interests: a single entry in his daybook lists debts for an almanac, a half-yard of calico, and a gallon of vinegar; prescriptions for senna, camphor, and an unguent; and fees for sewing and dressing a wound.⁶¹ Dr. Page was more single-minded than the others (and the one most disposed to intrude on Martha's territory, as we shall see in Chapter Five), but he too doubled as a trader. In 1796 he advertised "a very handsome assortment of Drugs and Medicine, among which is a variety of patent articles," including "Andersons, Hoogers, and Lockyer's Pills, Bateman's Drops, Turlington's Balsam of Life, and Daffy's Elixer." He also sold smelling bottles, nutmegs, British oil, and cephalic snuff.⁶² That the region's most earnest prescriber of imported drugs was also its major supplier was a conflict of interest no one seems to have noticed—or at any rate been troubled by.

The most successful Kennebec physicians were Federalist gentlemen, organizers of agricultural societies, builders of bridges, incorporators of banks. Their involvement in medical organizations was part of this general commitment to voluntarism and civic betterment. (Colman, Appleton, and Page, like Gony, were members of the Massachusetts Medical Society, as well as promoters of regional organization.)⁶³ They were successful practitioners not only because of their acknowledged status as learned gentlemen but because the town's other healers chose to defer to them in hard cases. There were no laws to prevent Martha or her neighbors from administering calomel or

drawing blood, yet they did not do so. By custom and training, honseetting, tooth-pulling, bloodletting, and the administration of strong drugs were reserved for self-identified male doctors. When Martha "misplaced a Bone in the Great toe of my right foot," she was grateful for the help of Dr. Page, but most of the time she and her family got along quite well without him.⁶⁴ It was no doubt part of the men's strength that they supported neighborhood practitioners, offering chemical compounds and venesection only when tansy failed. Even their inaccessibility was an advantage, a sign of their importance in the larger world.

Male physicians are easily identified in town records and, even in Martha's diary, by the title "Doctor." No local woman can be discovered in that way. Hallowell's female healers move in and out of sickrooms unannounced, as though their presence there were the most ordinary thing in the world—as it was. Historians have been dimly aware of this broad-based work, yet they have had difficulty defining it. Physicians who joined medical societies and adopted an occupational title can be recognized as professionals. But what shall we call the women? Persons who perambulated their neighborhoods hardly practiced *domestic medicine*, nor does *folk medicine* accurately describe the differences between them and male professionals. Other commonly employed categories are equally misleading. *Popular medicine* conveys the ferment of the nineteenth century, with its competing sects of herbalists, homeopaths, and hydropaths, but obscures the cooperative, if hierarchical, arrangements of eighteenth-century practice. *Lay medicine* connotes the lack of formal organization in female practice, but fails to suggest its complexity. A better label is *social medicine*, borrowing from the now familiar concept of social childbirth.⁶⁵

Professionals sought to be distinguished from the community they served (hence the need for the title "Doctor"). Social healers, on the other hand, were so closely identified with their public we can hardly find them. Professionals cultivated regional or cosmopolitan networks, joining occupational associations. Social healers developed personal affiliations and built local reputations. Professional training, even if only in the form of ap-

prenticeship, was institutional, fixed in place and time. Social learning was incremental, a slow build-up of seemingly casual experience.

Florence Nightingale's famous statement that "every woman is a nurse"⁶⁶ captures one element of social practice—its grounding in common duties—but it fails to convey the specialization that occurred even among female healers. Caring for the sick was a universal female role, yet several women in every community stood out from the others for the breadth and depth of their commitment. They went farther, stayed longer, and did more than their neighbors. It would be a serious mistake to see Martha Ballard as a singular character, an unusual woman who somehow transcended the domestic sphere to become an acknowledged specialist among her neighbors. She was an important healer, and without question the busiest midwife in Hallowell during the most active years of her practice, but she was one among many women with acknowledged medical skills. Furthermore, her strengths were sustained by a much larger group of casual helpers.

~~In the August 1787 journal, she named five persons who in some way shared the care of the sick during the canker rash epidemic. Hannah Cool was at the Williams house on August 7, Mrs. Pollard at Mrs. Howard's on August 9, "Capt Sewall & Lady" at the same house on August 10, and Mrs. Patten at the McMasters' on August 12. Although each person appears in the diary in much the same way, there were important differences between them.~~

~~Hannah Cool was living with Martha Ballard in the summer of 1787. She actually appears twice in the August segment: on August 6, when she "gott Mrs. Norths web [of cloth] out at the Loomes," and on August 7-8, when she was at Mrs. Williams's, where there was illness. Whether she was doing nursing or housework at the Williamses' we do not know, nor does it matter. In this period the occupations of nurse and maidservant overlapped. Hannah was probably a sister of Mrs. Williams, whose maiden name was Cool. Like most single women, she moved frequently between the homes of relatives and neigh-~~

~~hors, performing whatever sort of work was needed. (Her sister Peggy died of the canker rash at Dr. Cony's, where she was also a servant.) Hannah was older and more skilled than most household helpers, however, capable of warping a loom as well as nursing. Living with Martha Ballard, she may have picked up some medical skills as well. In the spring of 1788, when Joseph Williams was critically ill and "went to Dr Williams to be Doc-tered," Martha noted that "Hannah Cool went to be his nurse."⁶⁷~~

~~"Mrs Patin" and "Capt Sewall & Lady" were married folks fulfilling basic obligations of neighborliness. Sally Patten was the wife of Thomas Patten, the blacksmith. Martha Ballard had delivered their first child a year earlier. "Capt Sewall & Lady" were, of course, Henry and Tabitha, whom we have met before. In watching with little James Howard, they were returning the help they had received earlier that month when their own child was dying of the rash. Their obligation wasn't to Mrs. Howard in particular—she had been too busy nursing Isabella to have helped with the care of Billy—but to the common fund of neighborliness that sustained families in illness. Neither poverty nor wealth nor a recent bereavement excused one from helping where there was need. Henry's presence at the Howard house was somewhat unusual, however. Usually men sat with men, women with women or children. There is no entry in his diary for August 10, though he did note on August 14 that "Mr. McMaster buried a son, in his 4 year. It died of a canker rash."⁶⁸~~

~~Merriam Pollard represents a different form of social healing. The wife of Amos Pollard, the tavern and ferry keeper, she was the mother of at least seven children, most of whom were grown. She represents a group of perhaps ten women who served as general care-givers to the town. A frequent watcher at bed-sides and attendant at deliveries, she was particularly skilled in laying out the dead. She was not a midwife, at least not yet, though she did deliver one child when Martha was delayed.~~

~~Seeing Hannah Cool, Sally Patten, and Merriam Pollard at a single instant, an experienced observer could easily have distin-~~

~~quished between them.~~ One was simply a servant, the second a helpful neighbor, the third a recognized healer. The tasks that they performed were also distinct. Given the dominant therapies, Hannah Cool must have spent her time brewing tea, spooning gruel, and emptying chamber pots. Sally Patten had the most passive role. As a watcher, her job was to sit beside the patient, offering comfort or conversation, noting alterations in breathing, color, or demeanor, summoning help when it was needed. Merriam Pollard had more specialized tasks to perform. Like Martha Ballard, she knew how to swab swollen tonsils, change dressings, apply plasters, and administer a clister. She was also prepared, when the time came, to wash and dress the dead, easing eyelids and limbs into sleeplike dignity.

Yet each of these women could, over the course of a lifetime, encompass all these roles—and others besides. The social construction of healing allowed the free flow of information from one level to another. Administering a doctor's or midwife's prescription, feeding the fire under a bubbling syrup, shifting and turning a sister in bed, helping with the stitching on a child's shroud, watching, listening, soaking in attitudes of hand and eye, susceptible helpers found their callings. Martha Ballard probably started out very much like Hannah Cool, doing nursing as well as housework for her relatives or neighbors. Once married, she would have had less freedom for general nursing but more scope for perfecting the gardening and cookery that were so closely associated with herbal medicine. As a young matron she no doubt watched with sick neighbors and assisted at births, until in midlife, with her own child-rearing responsibilities diminished, she became a more frequent helper and eventually a healer and midwife. Midwives were the best paid of all the female healers, not only because they officiated at births, but because they encompassed more skills, broader experience, longer memory. "Mrs Patin with me." The social base of female medicine is apparent in the very casualness of the entry. A midwife was the most visible and experienced person in a community of healers who shared her perspective, her obligations, her training, and her labor.

There is no need to sentimentalize this "female world of love and ritual," to use Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's now famous phrase, or to understand that birth, illness, and death wove Talbot's female community together. Consider two bland sentences from the entry for August 14, the day of William McMaster's funeral: "Mrs Patten here," and then later, "I drank Tea at Mr Pollards." Both visits—Sally Patten to Martha Ballard and Martha Ballard to Merriam Pollard—were continuations of meetings at the bedsides of gravely ill children. Recall that Merriam Pollard had "sitt up" with Martha at the Howards' two days earlier, and that Sally Patten, who had come to the McMasters' to watch with Billy, had helped Martha prepare his body for burial. Since Merriam and Martha were old friends, their tea party is easily explained, but what of Sally Patten's visit to Martha? What led her up the path toward the mills? Presumably she had crossed the river to attend Billy McMaster's funeral, but Martha's house was three-quarters of a mile beyond the meeting house. Her visit cannot have been a casual one. Was it a practical errand that brought her there, or a deeper need to consolidate the experience she had shared a few hours before? Even for Martha, the nightwatch had been profoundly disturbing. What must it have meant for a young mother still new to the circle of matrons?

Eighteenth-century physicians, like twentieth-century historians, had difficulty distinguishing one social healer from another, yet they understood the power of their presence. William Smellie, who wrote an important English obstetrical treatise, displayed an acute consciousness of the female audience for any medical intervention. Cautioning young physicians not to do anything to make "the gossips uneasy," he explained the importance of reassuring both the patient and her "friends."⁷⁰ The word "friends" appears repeatedly in doctors' writings from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century. The label is a telling one: female healers identified with the patients they served in ways that male physicians could not.

Little wonder that some physicians actively resented their presence. William Buchan, author of the immensely popular *Do-*

social web. Clearly, some activities in an eighteenth-century town brought men and women together. Others defined their separateness.

September 4, 1787: "Mr Ballard gone to Mr James Pages on public business.... I have been at home. The Girls washed. Any account of gender definition in early America must begin with just such a contrast. Public business belonged to men, housework to women. In the past twenty years, that notion of "separate spheres" has shaped women's history. For many, the essential inquiry has been when and how women moved beyond the confining circle of domestic concerns into the larger world. Some have argued that the American Revolution connected women's private activities to the public sphere by publicizing their contributions to domestic manufacturing and stimulating a new appreciation of their roles as wives and mothers. Others believe it was women's activities in voluntary societies in the early nineteenth century that first gave them an identity within and beyond the household.³

Martha's diary complicates both arguments without challenging the evidence upon which they are based. There were no visible female organizations in Hallowell in the late eighteenth century, nor is there any evidence that Martha's identity was affected by republican ideology. The diary makes quite clear that men *did* monopolize public business, that households *were* formally patriarchal, and that women *did* uncritically assume that houses and even babies belonged to men and that the proper way to identify a married woman was by reference to her husband, as in "the wife of old Mr Springer Departed this Life this morn[ing]." Yet it also shows a complex web of social and economic exchange that engaged women beyond the household. Women in eighteenth-century Hallowell had no political life, but they *did* have a community life. The base of that community life was a gender division of labor that gave them responsibility for particular tasks, products, and forms of trade.

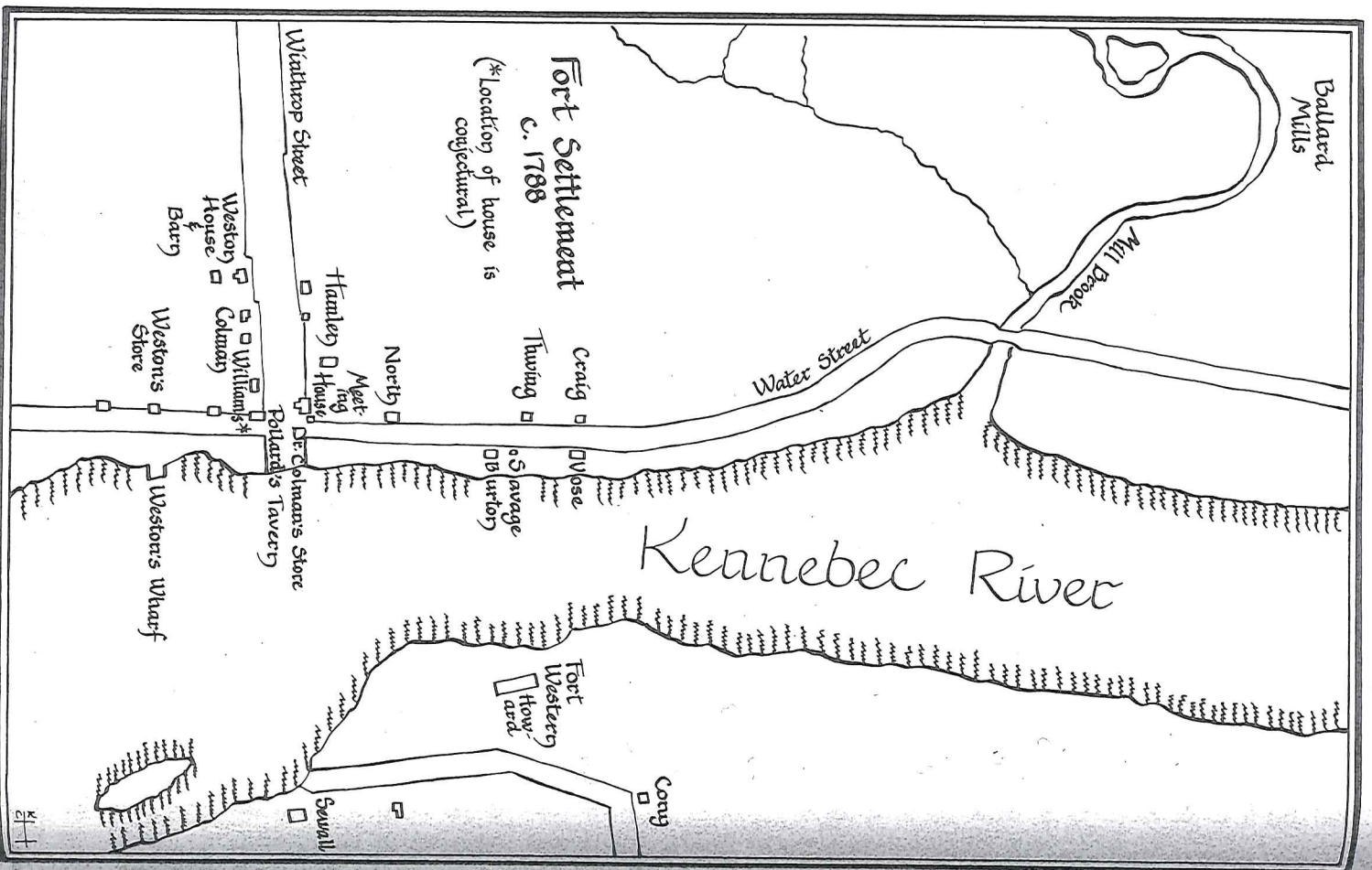
"Clear day. Thee Town Mett," Martha began her entry for September 9, 1788, adding in the margin, "I have been at home." There was no irony in the juxtaposition of those state-

ments. In political terms "thee Town" was an indigo square. When Ephraim Ballard (who was serving as selectman and town clerk in 1788) issued the warrant summoning the "freeholders and other Inhabitants of the Town of Hallowell qualified to vote" to the meeting house, he was addressing the adult male population.⁴ The men had much to talk about on September 9. As Ephraim reported it in the official minutes, a "paper signed by the Reverend Isaac Foster containing some terms which he proposed for a dismission, had two several Readings."⁵ That Martha cared about that business is certain ("Thee Town Mett to hear Revd Mr Fosters Proposals, but did not except them," she wrote), but she had more to do than sit home waiting for Ephraim to bring the news. Her full diary entry for September 9 restores women to a history that might otherwise bleach their lives into anonymity:

Dolly & Parthena went to see Mrs Hamlin. Mrs Savage here. Shee has spun 40 double skeins for me since April 15th and had 2 Bushl of ashes & some phisic for James & Dolly gave her 7 yds of Diaper. I let her have 1 skein of lining [linen] warp. The whole is 6/X.

While the men of Hallowell were at the meeting house conducting public business, Martha and her neighbor were completing some private business of their own.

There was nothing new in such behavior. New England women had long been engaged in barter and trade. The skein of linen warp that Martha gave Mrs. Savage on September 9 symbolizes the household production that characterized pre-industrial life, the neighborly trade that made such production possible, and the gender division of labor that assured women a place in economic life.⁶ There is a striking congruence between the Hallowell textile economy and the system of social medicine described in Chapter One. Spinning, like nursing, was a universal female occupation, a "domestic" duty, integrated into a complex system of neighborly exchange. In both realms, training was communal and cumulative, work was cooperative, even



though performed in private households, and the products remained in the local economy. The most experienced weavers, all of them women, extended the skills of their female neighbors in much the same way midwives extended the abilities of nurses and watchers. Men broke flax, sheared sheep, and performed other supportive services (just as they fetched and transported midwives and sat up with their male neighbors), but women had primary responsibility for the production of cloth. As in medicine, elite males connected the Kennebec with the Atlantic, importing finished cloth and raw cotton from Britain and the West Indies, commodities that women transformed into usable products.⁷

A closer look at textile production in the Ballard family helps us to see the complexity of this system. When Martha's diary opened in 1785, Hannah and Dolly already knew how to operate the great woolen wheel and the smaller flax wheel that the family owned. In the next two years they produced hundreds of skeins of cotton, wool, linen, and tow thread, most of which their mother carried to others to weave.⁸ In May of 1787, the family began assembling the equipment needed for weaving. Cyrus brought home "the bars & other utensils for weaving" on May 19, 1787, and a few days later his father spent part of a day "fixing the loom." Martha did her part by combing flax, "doubling yarn for the harness," and "quilling," while her husband fetched a kettle from the Savage house for "boiling a Lining warp." Dorcas Pollard warped the loom for the first time on May 25 and Hannah Cool "set the webb to work." These two young women helped to instruct Hannah Ballard, who was responsible for the web of forty yards that came out of the loom on July 4. On July 5, in preparation for the next round of weaving, Martha went to Mrs. Savage's to borrow a "sleigh" (an implement for controlling the pattern of a weave). Unfortunately, Mrs. Williams had already taken the one she wanted. Two weeks later she was successful in getting another from Merriam Pollard.¹⁰

Although Hannah and Dolly learned to weave check, diaper, huckaback, worsted, dimity, woolen "shirting," towels, blan-

kets, "rag coverlids," and lawn handkerchiefs, as well as "plain cloth," the exchanges with neighbors continued. Merriam Pollard continued to "instruct Dolly about her weaving" until the girls were able to return some of her services in kind, as on September 11, 1788: "Dolly warp'd a piece for Mrs Pollard of 39 yards." Trading fiber and yarn, borrowing tools and kettles, the Ballards contributed to their own self-sufficiency and strengthened their bonds with their neighbors. ~~The intimacy of the textile network is suggested in a diary entry for April 20, 1790:~~

"Cyrus borrowed a 40 sleigh of the widow Coburn for Dolly to weave a piece for Benjamin Porter."¹¹

That mother, father, daughters, and at least one son were all involved in setting up the weaving operation supports Ruth Schwartz Cowan's point that in early America, men and women had to work in tandem in order to undertake any single life-sustaining chore.¹² On closer examination, however, what is most striking about the Ballard economy is the independence of men's and women's labors, not only in production but in management and utilization of resources. "Mr Savage made the irons for our Loom," Martha wrote on May 21, 1787. "I paid him 4 shillings in cash." After all, Martha was willing to bake bread or mend pads for Ephraim's surveying journeys; that he was willing to sow flax and set up the loom for her is hardly surprising. This is the kind of cooperativeness one might expect of family members. That either activity was part of a fully integrated family economy seems far-fetched. There were really two family economies in the Ballard household, one managed by ~~Martha, the other by Ephraim.~~

It is no accident that Martha's midwifery practice accelerated at exactly the same time as her daughters began to weave. Freedom from childbearing was one prerequisite for a midwife's work. A secure supply of household help was another. An entry for October 26, 1789, puts it succinctly: "My girls spun 23 double skeins & wove 27 1/2 yds last week & did the houswork besides." By expanding textile production, Martha provided household help for herself and an occupation for her girls. She was not the sort of woman to turn her daughters into household

drudges, even if she could afford to. Hannah and Dolly needed skills to sustain their future families as well as ways to contribute to their own support in the present. Weaving was the perfect solution: It could be accomplished at home. It could be coordinated with other chores. It produced many of the items—bedsheets, ticking, blankets, towels, and coverlets—the girls would need in their future homes.

~~An alternate solution would have been to keep one mother at home and send the daughters out. This was what Martha's younger sister Dorothy Barton was forced to do. Perhaps "forced" is too strong a word. Living for a while outside one's own family was a kind of education for young women in this period—Hannah Ballard, for example, spent eight months in Oxford in 1785, living with her "Aunt Waters" and other relatives. Still, economic necessity seems to have played some part in the Bartons' case. Dorothy gave birth to six daughters before a son survived, a fact that may account for the difficulty her husband had in establishing a farm in Maine.¹³ Stephen and Dorothy Barton returned to Oxford in 1788, leaving their oldest daughters behind. Clarissa and Pamela had both spent some time with Martha Ballard, Pamela none too happily. "Pamela has spun 5 skeins of Linning this week & been to Wintthrop," Martha wrote drily in May of 1787. Pamela's sister Parthenia was a more satisfactory worker. She arrived on May 26, 1788, and, with occasional periods away working for other families, remained until her marriage in November of 1792. It was perhaps her presence that allowed Hannah to go to Oxford.¹⁴~~

We have already seen how a family mode of production encompassed wide-reaching exchanges with neighbors. Hallowell women exchanged daughters the way they exchanged kettles and sleighs, though as the girls grew older they themselves were responsible for negotiating their own terms and collecting their own wages. In slack times a woman might willingly part with her helpers, calling them home again when needed. Martha combined the long-term help of her daughters and niece with short-term help from other women. Married daughters were also integrated into this network of exchange. ~~When Lucy~~

Towns suffered a "broken breast" after the birth of her fifth child, Martha dispatched Dolly to Winslow. Later Parthenia spent more than a month nursing Lucy during another postpartum crisis. Conversely, when Hannah had her first baby, Lucy sent her current helper (her sister-in-law Betsy Barton) to nurse her.¹⁵

In addition to family workers, Martha utilized the short-term help of neighbors. Between 1785 and 1800, thirty-nine young women lived and worked for some period in the Ballard house; almost all were the daughters of local men in the middle range of the town's hierarchy. In contrast to other parts of America, there were no slaves in Hallowell in the late eighteenth century, and few indentured servants.¹⁶ The vast majority of household helpers in Hallowell were single "girls" between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five, young women who fully expected to become mistresses of their own houses. Two of Martha's helpers, Polly Savage and Sarah Neal, had babies born out of wedlock, and two, Betsy Barton and Jane Welch, were widows, but these were the exceptions. The only married woman employed in Martha's house was Beulah Prince, a free black. The vast majority of Hallowell helpers were single women who alternated work at home with work "abroad," spending a week or two spinning at a neighbor's house, going home to help with the harvest, moving on to a sister's house where there was illness, going back to the first house or to another to spin or wash.

Such a drifting and shifting of workers was part of the larger system of neighborly exchange that sustained male as well as female economies in this period. Cyrus went "to Gardner's mill" to work on September 11, 1788, because the family mills were still silent; when the mills were restored he would work once more at home. But though the fire had temporarily disrupted the male side of the family economy, it had not disturbed the women's work. Understanding that helps to explain an event that would otherwise be puzzling: in the months following the burning of the sawmill, the Ballards remodeled and improved their house. Certainly Ephraim had a significant income as a surveyor and Martha's midwifery practice was grow-

ing, yet it seems incomprehensible that the Ballards would make capital improvements in the house at the very time they faced the task of rebuilding the mills. Incomprehensible, unless we realize that the house was every bit as much a workplace as the sawmill, and that plastering and closing in the upstairs chambers would provide more room for weaving. In earlier years the girls had moved their beds into the unfinished upstairs chambers in the spring, bringing them back down into the lower rooms in autumn. Now they would have bedrooms year round, and additional space to work.¹⁷

Theophilus Hamlin "Laid a floor" in the west chamber in October and in the east chamber in November. He also made improvements to the two lower rooms, finishing his carpentry work on December 22, when he "maid a Book Caise & put it up in the East room." Hamlin's work probably settled an unpaid debt for board. Three years before he had arrived at the Ballard house from Oxford, bringing letters from the Moore relatives and news of old acquaintances. He had spent at least a month there, helping Cyrus run the mill on one April night and on another getting out of bed with the other men to secure drifting logs. He was not an employee of the mills, however, but an independent tradesman eager to establish a place in the town. Boarding with the Ballards was a preliminary step to establishing his own household, which he did on July 16, 1788, when he brought his bride, Hannah Rockwood, from Oxford to set up housekeeping in the neighborhood near the meeting house.¹⁸

On September 9, 1788, the day of the town meeting, while Martha and Mrs. Savage were settling accounts, Dolly Ballard and her cousin Parthenia "went to see Mrs Hamlin." The girls had first gone calling on July 27. Their September visit may also have been a social call, though Hannah Hamlin, like her husband, was soon participating in the neighborhood economy. "Mrs. Hamlin wound and warp't a piece here," Martha wrote on November 4, and again on December 8 and December 15. The precise nature of these exchanges is not clear. Hannah may have been setting up the loom for the Ballard girls, or she may have been borrowing the Ballards' equipment to do her own work.

Brooks, and Joseph North.³⁶ Martha called at Howard's house, noted the illness of North's daughter, and acknowledged the presence at the delivery of Susanna Cony Howard Brooks (the "Mrs Howard" of Chapter One). Only the Vaughans are missing from her description. In fact, they seldom appear in the diary. Ephraim Ballard did surveying for "Mr Yahn," but Martha apparently had no contact with the family. She never mentions Dr. Benjamin Vaughan, Charles's brother, or any of the women. She may never have met them. Latecomers to the region, the Vaughans remained somewhat aloof from their Kennebec neighbors, though the doctor, at least (as we shall see in Chapter Seven), fancied himself a benefactor of the town.³⁷

Beneath the eminence of the Howards, Brooks, Norths, and Vaughans, Hallowell's wealth distribution was remarkably even. As in many New England towns, wealth was a matter of age more than of class. Sixty-five percent of the men on the list, many of them very young, paid less than three shillings tax. Supply Belcher and Jesse Vose, the husbands of two of the other attendants at the birth, were in that group, as was Henry Sewall, the father. Ephraim Ballard, assessed at four shillings two pence, was among the top 20 percent of the town's taxpayers, as were Amos Pollard and Samuel Colman, the spouses of Tabitha Sewall's other attendants. The poorest (or youngest) men in the town were assessed only a poll tax. These included Anderson Taylor, probably a relative of Polly.³⁸ (Anderson may have been the "Taylor" who went with Jonathan Ballard to Pownalboro on September 4, 1788, to see the execution.) Thus, in a single brief entry in the diary, Martha covered the full spectrum of affluence in the town.

Such a description gives deeper meaning to the metaphor of the web. Economic and social differences might divide a community; the unseen acts of women wove it together. From the Book of Proverbs ("She stretcheth out her hand to the poor") to countless sermons in New England churches from the seventeenth through the nineteenth century, women were praised for their ability to reach out to others in need, regardless of wealth or social position. Four years after Martha's birth, the

Reverend Mr. Jared Eliot of Killingsworth, Connecticut, eulogized a local midwife in such terms: "Her Ear was open to the Complaints of the Afflicted, and her Hand was open for the Supply of the Needy." She was also above dissension: "If others were so Unhappy as to divide into Parties, and to burn with Contention, yet she remain'd a Common Friend to all."³⁹

Martha's diary reflects the same ethic. As a midwife she was bound to serve anyone who needed her, regardless of their social position. She was not a democrat, but she was benevolent. In the same month when "Edmond Fortes of the State of Virginia, a Negro man, with his wife and children," was warned out of the town, she delivered "Black Edmund's" wife, "Lydia," of a son.⁴⁰ Her charitableness showed itself not only in physical caring but in a reluctance to pass judgment on her neighbors' behavior. "Mrs McNight sleeps here. Her Husband hastened her out a Dores as shee says," she wrote on December 14, 1787, offering no additional detail on the family fight. Martha would not turn the woman away, but neither would she record without qualification the story of the abusive husband. She was perhaps restrained by the stereotype of the gossipy midwife as much as by her own deeply held Christian values. There is very little of what might be considered gossip in Martha's diary, though after seeing Calvin Edson lying in the road drunk, she offered a special prayer for his newborn daughter: "May God Almighty bless her and help her to shun her father's wicked example."

While other Hallowell folk were busy suing one another, Martha self-consciously excised contention from her diary. In a rare admission of trouble, she noted, "I went to Mrs Westons afternoon. Mr Brooks there. Shew dislike at my informing Mrs Weston of some affairs which hapned in the school."⁴¹ Yet even here she masked the details of the offense with that vague label "some affairs." She seldom went even that far in mentioning disagreement, or potential disagreements, with neighbors.

The Eliot sermon, like many published in the early eighteenth century, played on the disparity between the value of women's contributions and their seeming invisibility. "To denigrate a

CHAPTER THREE

OCTOBER 1789

*"Mrs Foster has sworn a Rape
on a number of men"*

SEPTEMBER

30 4 *I was at Mrs Husseys*

Clear Except a lite shower afternoon. I went to Captain Herseys, Mr Whites & Esquire Husseys. Had 6 lbs of sheeps wool of the old Lady which is to go towards what they owe Mr Ballard. I was Called to Mr Fosters door & askt some questions. *Colonel North interogated me Concerning what conversation Mrs Foster had with me Concerning his Conduct.**

OCTOBER

1 5 *I have been at home.*

Clear Except some showers. We had Company this afternoon. Mrs Hannah North, Mrs Chever & a Mrs Weston from Cohors. Mr Savage here. Informs that Mrs Foster has sworn a Rape on a number of men among whom is Judge North. Shocking indeed.

*This last sentence begins in the right margin but spills over into the space below the regular entry and is separated from it by a line. The sentence appears to have been added later.

2 *At Mr Goffs*

A rainy morn. I was called at 4th hour morn to Mrs Goff who was in travil. I walkt to Daviss Store, crost the river & went by land on hors back. Arrivd at the 6th hour. Old Mrs Goff returned from Boston at 1 hour pm. I tarried there this night.

3 7 *At M. Goffs. His first grand child Born.*

Clear. Mrs. Jackson & Mrs. Stickney went home. I slept an hour this morning. Mrs. Goffs illness increast & shee was safe delivrd at 11 hour & 30 minute morn of a daughter. Her marn, Mrs Bullin, Mrs Ney were my assistants. Mrs Jacon Came back at 1 h p.m. I returnd home at 6 afternoon. Find Mr Ballard returnd from his tower of surveying yesterday. Mr Bullin from the westward informs me Colo Thomson of Bilrick has Buried his only Child. Mr Burdun & wife here *Birth John Goffs daughter. First child. X X*

4 D *I have been at home.*

Cloudy. Wind South East. I have been at home. Pikt green peas in our gardin. Josh Sinclear brot us a barril of herin smokt. My girls went to Mr Hamlins at evening. Hannah tarries there. A rainy night.

5 2 *I have been at home. Received 1 1/2 Bushel of rie of Captain Hersey as reward for assisting his Lady.*

A rainy day. I combd 1 lb of flax for myself & 4 for Cyrus. Mr Ballard went to Captain Coxes. Hannah is at Mr Hamlins. Polly Savage here. Drank Tea. Mr Savage returnd Jonathans hors which he rode to Green. I am informd there was a man Drownd in Jones Eddy who Came passage from Boston with Captain Howard.

6 3 *I have been at home.*

A very rainy day. I Combd flax. Mr Ballard went to Esquir Coneyes & to Town meeting. Thee swep of one of the mills got off the crank so neither of them were tended this night.

7 4 *I have been at home. It is 12 years since I left Oxford.*
 Clear. Mitty Devenpord dind. Joshua Sinclair & Mr Richardson
 drank tea. I finisht combing my flax. Had 10 lb Tear. My girls
 washt.

8 5 *At Mr Daws. There was a muster of the troops & regiment*
 Clear & pleasant. I was Calld at the 8th hour morn to Mr Daws
 at the hook to his wife in travil. The rigament & troop Con-
 vened there on Mr Shuball Hinkleys Land. I tarried with Mrs
 Daw till Evn when shee had her women. She remained ill
 through the night.

9 6 *At dices. His wife is the 32d woman I have put to Bed since*
February 5th.

Clear forenoon. Cloudy afternoon. Mrs Daw was safe delivered
 at the 6th hour this morn of a fine son which weighd 11 lb. I
 tarried with her till 4 pm then Came to Mr Densmores. Tarried
 all night.

Birth Mr Daws son, the 4th, X X

10 7 *At Mr Densmores & Trues. Mr Hatch went from here.*

Clear & very pleasant. I went to Mr Trues to see Genny Coy.
 Find her more Comfortable, then retourned home. Mr Hatch &
 wife & Rufus Ballard here. Son Town Been here. Infomms his
 famely are well & that Mrs Barton was delivrd of a son the 8th
 instant. The Reverend Mr Isaac Foster removd to Varsalboro
 this day. Mr Ballard is gone to the hook.

11 D *At home*

Clear. We had Chickens for dinner. This day is the Aneversary
 of the Ordination of the Reverend Isaac Foster over the Church
 & flock in this Town three years since.



The town historians have had much to say about the Reverend
 Mr. Isaac Foster, about his calling and ordination, his encounters

with Henry Sewall, and his eventual dismissal by the town. They have had nothing at all to say about his wife, Rebecca. Except for a few cryptic documents in the records of the Supreme Judicial Court and a tantalizing set of entries in Martha's diary, her story is lost. "Mrs Foster has sworn a Rape on a number of men among whom is Judge North," Martha wrote on October 1, 1789, without further explanation. It is tempting to superimpose the controversies that dominate Isaac's story—the theological argument between Calvinists and liberals, or the practical problem of sustaining a tax-supported church in a religiously divided town—on Rebecca's, but that approach does nothing to explain her troubles. If anything, Joseph North had been a supporter and ally of her husband. Her accusation is an ugly tear in local history, an unexplained rent in the social web.

Still, Isaac's story is a necessary prelude to Rebecca's. Tracing it out through Martha's diary and through parallel entries in Henry Sewall's gives us some insight into the religious complexities of the town, into Martha's own religious temper, and ultimately into her response to the trial for rape.

Isaac Foster arrived in Hallowell in April of 1786, preached on probation for the next few weeks, accepted a call from the town in August, was ordained in October, and almost immediately began to tangle with disaffected evangelicals. This is the story that is told so compellingly in Henry Sewall's diary, the story that the town historians have preserved. It is a narrative dreadfully familiar to anyone who knows the ecclesiastical history of eighteenth-century New England. In fact Martha's own brother, Jonathan Moore, would go through the same process in Rochester, Massachusetts, four years later, and for much the same reasons—he was too liberal in theology and too illiberal in his dealings with his neighbors.¹

Henry Sewall had himself experienced a profound religious conversion a short while after coming to the Kennebec in 1783. In an unbroken stretch of woods somewhere between Pownalboro and Hallowell, "light and peace broke in upon his mind."

who measured life in "doing for others" might be expected to enjoy a sermon on Matthew 25, the chapter in which Jesus distinguished those on his right and his left hand, the sheep and the goats, according to whether they had fed the hungry, clothed the naked, or comforted the afflicted. For her, theological speculations about the nature of the final judgment probably mattered less than Christ's remembering who had "performed" well in daily life, who had offered service to "the least of these."

For Martha, attending church was a pleasant duty, especially if the sermon was well delivered. "Public worship," as she termed it, was not a calling out from ordinary life but a validation of it. Seeing her friends and neighbors gathered in orderly rows in the meeting house confirmed her place in the universe and in the town. She was pleased to see a "young Gentleman" in the pulpit. Henry Sewall, on the other hand, went to church to be awakened, not to be "agreeably entertained." For him there was a radical disjunction between worship and ordinary life. He expected the heavens to open.

As the ordination drew near, Sewall fasted and prayed with the brethren at Esquire Pettingill's, then composed a list of seven objections, which he presented to the ordination council gathered in Hallowell on October 11. He was not successful in blocking the nomination. Though his presentation "took up the forenoon" and the delegates debated the matter "till near sunset," they then "proceeded to the meeting house, & laid hands on the Candidate." Sewall had made enough of an impression, however, that the next day two members of the council visited him to give "the reason of their laying hands on Mr. Foster—viz that he did in the most solemn manner before the council, profess to hold fully to all the cardinal points in the calvinistic scheme of divinity—& also gave a full account of a work of saving grace on his own soul!!!!!! If he *speaks truth*," Sewall concluded with apparent irony, "he is a christian!"

For the rest of Foster's ministry, Sewall boycotted public worship, preferring the purity—and perhaps the intimacy—of the private meetings. "Met with a few brethren at Esquire Pettingill's," he had written after one such gathering. "Had meat

to eat which the world knows not of." For her part, Martha was more interested in the common kind of meat. "Mr. Foster here," she wrote on February 7, 1787. "Mr. Ballard carried him some meat from Cyrus and sause from our selves."

The Fosters had recently moved from Thomas Sewall's house to the Ballards' neighborhood. Ephraim brought in a load of firewood and found a man to help make "a kirk" for the minister's well. On February 21 Martha "began a Bingen Stockin for Lady Foster"; on March 3 she "finisht Mrs Foster's shoes," and on March 6 she joined Mrs. Weston and Mrs. Pollard for an afternoon's visit. The next day "Mr. Foster & Lady" dined at the Ballards'. Small courtesies, petty exchanges, casual visits incorporated the minister's wife into the female community.

Rebecca Foster was twenty-seven years old when she arrived in Hallowell, exactly the same age as Martha's oldest daughter, Lucy Towne, though she probably seemed younger, having been married only a short time. Her first child, named Isaac for his father and grandfather, was still an infant.⁸ She was born in Lebanon, Connecticut, a town with a rather exotic history. Not only was it the home of Hannah Brewster, one of the few published female poets in New England, it was the site of an Indian Charity School established by Eleazar Wheelock, who later founded Dartmouth College. (Rebecca's father, James Newcomb, had contributed financially to the school.)⁹ Whether the example of Hannah Brewster and other outspoken sisters in the Congregational church of Lebanon had affected her, we do not know; but there is a terse entry in Martha Ballard's diary which suggests that some part of her Lebanon heritage had followed her to Hallowell. "I was at Mrs Fosters," Martha wrote on August 22, 1787. "Indians there."

These may have been local Indians. Probably they were Christianized Indians, perhaps missionaries associated with Wheelock's movement. ~~James O'Connor is the most famous of these. O'Connor's missionary companion in England in the 1760s, Nathaniel Whitaker, had been pastor in Canaan (now Skowhegan), Maine, since 1784. A physician as well as a minister, Whitaker was an occasional visitor to the Ballard house. "Doctor~~

mistress had "took Cold" and that her breast was painful, Martha rushed to her aid. By the time the breast infection was cleared up, the minister was again in bed. Martha sat up with him all through the night on November 4. By November 18, he was back in the pulpit, though still able to "perform . . . but one Exercise by reason of his weakness." The following spring, it was little Isaac who was ill. Martha diagnosed "the salt rhume."¹²

On April 2, 1788, though Henry's diary took no notice, Martha walked over the still frozen river to deliver Tabitha. Henry was still boycotting public worship, the private meetings now being held most Sundays in his own house. On March 9, he had invited a visiting pastor to dinner. "Mr. Smith attended Mr. Foster's meeting for his own satisfaction; which he amply obtained," he wrote.¹³ On May 1, Henry Sewall and Ephraim Ballard were both present for a justice's court in which Thomas Sewall won three shillings plus costs from Isaac Foster for "house hire."¹⁴ By June the battle had moved back to Pownallboro. Foster was once again suing Henry for defamation. That case was continued to the following term, but in a separate action the minister successfully defended himself against a Boston creditor. The stakes had moved from shillings to pounds. "Met at my house," Henry reported the next day. "Had a full meeting in the afternoon—Mr. Foster not having returned."¹⁵ The following Sabbath Isaac Foster preached from Micah 6:8: "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God."¹⁶

Henry left Hallowell in July 1788 for an eighteen-month stay in New York City. The war continued without him. As Isaac Foster's creditors initiated an appeal, Rebecca again struggled with illness. Though she had earlier called Dr. Colman to attend her, on August 1, early in the morning, she summoned Martha, who found her "very unwell. Her Breast is Likely to Break." Martha "aplyd a politis of Sorril & returned home," but two days later the patient was still "very distrest." On August 4, after spending most of the day nursing her, Martha gave in to the

inevitable. "I open'd her breast. It discharged a Larg quantity. I left her much more comfortable." Rebecca's youngest child was eleven months old.

On September 14, Martha "attended worship in public" and heard Isaac Foster deliver "two Exelent Discourses from Psalm 90 & 12 vers." The text, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply *our* hearts unto wisdom," was too pointed to have been accidental. Foster's days were indeed numbered. Five days before, the town had met to consider his dismissal. They canceled his contract on October 30, called a church council in early November, and formally dismissed him on December 18. Perhaps the disaffection was mutual. In a letter to the town dated December 18, 1788, he said, "I have long been desirous a dismission should take place." Certainly theological issues had something to do with the pastor's troubles, but his habit of suing his enemies may have had more. His financial difficulties may have been a concern on both sides; certainly the key issue in negotiating the dismissal was how much money the town would have to pay. Foster asked for two hundred pounds and eventually got a hundred, not a bad sum after two years' service.

Martha attended the Church Council held November 20—21 at Pollard's Tavern in Hallowell. If this council was like most others, it considered a broad range of issues, doctrinal and personal. In Jonathan Moore's case, for example, there were at least nine different articles ranging from accusations of lying to insinuations that the minister had "abused" his wife by failing to provide necessities in season. In Rochester, a single-minded parishoner with the militia rank of major had pursued Jonathan Moore as doggedly as Colonel Sewall had pursued Isaac Foster in Hallowell.¹⁷ Yet Foster's troubles had as much to do with general structural problems in New England's religious establishment as with anything he or his opponents did or did not do. The old system of town-supported churches could not accommodate the religious diversity that now existed. In fact, two of the five ministers who participated in Foster's ordination were themselves deposed within five years. When a ministerial

association was formed in Lincoln County in 1790, eight of the twelve participating churches were without pastors.¹⁸

The Rochester council had "bemoaned" and "deprecat[ed]" the "strife and bitter contention" in their town, urging Jonathan Moore and his opponents to "lay aside all wrath, anger, malice & revenge & put on bowels of Compassion one towards another" for the sake of the church and of the "rising generation." That was no more likely to happen in Rochester than in Hallowell as long as the state tolerated dissent while clinging to the notion of a single tax-supported church. A hundred years earlier, a group like Henry Sewall's would have been fined for repeated absence from church. That a rival society could flourish outside the meeting house shows how far religious pluralism had already come. The next step, of course, was to ask for exemption from taxes, and in fact the dissenting brethren did just that in the town meeting that considered Isaac Foster's dismissal.

When their petition was denied, they and the neighboring ministers came up with an ingenious solution. With Isaac Foster out of the pulpit, they tried to organize a church. Since the town already had a legitimately constituted Congregational church, this was legally impossible. The council debated the matter and concluded that since several members of Sewall's society, including Henry's brother Jotham, actually lived in Chester, thirty miles away, they could establish a Chester church—though it would continue to meet in Hallowell. So it was that Hallowell acquired two Congregational churches in 1790, organized along doctrinal lines.

Although the town formally barred Isaac Foster from the pulpit on December 18, 1788, he remained in Hallowell for most of the following year, haggling with the town over the terms of his dismissal and attempting to settle the debts that rapidly accumulated. "Mr Ballard & I were Seited to give out deposition concerning what we heard Judge Howard & his widow say about some Beef he gave the reverend Mr Foster," Martha wrote on June 24, 1789. By the middle of October she could note that Charles Webber was "ataatching peoples Effects on

account of what Mr Foster owes him." Within a town debts and counterdebts might accumulate for years without anyone asking for a reckoning, but once the social web was broken neighbors rushed to get their due. It was during this difficult period, when the Fosters were neither in nor out of the town, that the alleged rape occurred.

"Mr Savage here. Informs that Mrs Foster has sworn a Rape on a number of men among whom is Judge North. Shocking indeed." The news that Mr. Savage brought was shocking, but not as unexpected in real life as in the diary. Martha had known something of Rebecca Foster's complaints for more than six weeks, though she carefully avoided describing them in her diary. The entry for August 19, 1789, the day Rebecca first confided her troubles, is as bland as any in the diary: "Call'd at Mr Westons, Pollards, Mrs Fosters & Mr Savages. Came home at 1 h pm feel fatigud." Nothing more. Again on August 25 a bare report: "I went to see Mrs Foster. Burtun & wife and Mrs Cooskin here." If Martha and Ephraim had not been summoned to Vassalboro on December 23 to give evidence "in the Cause between this Commonwealth & Joseph North Esquire," we would know no more. Perhaps concerned that she would have to repeat her testimony later before a full court, she sat and wrote all she could remember of what Rebecca had told her during those August visits. This account is the only surviving testimony in the Foster case. All that remains in the official court records is the formal indictment, an expense account, and the verdict.

My testimony was that Mrs Foster on the 19 of August Complained to me that shee had received great abuses from people unknown to her, such as throwing stones at her house, striving to get in & Lodg with her. After relating those abuses [she] said that was not the worst shee had met with since Mr Fosters absence, but shee hoped they would not quite kill her, that they Could do nothing wors

than they had unless they killed her. She also said that said North had abused her worse than any other person in the world had, but she believed it was best for her to keep her troubles to her Selfe as much as shee Could till her Husband returnd which shee hopt would be soon.

The diary entry continued, filling a full page and parts of two others:

Shee also Complained on the 25 (if I remember the day aright) of said Norths treating her worse than any other person had & said he did go after an other woman besides his own wife & that his wife was jealous of him. Shee seemd Exceedingly troubled when she related her tryals but not being askt any question for information did not descend to particulars relating to the Charges she now Laies at that time, which was the last time I Conversd with her while her Husband was absent.

Quiet listening. No questions. Martha was unwilling to invite any more information than she was given unbidden. No gossip, the bare facts were all anyone was going to get from her. There would be no speculation, no judgment, either before the court or in her diary. "I also testified that said North said to me Last weak (which I find by this diarey to be on the 18th instant) that he really believd Mrs Foster was treated as she Complains but he Should Deny the Charg Exhibited against him. He also said he never had the least reason to suspect her virtue or modesty." The diary entry for "the 18th instant"—that is, December 18, 1790—reads, "Colonel North was here. Examined me what conversation Mrs. Foster had with me Concerning his Conduct towards her last August. Mr Carr here. Capt. Nichols & Levy & Rhubin Moore dind here..." Again the hearing caused her to write down details she had recorded only in her memory.

Three days after the Vassalboro court, Martha turned the diary on its side and wrote in the margins this addition to her testimony:

The 26 instant I called to mind Mrs Foster saying Colonel North had positively had unlawful concors with a woman which was not his wife and I Begd her never to mentin it to any other person. I told her shee would Expose & perhaps ruin her self if shee did. I told her I supposed it was an Enemy of his who was her informer & that the informer might have miss received a story relative to Jack. Shee replied no it is his Father. I mean he is guilty.

The addendum is much more forceful than the initial testimony. The vague assertion that North "did go after an other woman besides his own wife" became a direct accusation: the judge "had *positively* had *unlawful concors* with a woman which was not his wife." Martha's description of her own response changed from the passive "not being askt any question for information" to the active "I Begd her never to mentin it to any other person." The effect, if not the intent, of the addendum was to heighten the intensity of Rebecca's early revelations. They appear much less tenuous than in the original description, and Martha's own intervention more significant. There is no reason to suspect conscious reshaping of the testimony here, though it seems obvious that the hearing had affected Martha's memory of the early conversations. Even the stark phrase "he is guilty" has heavier meaning in light of the formal process then underway.

The addendum, taken with her description of the hearing itself, suggests she had been deeply impressed by Rebecca's testimony. "The Charg was said North Broke into the house of Isaac Foster in the night time," she wrote, "& Ravisht the wife of said Foster. On trial Mrs Foster apeard very Calm sedate & unmoved notwithstanding the strong attempts there were made to throw aspersions on her Carreer. She on oath affrmd that said North Broke open the Door of her house & parpetrated the Crime of ravishment notwithstanding her Exerting her self as much as her strength would admit of." She had first written "Rape," then crossed it out and written "ravishment" in the margin. Was there a distinction in her mind, or was she simply

striving for the language she remembered from court? The statute defines the crime as to "ravish and carnally know any woman, committing carnal copulation with her by force against her will." The prescribed penalty was death.¹⁹

Martha was in a difficult position. Judge North was not only one of the most powerful men in Lincoln County, he was her near neighbor and, as an agent for the Kennebec Proprietors, her husband's employer. The Mistress Hannah North who came calling on October 1 was his daughter. When Ephraim returned from his "tower of surveying" on October 3, it was Joseph North who would authorize his accounts. "I Begd her never to mentin it to any other person," Martha had written. "I told her shee would Expose & perhaps ruin her self if shee did." Would her advice have been different if she had known the full story, if she had pressed Rebecca for details on August 19, asked the questions that might have brought out all of the facts? The reticence was on both sides. Rebecca talked around the problem, starting with vague accusations of "abuse." As far as we can tell she did not use the word "rape," though she surely alluded to it when she said "they Could do nothing wors than they had unless they killed her."

When Joseph North came to trial, the actual indictment charged assault "*with an intent . . . to ravish and carnally know.*" Since rape was a capital crime, justices and grand juries frequently reduced the charge in order to get a conviction. Only ten men were tried for rape in Massachusetts in the entire eighteenth century, none after 1780. Between 1780 and 1797 there were sixteen indictments and ten convictions for attempted rape, still a small number considering that the population of the state approached 400,000.²⁰ The women's reticence is hardly surprising, given the rarity of the accusation and the severity of the penalty. Rebecca could not say what she needed to say. Martha could not hear her. Martha was willing to entertain stories about young Jack North, but not his father. Her concern that a woman might "Expose & perhaps ruin her self" by accusing a high-status male suggests the difficulties in prosecuting such a crime. Rebecca's anguished allusion to the "abuses" she had "met

with since Mr Fosters absence" takes on an almost gothic quality in the light of the accusations she eventually made. According to the indictments Elijah Davis committed his assault "with an intent to ravish" on August 3, Joshua Burgess on August 6, and Joseph North on August 9. Her cryptic comments to Martha about people throwing stones at her house and striving to get in and lodge with her are transformed in the formal accusation into a week of terror. Alone in her house, disconnected from the community her husband had once served, her vulnerability was complete. Martha said nothing about the other men, except to note on December 4 that "Elijah Davis was carried to Vassalboro" and "Captain Biges apprehended."

Henry Sewall returned to Hallowell in November of 1789, about a month after Rebecca Foster's accusation became public. He says nothing at all about the case in his diary, yet it is surely the "affair" he alludes to in a letter to George Thatcher dated January 27, 1790. Characteristically, it was the legal procedure, rather than the accusation itself, that interested him.

Nothing of consequence has transpired in this quarter, except Colo. North's affair; and this has made considerable noise. His examination, as you have doubtless heard, was had before Esq. Wood at Vassalboro the 22 December, and the matter referred thence to the Sessions at Hallowell term for advice. The Sessions were of opinion that the matter could not come legally before them; but consented to hear the statement of the evidence produced before Esq. Wood; whereupon they proceeded to give their opinions as individual Justices (and not as Sessions), which were six to two for acquitting Colo. North. Esq. Wood, however, notwithstanding this advice, concluded the evening before the Court rose to order Colo. North committed. But Colo. North having made his escape, he arrested the officer for neglect of duty. Upon further consideration, however, he thought proper to release the officer, who has since sued Esq. Wood for false imprisonment. However this dispute between the Justice and the Officer may terminate, it is

was in Winslow, eighteen miles away, at the time of the alleged assault and that "Major Henry Warren of Plymouth in the county of Plymouth" could attest to the same if he were called. He also claimed that "Messrs Lummus, Hunt, and Martin of Lebanon in the State of Connecticut, can testify that the General Character of the said Rebeckah as a woman of truth is notoriously bad." Unfortunately, he produced none of these witnesses—"the Reason why he has not procured the testimony of all the above mentioned witnesses, is because he has not had sufficient time for that purpose." (His case was continued to the next session and then dropped, the Foster hearing left the room.)

Perhaps Joseph North also attacked Rebecca Foster's reputation. In the initial hearing in Vassalboro, as Martha observed, "strong attempts . . . were made to throw aspersions on her Character," yet Martha also wrote that Judge North told her "he really believed Mrs Foster was treated as she Complains but he should Deny the Charg Exhibited against him." This is a puzzling statement. Was North saying that the woman had mistaken him for someone else? If the crime had occurred on a very dark night, that defense might have been possible. Perhaps he was distinguishing between the treatment of which she complained and the crime for which he was charged, saying that what happened happened but it was hardly an assault. He could not have been pleading compliance, however, since he had also told Martha "he never had the least reason to suspect her virtue or modesty." Since there were no witnesses to the crime, he may simply have insisted he was somewhere else at the time.

The alleged rapes in Hallowell, like most in eighteenth-century New England, were what twentieth-century analysts would call "acquaintance rape." As we have seen, there was a great deal of coming and going among neighbors. Any of the men named might have stopped in at Isaac Foster's house, to convey goods or news, to check on the family's welfare, or drink tea, to inquire about the pastor's affairs or to ask for lodging. Suppose a solicitous friend like Joseph North were to show up too late some night, perhaps a bit the worse for drink, throw stones at the window, and insist on coming in? Would that con-

stitute breaking open "the Door of her house"? And if he begged a kiss, was that more than a pretty lady might expect?

Increase Sumner, one of the judges at Colonel North's trial, kept notes on an assault trial held in another county two years later. The pattern of testimony demonstrates the difficulty in reconciling contradictory testimony and conflicting assessments of character. The young woman in this action claimed her assailant had enticed her into the bushes when she carried water to the field, "ask'd me to lay down," and when she refused "pushed me down . . . & tried to be concerned with me." The witnesses for the defense claimed that the maid was the one who had enticed the man, that she "play'd about" and refused to go back to the house after delivering the water, that she herself went to the bushes for "slippery Elm bark," and that he refused to follow. One witness testified that "her Character is better than common," another that she "is called a liar in the neighborhood."

In Rebecca Foster's case, however, the mystery took on a deeper character. On April 20, three months before the trial, and eight months and seventeen days after the first of the alleged assaults, she had given birth to a daughter. Because the Fosters had moved from Hallowell to Vassalboro, Martha was not on hand for the delivery. She had written, "Neighbor Savage informed me that the Reverend Isaac Fosters lady was safe delivered of a daughter last evening and is cleverly." Unfortunately, we don't know exactly when Isaac Foster left home, but even if it had only been a few days before the presumed assaults, the timing was ambiguous enough to create a problem. Perhaps it was the pregnancy that finally forced Rebecca to tell her story. Neighbors—or her own husband—may have asked questions she could not answer.

That is why Martha's testimony was so crucial. She could affirm that Mrs. Foster had mentioned "abuses" by Joseph North just ten days after the alleged assault occurred and before any pregnancy could have been confirmed. Rebecca Foster may have remained silent, as Martha advised, until she was forced to speak. ~~Her pregnancy was in time, then her accusations may~~

well have been intended to affirm her innocence (or to cover up the guilt of an extramarital alliance). North's peculiar statement that he believed Mrs. Foster had been treated as she complained and that he never had any reason to doubt her modesty takes on a new meaning in this context.

Any effort to solve the mystery only deepens it. Barring the discovery of other documents, the case must rest with Martha Ballard. When the court recessed for the Sabbath on July 11, she and Ephraim had left their lodgings and gone to Eastern River to visit friends. The next day, Ephraim returned to court without her.

July 12, 1790. "At Mr. Kiders. Mr Ballard attended Court. North acquiesced to the great surprise of all that I heard speak of it." Her reference to "the great surprise" suggests that the evidence against North had been damning. Certainly many of the people she "heard speak of it" were other women, though of course they were not on the jury. This brief entry is the closest she ever came to asserting the judge's guilt. Given her usual habits, the omission of a title before his name is telling.

July 13, 1790. "Clear & hot. We Came to the Court house—saw Melona receive the punishment which the Court inflicted at 8 hours more then returned to Mr Hatches, Paid our reckoning & set out for home. I wrote Mr Pollards hors. We dind at Magr Smiths. Called at Mrs. Poulins & Mr Jacksons. Arrid home near sunset. Find Alice Ballard her Gillbreath helping Cyrus."

Martha had taken her one and only trip to Pownalboro. The day after she returned, she wrote simply, "Clear. Mr Foster here. Took Breakfast." The rest of the month she had cabbed and visited with her neighbors. The short sojourn of Isaac and Rebecca Foster in the town was now history. William Howard dropped his action for debt against the minister, the Walker case was settled, and when the Supreme Judicial Court met again in Pownalboro, the indictments against Elijah Davis and Joshua Burgess were dropped. By then Isaac, Rebecca, and their children were far away from the Kennebec. They had joined Rebecca's parents, who had earlier emigrated to New York State. In September of 1792, the Reverend Mr. Ezra Stiles, touring

in Westchester County, New York, reported, "Isaac Foster still at Bedford in the Parsonage House, but don't preach—drinks a Quart Rum a day. Wife handsome but mentis inops. Poor. Works for Colonel Sacket. A Devil incarnate—an abandoned Minister!"²⁶ Perhaps Stiles was passing on malicious gossip, perhaps not. If Rebecca was indeed mentally unstable, her credibility in the rape trial would be undermined, but even assuming that Stiles's information was correct, Isaac's intemperance and Rebecca's disability could have been consequences rather than causes of their nightmare in Hallowell. A nineteenth-century history of Bedford reports only that Isaac Foster preached two years in Bedford, leaving, "as tradition reports, with his name and that of his wife in bad repute."²⁷

The Fosters went next to Rehoboth, Maryland, a town that took its name from the ancient site of Isaac's well. Here they could say with the patriarch, "the Lord hath made room for us" (Genesis 26:22). Isaac was pastor of an Episcopal church in Coventry Parish from 1795 until his death in 1800. Sometime thereafter, a family tradition reports, Rebecca and her youngest son went off to Peru hunting for gold. They were never heard from again.²⁸

There is little more to add, except that for almost four years after Isaac Foster's dismissal Martha neglected "Public Worship." She attended church three times in 1789, the year after Foster was dismissed, eight in 1790 and in 1791. There were weekly meetings held in the meeting house, at the Hook, and in Henry Sewall's office. She ignored most of them. Not until 1794, when the town was formally divided into parishes, the remnants of the Chester church taking over the South Parish, the moderates in the old Hallowell church taking over the Middle Parish, did she regularly "worship in Public."²⁹

The spring of 1791 brought an important change in the Ballard family. "Mr Ballard and Cyrus gave up their possession here to Heter Jones," Martha wrote on April 12. Peter Jones was a brother of the exiled John Jones, who would himself arrive in



There were three marriages in the Ballard family in 1792, two of them described in the diary segment that opens this chapter. The other occurred in February, when Jonathan reluctantly married Sally Pierce, who had initiated a paternity suit against him. Martha's descriptions of the three weddings and the events surrounding them—one so dramatic, the others so placidly domestic—illuminate little-known marriage customs in rural New England.

Some historians see the mid-eighteenth century as a transitional time in the history of the family, an era when young people began to exercise greater freedom in choosing marriage partners, when romantic and sexual attraction between couples became more important than economic negotiations between parents. Others argue that romantic love and economic calculation had long coexisted in the English-speaking world, that well before the eighteenth century, marriages were primarily contracts between individuals rather than alliances of families.¹ Martha's diary supports the notion that children chose their own spouses; there is no evidence of parental negotiation, and little hint of parental supervision in any of the courtships she describes. The diary also confirms the prevalence of premarital sex. Yet there is little evidence of romance and much to suggest that economic concerns remained central. The weddings in the Ballard family were distinctly unglamorous affairs, almost non-events. For the women, they were surrounded by an intense productivity, a gathering of resources that defined their meaning and purpose.

~~"Thee Matrimonial writes were cellibrated between Mr Moses Pollard off this Town and my daughter Hannah this Evening," Martha wrote on October 28. The misspelling of "writes" for "rites" is a charming accident. Most of what we know about~~

~~patterns of marriage in eighteenth-century New England comes from official records, the scanty "writes," of men like Henry Sewall, who was serving as town clerk in 1792 and who entered marriage intentions and sometimes marriage dates in the town book. Martha imitated the starched formality of such records in describing the groom as "*Mr Moses Pollard off this town*," as if he were some newly arrived gentleman rather than the grown-up son of her old friends Amos and Merriam Pollard.~~

~~Marriages were regulated under Massachusetts law according to "An Act for the Orderly Solemnization of Marriages" passed on June 22, 1786. This new legislation reflected the old colonial faith in community surveillance. A justice of the peace or minister could perform marriages only when the bride or the groom or both belonged to his town. Furthermore, the couple had to present a certificate signed by the town clerk indicating that their intent of marriage had been appropriately "published" either at three "publick religious meetings, on different days, at three days distance exclusively" or by posting for "the space of fourteen days, in some publick place."²~~

~~In 1792 Henry Sewall entered twenty-one intentions of marriage in the town book, noting that one engagement "fell through" before a certificate was issued and that another "broke off." In the case of John Chamberlain and Mary Brown, he wrote, the certificate was "barred by a written objection filed by his Father." That was in May. In December Sewall added: "Certificate issued by consent of the Father who filed the objections aforesaid." Martha's entry on December 16 fills in the details in this domestic drama: "John Chamberlain was maried the 10 instant, removed his wife to Sidney the 11th, Shee was delivered of a daughter the 12th and it Expired before night."³ As we shall see, John Chamberlain's story was not unique.~~

~~Conscientious town clerks, and Henry Sewall was one, not only kept orderly lists of intentions filed and certificates issued but also tried to compile and enter into the official record lists of marriages actually performed. In April of 1793 three Hallows well justices "returned" their marriage lists to Henry Sewall. Samuel Dutton officiated at his only ceremony of the year when~~

he joined Parthenia Barton and Shubael Pitts "in the bands of wedlock." Daniel Cony married only one other couple in 1792 in addition to Hannah and Moses Pollard. Parthenia and Hannah seem to have gone out of their way to avoid the most popular (or a viable) of Hallowsell's justices, Joseph North.⁴

"The Matrimonial writes were celebrated between Mr Moses Pollard off this Town and my daughter Hannah." Despite the verb there is little evidence of celebration in Martha's scanty description. Here was no gathering of far-flung (or even immediate) family and friends. Cyrus wasn't there, though it was a Sunday, his usual day at home, nor did Lucy and Ezra Towne ride down from Winslow. Except for Jonathan and his family, there seem to have been no other guests, not even the groom's parents, who were, after all, good friends of the Ballards. If anyone baked pies or cakes, Martha Ballard didn't say so, nor did the roast turkey appear until Tuesday, two days after the wedding. There is no more sign of special festivity in the entry for November 18: "Mr Pollard & Pitt dind here. Thee latter was joind in the Bands off wedlock with Parthenia Barton." In Martha's description, the wedding appears almost as an afterthought to the young men's presence at dinner.⁵

What is even more puzzling is the apparent failure of the brides to leave home. Through the month of November, Hannah and Parthenia continued to act like Martha's "girls," quilting, washing, and helping with the housework. Moses and Shubael came and went. "Mr Pollard & Pitt here the night," "Mr Pollard & Pitt supt." "Mr Pollard and Pitt waited on their wives & Dolly to Mr Pollards." The entry for the day of Parthenia's wedding, "Mr Pollard & Pitt dind here," was part, then, of a larger pattern. What is especially striking is Martha's pairing of the two names. On November 8, when Martha noted that the two were "here the night," Moses was a husband. Shubael still a husband-to-be. Again on November 30, both men "took breakfast," apparently having spent the night. If they had been sleeping and taking meals there consistently, it would not have been necessary to note their presence.

Twentieth-century readers puzzle over such behavior because

we think of a wedding as a discrete event, a brief and festive occurrence. The guests gather, the music plays, the proper words are said, and the celebration begins. It is difficult to imagine a "wedding" that meanders through six weeks of housework and family suppers, to comprehend a world in which brides sleep at home (with or without their grooms) for more than a month after they have been "joind in the Bands of wedlock." But that, in fact, is what happened at the Ballards' and in many New England households in the late eighteenth century. The rituals of marriage began with "publication" (in Hannah's and Parthenia's case six weeks before the ceremony) and ended when the young couples finally "went to housekeeping" at about the same interval after.

The phrase "went to housekeeping" had perhaps an even greater resonance than the words "joind in Marriage." Until Hannah and Parthenia actually left the house, they remained "the girls." Once they had gone, they were forever after "Daughter Pollard" and "Mrs Pitts." Martha later recalled that she had gone to housekeeping the same day as she was married, but in Hallowsell that practice was unusual. All the marriages recorded in the diary followed the same leisurely pattern. Hannah, Parthenia, and Jonathan all went to housekeeping more than a month after marriage, as did Dolly and her cousin Betsy Barton three years later, and Ephraim, Jr., in 1804. During the interval between Betsy Barton's marriage and her departure from the house, Martha noted that she and the other "girls" had "Crossed an opperation for the fish and washt hoping they are Cured."

Henry Sewall's diary confirms the pattern. He was married in Georgetown on February 9, 1786, spent a few weeks with his wife's family, then returned to Hallowsell, leaving Tabitha behind. Not until July 7, when Tabby arrived from Georgetown with "Miss Esther," presumably a cousin or sister, did the young couple "go to housekeeping." What is similar about all these cases is the coming and going of the groom—almost as in courtship—the bride remaining in her parents' house. When "Mr Pollard and Pitt waited on their wives & Dolly to Mr Pollards" (while the Ballards roasted a turkey at home), Hannah

was making her first formal visit to her husband's family. Significantly, she and Moses were accompanied by other people, just as Tabby Sewall had been when she finally came from Georgetown to Hallowell.

According to Ellen Rothman, even in the early nineteenth century wedding rituals affirmed ties of community. A week of neighborly visiting following the wedding was more common than a journey, and when couples did take a trip, other people often went along. This practice began to change in the second half of the nineteenth century. "Beginning in the 1870s, etiquette books advocated that the couple leave the church—where middle-class weddings increasingly took place—together and alone, and that instead of the 'harassing bridal tour,' they enjoy 'a honeymoon of repose, exempted from claims of society,'" By the 1880s, "honeymoon trips to 'romantic' locations were expected to follow weddings."⁸

In the late eighteenth century, romance was still subordinate to the larger process of establishing a new economic relationship. The issue for Hannah and Moses was not where they would spend their wedding night but when and how they would begin house-keeping. Providing household goods seems to have been a joint responsibility of mother, father, and daughter. On October 20, eight days before Hannah's wedding, Martha bought a case of knives and forks, some small spoons, sewing silk, and 28 3/4 yards of a fabric she called "Camblesteen" from one store at the Hook and a dozen plates from another. Three days later, Ephraim returned to the second store to purchase six bowls (whether on his own credit or Martha's we do not know). For both of them the coming wedding was an excuse for collecting debts. On October 17 he brought home "9 1/2 yd. Cambleteen, 5 yds Lining, & 3 lb Tea and a handkf which he had off Mr Bridge for our attendance at Supreme Court." A month later, Martha used a note of credit she had collected from Savage Bolton to help buy pewter dishes, a coffee pot, and six tablespoons at Burton's.

Earlier Mr. Burton had given Martha a looking glass, "which I bestowed on my Daughter Hannah."⁹ Whether Hannah was the recipient of all the goods assembled that month we do not know.

November 1792

143

The mention of two iron kettles, two pepper boxes, and two trip-pers in the entry for November 2 is suggestive. While one might certainly use two kettles, two pepper boxes were hardly necessary. Was Martha helping to supply Parthenia as well as her laughter? Even taken together these purchases seem few, yet household inventories from Hallowell suggest that the goods assembled in October and November of 1792 were in fact representative of what a young couple might have—a few plates and bowls, some pewter spoons, knives and forks, a coffee pot, a couple of kettles, and a frying pan, or "spider." Even well-established households in the town had little more.¹⁰

While Martha circled from Mr. Burton's to the Hook collecting crockery and tinware, Hannah and Parthenia intensified their own work. "The girls had the Ladies to help them quilt," Martha wrote on November 1, four days after Hannah's wedding. Quilting was the most insistent of the matrimonial preparations. The first round brought the neighbors, the women coming by turns, Sally Cox and Sarah Densmore on October 30, Polly Pollard, Mrs. Damrin, and Mrs. Livermore on October 31, and the unnamed group of "Ladies" on November 1. Whether Parthenia's was the first or the only quilt to go into the frame during that three-day period we do not know.

A different kind of stitching, less social, more intense, consuming the total attention of the two brides for a full day or more, began later that month. Hannah had begun "piecing a Bedquilt" on November 20 (two days after Parthenia's wedding), but had interrupted her work to weave a tow and woollen blanket. On November 26, she put the quilt "into the Frain" and with the help of Parthenia and Dolly "quilted it out before she slept." Parthenia's "Callico Bed quilt" came next. This time Martha as well as the girls helped with the quilting. Parthenia finished it the next day.

These quilts probably combined a top made of imported fabric, a filler of combed wool, and a homespun lining, the three layers being stretched tightly on a wooden frame, marked with chalk, then quilted together.¹¹ (In the fanciest quilts, the stitching formed an intricate maze of feathers, fans, and scrolls.) One

of the oldest pieced quilts known to have been made in America is a Maine coverlet, long identified as a "wedding quilt" because of the appliquéd hearts in the center.¹² Hearts or no hearts, the quilts made in the Ballard house in November of 1792 were clearly associated with the transition from girlhood to marriage. In this sense, quilting, too, was one of the rites of marriage.

~~Marriage customs were more easily discovered in Martha's diary than the rituals of courting. "Moses Pollard waited on my daughters & Parthenia to his dads this Evening," she wrote on December 19, 1791, adding, "This day is the Anabaptist's of my marriage. I went to housekeeping the same day." Whether the juxtaposition of the two entries was coincidental or prophetic, "Mr. Pollard's name appears only four times more before the notice of his marriage to Hannah. In fact there are no explicit references to Hannah and Moses "keeping company" in the year before their marriage. On March 15, 1792, Hannah returned from the Burtons' house, where she had been caring for their children. "Mr Hamlin, Burton, Pollard, Partridge, Esquire Hales Lady, 2 Mrs Bisbes, Rockwood, & Sally Hamlin with her," her mother wrote, adding, "The Ladies dine & drank coffee here. Mr Haywood, Pollard, & Partridge waited on them & my daughters at Evening to Mr Pollards." Without the knowledge that "Mr Pollard" was about to become Hannah's husband, there would be no way to separate him out from the crowd of visitors.~~

~~The mixture of sisters and friends, married and unmarried people, and uneven numbers of males and females is typical of the gatherings of young folks described in the diary. It was also common for such groups to gather at "Mr Pollard's" or "Mr Thomas's"—that is, at the two taverns in the town. On October 11, 1793, for example, a year after Hannah's and Parthenia's weddings, "Esquire Ebenezer Hail & Lady & Mrs Stratne, Daughter Pollard & Mrs Pitts dind here. Dolly & Sally went to Mr Pollards with them." Dolly was then twenty-one years old, though Sally Cox, the new helper in the Ballard family, was just eighteen. There seems to have been no taboo against young ladies participating in mixed gatherings at taverns or elsewhere,~~

accompanied or alone. "Dolly & Sally at Mr. Thomas's at Evening," Martha wrote on October 30. Her description for December 23, 1794—"Dolly & Sally went to a Daunce at Mr Capins. Were attended by a Mr Lambart and White"—is a rare example of what we would think of as courting or dating.¹³ (That Martha referred to Barnabas Lambard as "a Mr Lambart" suggests her future son-in-law was still a relative stranger.)

~~Dolly's courtship lasted four months, but resulted in only three entries in the diary. "Mr Lambart and White spent Evening," Martha wrote on February 10, 1795. On March 1, when Charles Gill and Betty Barton were married at the Ballard house, Lambard was among the persons present. On March 15, during the period before the Gills went to housekeeping, Martha wrote, "Mr Gill & Lambart & D. Livermore here at Evening," combining the newly married husband, the suitor, and a casual visitor in a single stroke. Then on April 19, "Mr Barnabas Lambart auskt our Consent that he might Marrie our daughter Dolly." The two were published the next day and married on May 14, Esquire Brooks officiating.~~

~~In Martha's diary the passionate intensity we associate with romantic love appears only as an aberration. "Enformed that Mr Smith was gone away & is feared he Deserts to Deprive himself of Life on account of Polly Hamlin's refusing to wed with him," she wrote on February 27, 1786. For a time the woes of the abandoned suitor created anxiety—and entertainment—in Hal-
lowell. "Smith & Polly Hamlin are in all Conversation at present," Martha wrote after taking tea at a neighbor's. By March 5 she could report a rumor that Smith had hanged himself, though ten days later he was back in town, apparently resigned to his fate.¹⁴ In contrast, Martha described her own children's courtships as casually as she noted the black turkey sitting on its nest.~~

~~If Hannah or Dolly had been keeping the diary, there might have been more evidence of romance. It is a mistake, however, to draw too sharp a distinction between traditional notions of marriage as an economic (and sometimes spiritual) partnership and supposedly newer ideas that emphasized sexual attraction~~

TABLE 1 LINCOLN COUNTY COURT OF GENERAL SESSIONS
FORNICATION AND PATERNITY ACTIONS, 1761-1799

Date	Women	Men: "Unknown"	Presented	Convicted
1761-1765	9	2	1	1
1766-1770	20	3	3	2
1771-1775	11	2	0	0
1776-1780	12	1	2	1
1781-1785	21	0	4	4
1786-1790	0	0	3	2
1791-1795	0	0	6	6
1796-1799	0	0	0	0

NOTE: Kennebec County was separated from Lincoln in 1799. There are no fornication or maintenance cases in the first General Sessions Record Books for the new county. Unfortunately, court papers for the early nineteenth century have not survived.

Elizabeth defined sexual intercourse between unmarried persons as a crime. In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, courts had punished men who fathered children out of wedlock as rigorously as the women concerned, often relying on testimony taken from mothers during delivery to establish the fathers' identity, but by the middle of the eighteenth century, most historians argue, fornication had become a woman's crime.

William Nelson has shown that while fornication prosecutions still accounted for more than a third of criminal actions in Massachusetts between 1760 and 1774, in only one case was the *father* of an illegitimate child prosecuted—a black man suspected of cohabiting with a white woman. By the end of the century, actions against women had also disappeared from court dockets. Prosecutions dropped from seventy-two per year in the years 1760-1774 to fifty-eight during the revolutionary years and finally to fewer than five after 1786. Nelson found only four prosecutions after 1790 in the entire Commonwealth. Lincoln County records show the same decline. Between 1761 and 1785, seventy-three women but only ten men were presented for fornication or related crimes. No women were presented after 1785.¹⁸

Historians are still debating the significance of such changes. Some stress liberalization, arguing that as courts became more

concerned with mediating property disputes than enforcing Puritan standards of moral behavior, sex became a private affair. Others perceive the decline in fornication prosecutions as reflecting generational tensions in a society that had given up the legalism of the Puritans but had not yet developed the repressive individualism of the Victorians. More recent studies have emphasized gender issues, arguing that changes in fornication proceedings reflected a larger argument over female sexuality, an argument vividly displayed in eighteenth-century novels of seduction, some of which openly challenged the prevailing double standard.¹⁹

Against such evidence, Sally Pierce's declaration appears a quaint and inexplicable throwback to an earlier era. It was not. Evidence from Martha's diary and from supporting legal documents casts doubt on the notion that sexual behavior had in fact become a private concern. The diary suggests that even in a newly settled lumbering town like Hallowell, sexual norms (though neither Puritan nor Victorian) were clearly defined and communally enforced, that courts seldom prosecuted sexual deviance because informal mechanisms of control were so powerful. It also casts doubt on the use of General Sessions records or elite literature to define the double standard. There were certainly inequities in the way male and female culpability was defined in this period, yet there is no evidence that in rural communities women who bore children out of wedlock were either ruined or abandoned as early novels would suggest.

The prosecutorial double standard originated in a 1668 Massachusetts law that introduced the English practice of asking unwed mothers to name the father of their child during delivery. At first glance, questioning a woman in labor seems a form of harassment. In practice, it was a formality allowing the woman, her relatives, or in some cases the selectmen of her town to claim child support. The man she accused could not be convicted of fornication (confession or witnesses were needed for that), but unless there was overwhelming evidence to the contrary, he would be judged the "reputed father" of her child and required to pay for its support. The assumption was that a woman asked to testify at the height of travail would not lie.

In fact, early courts showed a remarkable reluctance to ~~offer~~ such testimony. Although Alice Metherell of Kittery, Maine, had been convicted of a false oath in an earlier case of bastardy (she had delivered a black child after accusing a white man), she was able in 1695 to get maintenance from John Thompson and even to defend herself against a slander suit from him. As late as 1724 Bathsheba Lyston's accusation of Daniel Paul stood, even though a witness testified that the summer before, "she was a telling what a great Liberty a Young woman has to what a young man hath for, said She, I will let any Young man get me with child and then, Said She, I can pay it to who I please because a woman has that Liberty granted to them."²⁰ Courts were obviously less concerned about the possibility of a false accusation than about the problem of having to provide public support for fatherless children. Yet one need not interpret the law cynically. It formalized a common assumption in English society, evident in the Chesapeake as well as in New England, that women were guardians of the sexual values of the community. In this regard, the witnesses in the procedure were as important as the mother herself.²¹

Other than Nelson's general overview, there has been little scholarship on changes in fornication procedures in Massachusetts in the middle decades of the eighteenth century.²² We know that courts gradually abandoned the practice of fining married couples whose first child was born too soon, but we know almost nothing about the single women whose cases began to dominate the dockets by midcentury. Unfortunately, earlier studies have made it difficult to trace the direction of change by failing to relate paternity suits to fornication procedures. They have also given too little attention to the documentary impact of changes in legal procedures.

A 1786 "Act for the Punishment of Fornication, and for the Maintenance of Bastard Children" confirmed the old laws, but made one important change. A new clause made it possible for women to avoid appearing at the Court of General Sessions to answer a fornication charge by voluntarily confessing to the crime before a single justice of the peace and paying a fine (six shillings

for the first offense and twelve shillings for any later ones). William Nelson has assumed this was a first step in the decriminalization of sexual behavior. Possibly—though he fails to notice that the procedure made it easier for a woman to initiate a paternity action. If a woman named a man at the time of her initial confession, and then "being put upon the discovery of the truth respecting the same accusation in the time of her travail, shall thereupon accuse the same person," *he* would be tried before the sessions and, if convicted, be required to provide for the child.²³ In fact, the two actions were typically combined on one form, suggesting that confessing to fornication was simply a preliminary step to suing for the maintenance of one's child.

~~This was the procedure Sally Pierce followed.~~ On July 19, 1791, Martha wrote that Mrs. Savage had come to the house to inform her "that Sally Peirce swore a Child on my son Jonathan & he was taken with a warrent. Mr Abisha Cowen is his Bondsman for appearance at Coart." In October, just as the law required, Sally confirmed her accusation before Martha Ballard. She was not the only unwed mother to do so. For thirteen of the twenty out-of-wedlock births in the diary, Martha recorded the name of the father, using stylized language that suggests she had indeed "taken testimony" as the law instructed. Lucy Shaw, for example, "declared that David Edwards was the True Father of the Child."²⁴ In five of the cases in which Martha made no record of the father's name, there were unusual circumstances. Two babies were stillborn, one of the mothers being in convulsions at delivery. In another case, Martha wrote, "Called at the rising of the sun to Sarah White, she being in travail with her forth Child, & is yet unmarried."²⁵

The remaining two were to a free black woman, Mehitable Slocum, whom Martha always referred to in the diary as "Black Hitty." In the first of Hitty's deliveries, Martha mentioned no father. In the other, she identified him in the margin but not in the main entry as "Nicholas," adding, "This man is a Portugues who was Brot here by Mrs Hussey from Nantucket." The form of the entry suggests she was conveying casual information rather than the solemn testimony assumed in the other cases. If

TABLE II MARTHA MOORE BALLARD DIARY, 1785-1812
PATERNITY RECORD

Total Number of Deliveries	814
Deliveries to single women	20 (2.4%)
Women giving father's name	13
Women not giving father's name	7
Stillborn child	2
"Black Hitty"	2
Sarah White's fourth child	1
Unexplained	2
Total First Births (1785-1797)	106
Conceived out of wedlock	40 (38%)
Premarital pregnancy	31 (29%)
Illegitimacy	9 (8%)

Hitty held an anomalous place in her midwife's diary, she nevertheless succeeded in contracting a marriage. Six months after the baby's birth, the town clerk recorded the marriage of "Nicholas Hilson to Hitty Slocum (Negroes)." ²⁶

All of this argues that the mothers, rather than Martha, initiated the confession at delivery, and that it was part of a process of suing for maintenance. A black servant or the mother of several bastards was unlikely to sue. A stillbirth rendered the question moot. In the two remaining cases in which Martha failed to record the name of the father, there is no obvious explanation. Perhaps these two young women simply chose not to confront the father. Significantly, Sarah White, the mother of four, is the only one of Martha's patients to appear in the quarterly court records for Lincoln County, and she appeared only once, in 1782, when she was fined four shillings after a presentation by the grand jury.

~~Paternal documents in the loose file papers of the court relate to two other cases mentioned in the diary. These suggest the process that must have been followed in the others. Abigail ("Nabby") Tower accused Moses Palmer before Nathaniel Dummer on April 19, 1794, when she was just three months pregnant. Judge Dummer asked her about the time and place of conception. She answered that it had occurred on January 5, 1794. "How do you know?" he continued. "I know it was that~~

time," she answered simply. Where did the conception occur? "In Mr Zenith Lathrop's chamber." Did she keep company with any other person about that time? "No, I did not." There is no evidence that he questioned her judgment or sought other witnesses. Noting that the child "if born alive will be a bastard," Dummer issued a warrant for Palmer's arrest, then bound him through a recognizance to appear in court once the child was born. Nabby confirmed her accusation before Martha during her delivery on October 11, but when the next court met in January, Moses had been discharged, probably because he had come to an agreement with the mother.

We know about the other case from a rare bit of gossip in Martha's diary. On November 6, 1788, she noted that her daughters had returned from a neighbor's house with the news that "Hannah Fletcher has sworn she is with child by Joseph Fuller." A loose piece of paper in the Lincoln County court files, signed by Ebenezer Farwell, J.P., notes that Hannah Fletcher had voluntarily appeared on November 3, and that a warrant had been issued for a Joseph Fellows. That the Ballard girls carried the news home to their mother three days after the examination before Esquire Farwell suggests that a voluntary appearance before a justice of the peace was in some sense public. Since Martha did not attend Hannah's delivery, we do not know whether she held firm in her accusation, or if in fact she carried the baby to term.

Fornication actions in the county courts were the apex of a broad, community-based system of enforcement. Since the procedure began with individual judges and midwives, very few of whom left records, formal court documents provide at best a glimpse of the process. That women are overrepresented on county court dockets may have less to do with a decline of interest in prosecuting men for fornication than with the voluntary nature of paternity proceedings. The very structure of the process required an admission of fornication on a woman's part in order to establish an action for paternity against a man. At the initial stages—the examination before the justice of the peace, the testimony in travail—both parties were visible, but if the man chose to settle out of court rather than to contest the

conceived out of wedlock. (See Table II.) The great majority of the women concerned (thirty-one of the forty) had already married the fathers of their children. For these mothers, the average interval between marriage and delivery was 5.6 months, though there were enough "near-misses" to blur the distinction between legitimacy and illegitimacy. "Was called by Mr Young to go and see the wife of John Dunn who was in labour," Martha wrote on August 25, 1799, a Sunday. "She was safe delivered at 7 hour 30 Evening of a fine son... Mr. Dunn was married ~~last Thursday. It was 20 years old last July."~~

Did the women who conceived out of wedlock differ in some fundamental way from those who did not? Probably not. Unwed mothers, pregnant and nonpregnant brides often came from the same families. Even in the families of town leaders, premarital pregnancy was common. Martha delivered the children or grandchildren of seventeen of the men who served as Hallowell selectmen between 1778 and 1800. One man was himself accused of fathering an illegitimate child (before marriage), two had premarital pregnancies in their families, and five had both premarital pregnancies and out-of-wedlock births. Ephraim Ballard belonged to the last group. He was without question a solid citizen, serving four terms as selectman, on committees to hire a minister and build a church, and as a moderator of town meetings. Of the five Ballard children who married, three (Lucy, Jonathan, and Ephraim Jr.) conceived their first child before marriage. Lucy and her youngest brother both managed to marry before their babies were born; Jonathan, as we have seen, did not.

Daniel Savage, another of Hallowell's perennial town leaders, had three daughters whose first births are recorded in the diary. Martha Savage was pregnant at marriage, Hannah was not, and Rachel gave birth out of wedlock to a stillborn child, then married a few months later. Sarah White, the woman who delivered her fourth child though "yet unmarried," was also the daughter of a town selectman. One of her sisters gave birth out of wedlock, another delivered a month after marriage.

Why did some women deliver out of wedlock when their sisters did not? One difference may be in the choice of suitors. Eighty-

seven percent of the men who married their pregnant lovers were sons of established families in the town or remained to become householders on the censuses of 1790 and 1800. This was true for only 39 percent of those who failed to marry. It would be tempting to believe these men fled before the vengeance of irate women and their fathers. More likely, they were already less committed to the town and to the women in it, being part of the transient population of mariners and lumbermen. (In the same way some Hallowell men, married and unmarried, had casual sexual alliances with women in other port cities.)

~~In the case of Sally Pierce's sister, Hilly, social differences were an issue (we shall return to her story in a later chapter). For other women, it may have been a simple matter of irresolvable differences during the period of engagement. Becky White was published to Seth Partridge in January of 1787, but they did not marry; she gave birth to his child eleven months later. Polly Savage, the young woman who did so much spinning for the Ballards when they lived at the mills, gave birth in November of 1788, more than a year after she was published to Elihu Getchell, who married someone else. Polly kept her little daughter at her parents' house until she married Abiezer Benjamin in 1790. (She was three months pregnant at the time.) Single mothers typically remained in their families of origin, and eventually married.~~

None of this was confined to Maine. Premarital pregnancy was common throughout New England, in old towns as well as new, Oxford as well as Hallowell, and it had been so for at least a generation. Although Martha and Ephraim were married almost two years before their first child was born, several of their siblings, including Ephraim's sister Hannah Towne, had early babies. As we have seen, Hannah's son and Ephraim's daughter continued the tradition in the next generation. Martha's sister, Dorothy Barton, was almost five months pregnant at marriage. Her story is especially interesting, considering the names she and Stephen gave their daughters: Samuel Richardson's novel *Pamela* tells the story of a maidservant who marries her employer's son by heroically resisting his sexual advances. The heroine of *Clarissa Harlowe* is less fortunate: thrown into the arms of the fiendish Lovelace by

her parents' insistence on an arranged marriage, she is raped and left to die. Pamela Barton was not pregnant at marriage. Clarissa Harlowe Barton was.

It was their sister Hannah, however, who lived a life worthy of a novel. Returning to Oxford with her parents, she gave birth to two children said to have been fathered by her employer, whose wife was an invalid. When the man's wife died twenty years later, he married Hannah, but not in time to prevent the suicide of their youngest son, who killed himself out of humiliation while a student at Brown. The oldest child, however, became a prominent citizen of Worcester County. In the words of a family historian, Hannah's descendants "have little cause to be ashamed of her for ~~she has given them a remarkable and splendid heritage.~~"²⁷

There were surely differences in attitudes toward sexuality in Hallowsell just as there were differences over politics or theology. Some families probably condoned premarital sex. Others encouraged formal and decorous behavior. Yet nearly everyone in the town agreed with certain fundamental propositions. One was that marriage should certainly follow, if it did not always precede, conception. Another was that fathers as well as mothers were responsible for children born out of wedlock. In courtship, sexual activity was connected with a comprehensive transition to adulthood, to good citizenship and economic productivity. The communal rituals of birth marked women as well as men as sexual beings, and affirmed the obligations as well as rights of fatherhood.

All of this contrasts sharply with the seduction literature of the eighteenth century, which describes innocent young women strangely disconnected from their communities by the machinations of unprincipled lovers who abandon them in foreign countries, imprison them in mysterious villas, or leave them to die in strange taverns.²⁸ As Susan Staves has argued, such a construction of seduction belongs to a particular historical moment. Some young women in all periods of history have engaged in illicit intercourse, she writes, yet "such girls need not be seen as sweetly pathetic. Instead, they may be seen as loathsome temptresses, damned sinners, sordid criminals, pioneers of sexual freedom, boring fools, or simply as normal." Readers in

the eighteenth century shed tears over such maidens not simply because they were powerless but because "those qualities that made them vulnerable to seducers—beauty, simplicity, and the capacity for affection—were precisely those qualities the culture found desirable in women."²⁹

Such values had been heard of in the Kennebec. In 1795 a Lincoln County woman sued a man in county court claiming that for three years he had begged her to marry him. Finally, "by his assiduity, assertion, protestations, and assurances of his feeling" (one suspects the presence of a lawyer here), he "so endeared himself to her" that she agreed. "Wanting craftily, subtilly and cruelly to deceive, seduce and despoil her of her innocence and happy virgin situation," he "obtained his cruel purpose." Pregnant and abandoned by her seducer, she was "rendered Miserable and her good Name Forever lost."³⁰ What is remarkable about the case is that the woman avoided the old system of justice by initiating a civil suit before the Court of Common Pleas rather than an action of paternity before the local justice of the peace. Perhaps she found it impossible to simultaneously defend her "innocence" and pay a voluntary fine for fornication. The seducer was acquitted.

This story might have come from the pages of a novel. In sentimental literature, of course, the heroine would never have attempted any sort of suit at all, yet the language of her plea echoes the argument of contemporary fiction, most of which turns on a belief in female innocence and to a large extent female passivity. In contrast, the old system of justice asked young women to cooperate with old women in witnessing to male culpability. It also required an acceptance of female sexuality and an acknowledgment of fleshly sin. Such a system had difficulty comprehending rape, let alone seduction; its working assumption was that if a woman became pregnant, she had somehow acquiesced. Still, on its own terms it did hold men responsible for their behavior. It is difficult to imagine a sentimental heroine naming her seducer at the height of travail or describing the day and place of conception for the local J.P. Sentimental heroines died rather than confront their betrayers.

In Hallowell, betrayed women collected cash payments, then went on to marry other men. For a sentimental heroine, a forced marriage to her seducer could never have been an acceptable solution as it was for Sally Pierce.

If one did not know about Sally's confession to Martha in October, it would be easy to miss the suppressed anxiety, the suspense, the tension of the entries regarding Jonathan through the early winter of 1792. "Jonathan stayed from home last night," Martha wrote on December 29, and on January 6, "Jonathan has not been at home since yesterday." The same entry reappeared on January 11, January 29, and in slightly different form on February 20: "Jonathan has not been here this day till morning." He was missing again on February 26, but three days later his mother wrote, "My son Jonathan Brot his wife & little son here."

Henry Sewall's records show that Jonathan and Sally had been published on February 11, which means they could have been legally married on February 24 or sometime thereafter. Like the Pollards, the Ballards were not present at their son's wedding, though Martha made the new bride welcome as soon as she could.³¹ "Help't Sally nurse her Babe," she wrote on March 2. Soon she was referring to the "Babe" as "Jack." Jonathan and Sally stayed alternately at the Ballards' and at the Pierces' for the next four weeks, and on April 4, 1792, "went to housekeeping."

For Jonathan, only one wedding ritual remained. At the Hallowell town meeting in June he, along with six other newly married men, was elected a "hog revee," a humorous acknowledgment by the town fathers that another proving stag had been yoked.³²

In one year, then, the Ballard family had been touched by most of the matrimonial rites (and several of the "rites") common to an eighteenth-century town. The town clerk recorded the marriage intentions of the three couples and the justices of the peace said the vows. While Jonathan passed under the watchful eye of the law—and his own mother—into the ranks of respectable householders, Hannah and Parthenia amassed the goods essential to housekeeping.

Martha's diary entries continued in December 1792 as they had begun in October with the young brides hard at work, now weaving rag coverlets rather than cloth, while the mother continued to make purchases at the stores. On December 12, she wrote, "Clear but very cold. Mr Pollard came and Conducted my daughter, & his spouse, home to Housekeeping." Ephraim drove the team, Dolly went along to help unpack. "Cyrus went & Bot 2 pails," perhaps his contribution to the new household. The next day the new Mrs. Pitts "made her Candles & some for me." Parthenia washed on December 14, went to visit Hannah on December 16, and on December 20, she and Shubael also went to housekeeping. "Shubael Pitts came and removed his wife from here," Martha wrote. "May they prosper in this life & be happy in the future."

For a time the young couples did prosper. "Mr Ballard to son Pollards," Martha wrote on May 9, 1793. "Brot the haslett of a Veal home from them." As Parthenia and Shubael's first anniversary approached, Martha could report that "the Ship which Pitt Built was Lanch'd this forenoon."³³ Martha now dignified Hannah and Parthenia with the titles "Daughter Pollard" and "Mrs. Pitts." "Daughter Pollard & Mrs Pitts took Tea here," she would write, or "Mr Pollard & Pitts & their wives took Tea."³⁴

For the first few months after the brides went to housekeeping, Betsy Barton came to help Martha with her work. A more permanent helper, Sally Cox, arrived in the spring, soon taking Parthenia's place as a member of the family. Dolly continued to work at home, going to neighbors' houses for short stints of dressmaking. With a new set of helpers in place, Martha was free to serve her neighbors.

for seven days until a summons from another woman took her back to her own neighborhood. By the time the Hussey delivery began in earnest, the river had thawed, broken up, then frozen again. "Walkt to the Loading place," Martha wrote. "From there Crossed the mountains of ice. Arrivd almost fatagud to death."⁵

A woman caught between the premonitory tightening in her belly and the feel of snow in the air was suspended between two uncertainties. If she called her midwife, labor might stop; if she did not, she might give birth unattended. In the segment of the diary that opens this chapter, Martha recorded four trips to the Parker house before that reluctant baby—Birth 51 for the year—arrived. "His Lady is about house," she wrote on the fourth day of her third visit. The condition of the river compounded the risk of going home. Martha settled into her knitting, producing two pairs of gloves and five and a half pairs of mittens before being called away, at two in the morning, by Mrs. White, who lived two miles away by sleight. That was the signal for the Parker baby. Martha performed two deliveries in twenty-four hours, without sleep, walking home across the river the next day in snow, hail, and rain. "I had a wrestless night by fataug & weeing my feet," she wrote. A third of the year's deliveries came in such strenuous clusters of two or three.

Martha numbered births the way she weighed candles or counted cabbages or mittens, but with even more intensity and seriousness. Numbers were a measure of productivity, though in the moral sense of diligence, of mastery of a chosen task, rather than in the mercantile sense of income or outgo. She didn't isolate births from the other activities in the diary, but she did give them precedence. Despite their ragged appearance, the birth entries were carefully structured and remarkably consistent. The left margin invariably included the father's surname, the sex of the child, and an XX for fee paid; the right gave the location of the birth and its number. The body of each entry offered additional detail, usually the exact time of delivery ("9 hour 30 minutes"), the hour of her summons or departure ("I left his Lady at 4 pm"), the condition of the mother and child

("as well as Could be Expected"), and the method of travel ("walkt over the river"). In addition some entries included the form or amount of payment ("Received 7/6 as a reward"), the names of the attendants ("Mrss Cleark, Dutrun, Sewall & myself"), and comments on unusual occurrences at birth ("Doct Page was Calld before my arival").

Individual entries may seem flat and unrevealing. Taken together, they provide an unparalleled record of an eighteenth-century practice. Even the most routine and formulaic pieces of information are useful. Rare comments on obstetrical complications mean more when seen in relation to hundreds of bland notations that say simply "delivered" or "safe delivered", a twenty-four-shilling fee acquires new significance when framed with all those other entries recording six shillings or a plain XX, while the appearance of a doctor at a delivery becomes more noteworthy when the hundreds of other deliveries in which no one thought to call a physician are considered. In midwifery as in so many other aspects of Martha Ballard's diary, it is the combination of boredom and heroism, of the usual and the unusual, that tells the story.

In medical terms the success of Martha Ballard's practice is conveyed in what she didn't write. For 768 of the 814 delivery entries in the diary she included no medical detail at all, simply noting "delivered" or "safe delivered," sometimes with an additional reassurance such as "left My patients very well." In only forty-six deliveries, 5.6 percent of all the births in the diary, did she give any hint of complications. Even then she seldom elaborated. A woman was "safe delivered tho very ill indeed" or "Her case was some alarming but shee revived and seems comfortable." In a particularly difficult case she might add a special thanks: "She had a Laborious illness but Blessed be God it terminated in safety. May shee and I ascribe the prais to the Great parent of the universe."⁶

Such a record is exactly what one might expect of a skilled practitioner. One medical historian has estimated that 96 percent

of all births occur naturally and spontaneously. The remaining 4 percent involve obstructions of some kind and require intervention. In addition, 1 percent may result in accessory complications, fainting, vomiting, tearing of the perineum, or life-threatening hemorrhages or convulsions. The eighteenth-century English physician Charles White was not far wrong when he said that a healthy young woman might deliver untended in the middle of the town common and still do well.⁷ As twentieth-century reformers insist, birth is a natural process, not a medical event.

Yet, as Martha would be quick to add, a natural process might still be uncomfortable and frightening, and when mismanaged even a normal birth could be dangerous. Like most of her contemporaries, she feared unattended birth.⁸ She fretted when a missing horse delayed her response to a call. "My anxiety was great for the woman but I found her Safe," she wrote after one such event. On other occasions she was not so positive. Unattended women were "in a deplorable condition" or "suffering for want of help."⁹ To her mind, those frenzied journeys and patient watchings mattered.

Her results attest to her skill. Her comment on August 20, 1787, that the death of Susanna Clayton and her infant was the "first such instance I ever saw & the first woman that died in Child bed which I delivered" allows us to add the 177 predatory deliveries to the total: in almost 1,000 births Martha did not lose a single mother at delivery, and only five of her patients (including Mrs. Clayton) died in the lying-in period. Infant deaths were also rare. The diary records fourteen stillbirths in 814 deliveries and an additional five infant deaths within an hour or two of delivery.

By our standards, mortality was high. Martha saw one maternal death for every 198 living births. Today that rate is one per 10,000. But as late as 1930, there was one maternal death for every 150 births in the United States; the major gains in obstetrical safety have come in the past fifty years. In fact, many historians believe that the routine employment of physicians in the nineteenth century probably increased rather than decreased

TABLE IV SUMMARY OF DELIVERY DATA FROM TWO MANUSCRIPT SOURCES

	Martha Ballard 1785-1812	James Farrington 1824-1859
Deliveries		
Total Recorded	814	1233
Average per year	33	35
"Difficult" Births		
number	46	246*
percent of total	5.6%	20%
Stillbirths		
number	14	36
ratio to live births	1.8/100	3.0/100
Neonatal Deaths		
number	20	?
ratio to live births	2.5/100	
Maternal Deaths		
total	5	5
at delivery	0	4
within two weeks	5	1
ratio to live births	5/1000	4/1000

*James Farrington categorized the 20% of births listed as something other than "natural" labor, as follows: "tedious" (102); "premature" (41); "preternatural" (39); "complicated" (33); and [after 1838] "instrumental" (31).

sources: Martha Moore Ballard Diary, 1785-1812, MS, Maine State Library, Augusta, Maine; and James Farrington Medical Record Books, 1824-1859, MS, Special Collections, Dimond Library, University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH.

mortality. Records of an early-nineteenth-century New Hampshire physician, whose case load was almost identical to Martha Ballard's, shows higher stillbirth ratios and four maternal deaths at delivery, though only one during the lying-in period (see Table IV). What is even more striking is the large number of complications recorded in his records: 20 percent of his deliveries (as opposed to 5.6 percent for her). The difference was partly in perception—as a physician he was attuned to biological anomalies in a way that she was not—yet there is good

evidence that birth *had* become a more complex process in the nineteenth century, as physicians began to employ ergot, opiates, and forceps in what Martha Ballard would have considered routine deliveries. Those dangers did not decrease as hospital delivery became more common. A study of a Portsmouth, New Hampshire, hospital found stillbirth rates in the second decade of the twentieth century five times as high as Martha's.¹⁰

The more appropriate comparison, of course, is with her own contemporaries. Estimates based on parish registers for seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English villages range from ten to twenty-nine maternal deaths per thousand births. In some eighteenth-century London and Dublin hospitals, maternal mortality ranged from 30 to 200(!) per thousand births, compared with 5 per 1,000 for Martha (see Table V).¹¹ There are few comparable New England records, though such as there are suggest that maternal mortality, like other forms, was lower in rural America. Lydia Baldwin, an eighteenth-century Vermont midwife, claimed only one maternal death in 926 deliveries, though the lack of detail in her records makes it impossible to determine whether she included deaths in the lying-in period as well as deaths at delivery. Hall Jackson, a Portsmouth, New Hampshire, physician claimed no maternal deaths in 511 births, though again his records are sketchy. Martha's stillbirth ratios are comparable to (though slightly lower than) both Baldwin's and Jackson's¹² (see Table VI).

Martha's obstetrical entries were routine and predictable because most deliveries were routine and predictable. The terseness of her records also reflects a traditional reticence about the details of sex and birth. Martha's patients were not anonymous bodies but friends and neighbors. She was no prude, yet she was probably unaccustomed to saying, let alone writing, all she knew and saw. Even among publishing physicians a certain reserve was expected. The author of one English midwifery manual defended the lack of anatomical detail in his text on the grounds that his work was designed not to "give the least Offence to the most modest Reader."¹³

Beyond that, the lack of detail reinforces what we already

TABLE V COMPARATIVE MATERNAL MORTALITY RATES

Place	Total Births	Maternal Deaths	Deaths per 1000 Births
London A			
1767-1772	653	18	27.5
1770	63	14	222.2
London B			
1749-1770	9108	196	21.5
1770	890	35	39.3
London C			
1747-"present"	4758	93	19.5
1771	282	10	35.4
London D			
	790	6	7.5
Dublin A			
1745-1754	3206	29	9.0
Dublin B			
1757-1775	10726	152	14.1
1768	633	17	26.8
1770	616	5	8.1
Martha Ballard			
1777-1812	998	5	5.0
1785-1812	814	5	6.1
United States			
1930			6.7
1935			5.8
1940			3.8
1945			2.1

SOURCES: Charles White, *A Treatise on the Management of Pregnant and Lying-in Women*, Worcester, Mass., 1793; Martha Moore Ballard Diary, 2 vols., MS, Maine State Library, Augusta, Maine; *Maternal and Child Health Practices: Problems, Resources and Methods of Delivery*, ed. Helen M. Wallace, Edwin M. Gold, and Edward F. Lis (Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, 1973), p. 285.

know about her craft, that it was traditional rather than experimental. Unlike the publishing physicians of the period, some of whom kept obstetrical case notes, she had no interest in instructing others (at least through the written word) or in testing

TABLE VI COMPARATIVE STILLBIRTH RATES

	Total Births	Total Stillbirths	Stillbirths per 100 Live Births
Martha Ballard 1785-1812	814	14	1.8
Hall Jackson 1775-1794	511	12	2.4
James Farrington 1824-1859	1233	36	3.0
Portsmouth, N.H. 1809-1810	541	14	2.7
Marblehead, Mass. 1808	222	7	3.3
Exeter, N.H. 1809	53	1	1.9
United States* 1942			2.0

*Fetal death ratio, defined as fetal deaths of 28 weeks or more gestation per 1,000 live births.

SOURCES: Martha Moore Ballard Diary, 2 vols., MS, Maine State Library, Augusta, Maine; J. Worth Estes, *Hall Jackson and the Purple Foxglove: Medical Practice and Research in Revolutionary America, 1760-1820* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1979), p. 120; James Farrington Medical Record Books, 1824-1859, MS, Special Collections, Dimond Library, University of New Hampshire, Durham, N.H.; Lyman Spalding, *Bill of Mortality for Portsmouth*, broadside [Portsmouth: 1809, 1810]; John Drury, *Bill of Mortality for Marblehead*, 1808, broadside (Marblehead, 1809); Joseph Tilton, M.D., *Bill of Mortality for Exeter, New Hampshire*, broadside ([Exeter: 1809]); Helen M. Wallace, "Factors Associated with Perinatal Mortality and Morbidity," in *Maternal and Child Health Practices: Problems, Resources and Methods of Delivery*, ed. Helen M. Wallace, Edwin M. Gold, and Edward F. Lis (Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, 1973), p. 507.

and promoting new methods. Her training was manual rather than literary. Having mastered her craft she had no need to explain it. Although the outcome of each delivery mattered (it was important to note whether a woman who had been "very

ill" was now "comfortable"), the process was of little consequence. Furthermore, the cultural setting of the work discouraged a technical presentation of the result.

Excessive bleeding was "flooding" in her diary as in the obstetrical literature, but she did not use Latinisms like *matrix* and *vagina* or technical terms like *Os Pubis* and *Os Tineae*. In fact, what is most striking is the absence of any reference to the explicit processes of birth. Her women are seldom even in "travel." They are simply "unwell," and as the delivery proceeds it is their "illness" rather than their "bearing pains" or even their "labor" that increases. Where an English midwife might "touch" a woman (a euphemism for an internal examination), Martha "inquired into her case." Once in a while she refers to a presentation as *preternatural* as a physician might, but her designation of one woman's labor as *supernatural* was surely a slip of the pen.¹⁴

Her reference to the encounter with Dr. Page at Mrs. Poor's delivery in the November 17 passage is a case in point. In the context of the larger history of obstetrics, it is also extraordinarily interesting. "I Extracted the Child," she wrote. "He Chose to Close the Loin." The language is almost Biblical in its circumlocution. Presumably she meant that Dr. Page had delivered the placenta or afterbirth and then applied the traditional bandages around the abdomen and thighs. Because the delivery of the placenta was a source of some controversy in the period, the incident is worth examining in detail.

Early-eighteenth-century advice books urged the immediate extraction of the placenta, even if it meant reaching into the womb. "With my left hand I was oblig'd to keep her Belly down," wrote one English midwife, "whilst with my right hand I peel'd off and loosen'd the *secundines* from the *Matrix*." Many physicians promoted similar methods, arguing that if there was room for a baby in the womb there was certainly room for a hand. No one advised rough pulling on the umbilicus, however, a method usually attributed to "ignorant midwives." By the last quarter of the eighteenth century a few physicians claimed that doing nothing was the best approach of all. ~~Placenta goes~~

those of her peers, working into the diary hearsay evidence of difficult births that occurred outside her practice. "Mr George Brown informed me that Capt Smiths wife had 2 Children Born Last night. They are dead," she wrote. In this case the practitioner may have been Mrs. Hinkley, who is known to have delivered another of Captain Smith's children. Sometime later Martha noted that Mrs. Hartford had been "delivered of two Dead Babes by Esquire Cony this morning, one of each sex."³² Behind these statements is her own quiet awareness that she herself had never lost a pair of twins. She reported multiple births as though they were as ordinary as any others: "I was called in haste at 11 hour Eveing to Mr Isaac Clearks Lady in travil. Shee was safe delivered of a fine son & a daughter before 12. All likely to do well."³³

A statistical comparison between Martha Ballard and her competitors is something of an anachronism, however, as is an effort to isolate and categorize her delivery techniques. She simply did not see her work in that way. In fact, the most descriptive account of the birth of twins in her diary says almost as much about her own journey as the delivery itself. Mrs. Byrnes

was seizd with her illness very severe about noon, calld her women a little before sun sett and shee was safe delivered of Two Daughters before 8 hour Evening. There was but a short space between the Births. They are fine Children. May God long preserv them. I sett up with my Patents, Mrs Conry and Benn White's wife also. It was a very Cold night. I was Calld to Mrs Byrnes yesterday. Mr Ballard & Dingley broke thro the ice and got me over the river. I was fatigued in Climbing the bank on the other side. Mr Dingley & Graves assisted me.³⁴

Characteristically, the one obstetrical comment in the entry ("There was but a short space between the Births") is embedded in seemingly extraneous references to the weather, her journey, the names of the men who assisted her across the river and of the women who sat up with her through the night. The biologi-

ical event fades into the clutter of social detail. Where is the center of the picture? Is it Martha Ballard scrambling up the icy bank, Mr. Dingley grasping one arm, Mr. Graves reaching toward her from above, while Ephraim slowly turns his boat in the ice-rimmed river below? Is it Mrs. Byrnes, exhausted from her eight-hour labor, bearing down for the second delivery? Is it Mrs. Conry easing two perfect babies into the cradle, or the three drowsy women leaning toward the kitchen fire, the midnight cold at their backs, small clouds of mist above their whispers?

There is no center, only a kind of grid, faint trails of experience converging and deflecting across a single day.

A description of childbirth taken from Martha Ballard's diary could not include anything so precise as the dilation of the cervix or the extraction of the afterbirth. Nor would it focus on the three stages of labor easily recognizable to twentieth-century women in the eighteenth-century distinction between "grinding or preparing pains," "forcing pains," and "grumbling pains." The diary description would have three stages, but they would be defined in social rather than biological terms, each marked by the summons and arrival of attendants—first the midwife, then the neighborhood circle of women, finally the afternurse. Parturition ended when the mother returned to her kitchen.

The first stage of delivery lasted from several hours to several days and at first might not even be accompanied by genuine labor. The *expectation* of labor was enough. "I helpd Mrs Lithgow make Cake & Pies & knit on my Stockin," Martha wrote two days after her arrival at Esquire Lithgow's in Winslow. The long distance necessitated the early summons, but Mrs. Lithgow was not far wrong in her estimation, as the next day's entry attests: "I finisht my stockin. My patient was unwell all day." She was delivered at ten the following night of a "fine son."³⁵ Whether she was actually in labor the whole time or only uncomfortable and anxious, we do not know. The important thing is that her midwife was there and willing to stay.

Elite women could obviously afford a more leisured and orderly lying-in. Henry Sewall reported that Tabitha "got below" three weeks after the delivery of her seventh child. With a toddler and three other children to care for as well as the infant, she was probably happy to delay her emergence as long as possible. This time she had been fortunate in engaging Mrs. Conner, the most sought-after of the local afternurses. In comparison, Isaac Hardin's wife hardly paused after delivery to catch her breath. "I am informed that Mrs Hardin wove 1 1/2 yards this day & 3 the next," Martha wrote in the margin of her entry for March 12, 1794. The baby had arrived three days before.

For many Maine women, as for their English counterparts, alcoholic drinks were a part of lying-in. A store manager in another part of Maine wrote his employer, "The women in these parts have been very fruitfull this winter and had I not assisted many of them with tea, sugar, rum &c in their lyings in I do not know what would have become of them, for they seem destitute, of all comforts, and their husbands are to repay in labour." Two days after her niece Pamela Porter was delivered, Martha sent her the same list of commodities, minus the tea. The continuous caution of the prescriptive literature against the use of "strong spirituous liquors" during lying-in reinforces the evidence. The concern of some authors was that strong beverages would induce fevers by adding heat to the body. Thin-water gruel was much better, they insisted, than caudle or thick gruel mixed with liquors.⁵⁴ Maine women did not agree. Rum, sugar, and tea were necessary comforts for a lying-in.

The scarcest commodity in Hallowell households was not rum, however, but help. As we have seen, the same young women who warped looms and swept kitchens in Hallowell occasionally did nursing ("Parthena gone to nurse Mrs Foot"; "Philip Bullin conducted Becky Fought to his brothers as nurse after birth"). Few of these young nurses could stay long, most having other obligations to their families or employers. After one of her own daughters delivered, Martha noted that Debby Low had come and gone in a day and that the mother had no help except for her sister, who had brought her two young chil-

dren with her and another baby as well. Under such circumstances, getting well was a woman's best defense.⁵⁵

There were a few older women who specialized in nursing, and those who could afford them were fortunate. Martha Ballard and Henry Sewall both mentioned Mrs. Conry or Conner. Since neither surname appeared on either the 1790 or 1800 census for Hallowell, Augusta, or other nearby towns, she may have been a widow living as a dependent in a daughter's or sister's house. Mrs. Vose, probably the wife or mother of one of the men by that name in the town, also did nursing, as did Mrs. Stone. Nurses were probably paid less than midwives, though in some families, at least, they inherited the traditional place of honor at an infant's baptism. At the baptism of one of the Reverend Mr. Foster's children, "Mrs Vose carried it." Henry Sewall gave Mrs. Conner the same honor when his daughter Mary was baptized.⁵⁶

A successful delivery did not assure the survival of the child, nor did all women pass through the lying-in period without incident. Experienced afternurses could handle the usual complications, though occasionally Martha was called back to administer remedies two or three days after delivery. "Shee had an ill turn. Her milk is Cumming," was the common explanation. There were more exotic complications, of course. Two weeks after a birth, Martha went back to the Norcrosses and "Cleared her infants breasts of milk." Women then as now suffered from afterpains, hemorrhoids, and phlebitis. In thirty-eight of the 481 births between 1785 and 1796, Martha returned to her patients to treat some sort of complication. In thirty-four of these cases, at least one specific symptom is mentioned. Seven women had sore breasts, three experienced fever, two had taken cold, another had contracted a sore throat, five had an "ill turn" when their milk came in, another a severe headache, two experienced unusual weakness, and one had cramp pains a month after delivery. Six days after delivery, Moses Sewall's wife was "Exercised with a swelling in her Left Legg & Severe pain." In the final case, Martha attributed the postpartum crisis to the misbehavior of a husband.⁵⁷

"I was called in hast to Mrs. Williams," she wrote, "shee

being in a Delirium by reason of a mistep of her Husband tho not desiring to injure her. I tarried till 3/O Clock morn. Left her rationall tho Exercisd with some pain." It is hard to imagine what the young husband had done. Had he administered the wrong medicine? Let the fire go out? Crawled in bed with his wife—or the afternurse? The suddenness of the crisis suggests that an emotional upset rather than a fever had induced the "Delirium," though we cannot be sure.⁵⁸

As we have seen, five of Martha's patients died during the lying-in period. One woman was seriously ill with the measles when she gave birth. Another was in convulsions when she delivered a stillborn daughter and was still experiencing "fits" four days later when she died. She was no doubt a victim of eclampsia, the most severe stage of an acute toxemia of pregnancy, a condition that is still considered one of the gravest complications of childbirth today. The other women may have died of puerperal infection, historically the major cause of deaths in childbed. The infectious quality of puerperal fever was first suggested in the 1840s by Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes in the United States and Dr. Ignaz Semmelweis in Austria, but the bacteriological nature of the disease was not settled until the 1880s, when Louis Pasteur demonstrated the presence of what is now known as streptococcus in patients suffering from the affliction. Puerperal fever is a wound infection caused by the invasion of the uterine cavity by a number of bacteria, alone or in combination. The patient may feel normal in the first few days after delivery, but then an elevation in temperature, headache, malaise, and pelvic pain signal infection. (With certain strains of bacteria there is a profuse discharge characterized by a peculiarly foul odor.)⁵⁹

The description of Mrs. Craig's death fits the pattern. She was "safe Delivered of a very fine Daughter" on March 31, 1790. Five days later Martha reported finding her "not so well as I could wish." The midwife returned the next day and administered a "Clister [enema] of milk, water, & salt" and applied an "ointment & a Bath of Tansy, mugwort, Cammomile & Hysop which gave Mrs. Cragg great relief." A week later she was

called back because her patient was "Exceeding ill." Mrs. Craig had taken rhubarb and the bark on her own but had not improved. When a physician was called the next day, he "plainly told the famely Mrs Cragg must die." She expired that evening. Martha helped "put on the grave Cloaths," then stayed with the family the night. "The Corps were Coffined & sett in the west room," she wrote. "Purge & smell very offensive." Meanwhile, the neighbors came by turns to "give the infant suck."⁶⁰

Martha attempted no diagnosis in this or in the remaining cases, though infection seems the likely cause. As we have seen, Mrs. Caton died four days after delivery during the scarlet fever epidemic of 1787. The remaining women fell ill a few days after delivery and died two weeks later. What is significant about these five deaths, of course, is their rarity. A woman might experience acute discomfort during lying-in—afterpains, sore nipples, swollen legs, and even "Delirium"—but few died.

Most women went through delivery every other year, summing a midwife, calling their women, welcoming the afternurse, returning to their kitchens. For the next year they would breast-feed the newest baby while caring for the older siblings, fitting in work at the loom or in the barn and garden as they could. Some historians have discerned an effort in New England toward the end of the eighteenth century to control family size. There is little evidence of that in Hallowell. Even with incomplete registration, there are more than seven children per family in the town clerk's records. Martha delivered four women of a twelfth, one of a thirteenth, two of a fifteenth, and one of a sixteenth child.

For most women, breast-feeding retarded conception, creating birth intervals that averaged twenty-four months, in Martha Ballard's practice as in most of the western world. Martha was impressed enough to note it when Ezra Hodge's wife delivered her fifth baby just two months after her oldest child turned five, but such feats of fertility were rare.⁶¹ The rhythm of childbearing kept the traditional beat. If there was any effort at family limitation, it came toward the end of the childbearing years. In some families, birth intervals grew further apart in the last years of delivery.

1793, to buy a shawl, she was probably collecting part of the twenty-four-shilling fee he had given her three weeks before. It is not surprising that the really big fees in the diary, those double, triple, and even quadruple fees offered in about 15 percent of cases, were offered by storekeepers and merchants. They could afford that kind of extravagance since, with the markup, twenty-four shillings at the store cost them considerably less. John Sheppard was the most consistently generous of the merchants, probably because as agent for the Vaughans he could afford it.

The "Elligant supper" served after Mrs. Molloy's delivery reinforces the notion that John Molloy was showing off a bit in multiplying the midwife's fee. Prosperity did not ensure domestic tranquillity, however. Martha Molloy gave birth to a second child two years later and then disappeared from Martha's midwifery records, presumably because she and her husband had moved to Portland or some other coastal town, though his shipping business occasionally brought him back to Hallowell. (On June 12, 1796, Martha noted: "Capt. Molloy sleeps here this night.") In 1801 Martha Molloy sued for divorce in the Supreme Judicial Court, charging her husband with desertion and adultery. Supporting testimony came from Mary Wyman of Salem, Massachusetts, who admitted that John Molloy was the father of her illegitimate child. Her deposition did not spare details:

She affirmed that John Molloy, mariner, Did at Salem ... Lodge in the same Bed with me the deponent thro' the Nights of the thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth days of January, in the Year of our Lord One thousand and Eight hundred, in my Chamber, in the House of Mr. Ashley in said Salem, and both of us being undressed without any Cloths on except our Linen, and that He the said John Molloy had carnal knowledge of my Body, during those Nights aforesaid ... and then and there did Beget me with a Female Child, which was born on the thirteenth day of October last past, and I further declare that he solemnly declared that he was a Widower, at the

same time, but afterwards I heard that he had a Wife and two Children at Portland and that his wifes father had taken his Daughter Home to his own House."⁷⁸

Martha Molloy was one of two Hallowell women to get divorces that year. Nabby Sylvester (another of Martha's patients) also charged her husband with infidelity, claiming he had "committed divers act of Adultery" in Boston and in the West Indies.⁷⁹ Martha never mentioned these divorces or any others in the diary. Still, her quiet entries suggest the realities of maritime marriage. After a delivery at Nathan Burges's house, she wrote dily, "Her husband is at Sea if living."⁸⁰

Novelists and filmmakers have long exploited the drama of birth, the agony of labor, the shadowy threat to the mother's life, the anxious pacing of the father. Martha Ballard's diary shifts the focus of adventure from the labor itself to the midwife's journey. If spring breakup brought high adventure, winter offered a numbing course in endurance. One day, called at daybreak during a heavy snow, she trudged across the river and "as far as the plain beyond Esquire Howards Bridge," when she "met a mesage Enforming the woman was got safe to Bed." (No delivery, and hence no fee.) "I had two falls, one on my way there, the other on my Return. The Storm continues yet. The snow is Levil with the top of the lower pain of glass of our north window. I travild some Rods in the snow where it was almost as high as my waist."⁸¹

Some weeks she hardly moved from one journey before she began another. Setting out in a "doleful storm" she went by horseback as far as Pollard's tavern, then took a sleigh upriver to the Boltons'. Mrs. Savage with her. "We were once over set," she wrote, carefully accounting each mishap. "Once I got out & helpt push behind the carriage. We arivd safe at sun sett." The baby was born at eight; at six the next morning ("clear but very high wind") Martha was on her way through the brilliant cold to a house five miles downriver. "Men shoveld through

drifts & we arrivd at 9," she wrote. She was called back upriver the following day, this baby arriving "in the middle of the night," stopped home the next morning ("clear, calm, and cold,") to take a nap before leaving again ("clear and excessive cold") to officiate at yet another delivery.⁸²

The Kennebec country offered adventures for every season. Even in good weather there was a certain thrill in crossing a modest stream "on the string piece of the bridge." Given the rough country beyond the river, riding was also unpredictable. "My hors mird in a swamp and I fell off," Martha reported after one delivery. The mire "by the Bridge between here and Densmores" was also a pitfall, though ordinary ruts and ridges could be just as troublesome. "The hors Blunderd & I fell & hurt me," Martha would write, usually without further comment or explanation. The family horse was a stumbler, but he was at least familiar. Mounting Captain Springer's horse after another delivery, she found herself thrown to the ground as the beast ran under a shed. "Broak my specktakles and allmost my limbs," she reported drily.⁸³ Since she generally rode sidesaddle, falling off a horse was easier, but perhaps less dangerous, than it would have been if she had ridden astride. At least she was well padded with petticoats and skirts. She certainly preferred sidesaddle. "I wrote a mans saddle which fatagud me very much," she complained after one journey home.⁸⁴

A cloudy night could transform any journey into a pilgrim's progress, as on the April night when she and Woodward Allin "carried a candle to the top of Burnt Hill." Lacking light, she resorted to wilderness savvy. "Calld in hast to go to Mr. Whites," she wrote. "The Boys Landed me at Jackson Landing. I took off[] my shoes & walkt in my stockings. Steerd as strait a Coars as I Could and reacht Mr Whites very soon but was much fatagued."⁸⁵

Martha was proud enough of her adventures to write about them, though she was also pleased to note when more commodious transportation was available. "Was conducted home in a carriage by Mr Pitt," she wrote after delivering Jonathan and Sally's second baby. But there was little danger of her growing

soft. In 1798, after another delivery in the Hussey neighborhood, she crossed the river to the Shepards', walked from there to the Parners', and then rode "a Colt home on which woman never was before."⁸⁶ She was sixty-two years old.

What took Martha Ballard out of bed in the cold of night? Why was she willing to risk frozen feet and broken bones to practice her trade? Certainly midwifery paid well, at least by the standards usually assigned women's work. Martha cared about her "rewards," and she kept her midwifery accounts carefully. Yet money alone cannot account for her commitment. Nor is it enough to say that serving others was her way of serving God. She interpreted her work, as all of life, in religious terms: God rescued her from the spring flood, sustained her through difficult deliveries, preserved the lives of mothers and children, and gave her the strength to continue her work. (Even such a prosaic end-of-the-year summary as "I have Lost 42 nights sleep the year past" was a kind of spiritual accounting.) Yet religious faith is also an inadequate explanation. Midwifery was a form of service and a source of material rewards, but even more than that it was an inner calling, an assertion of being. Martha Ballard's specialty brought together the gentle and giving side of her nature with her capacity for risk and her need for autonomy.

The fathers who fetched her in the black of night leaned on her skill, offering her the command of their horses and bedchambers, bestowing lumber credits and teapots for her service. The women who circled around her at the height of travail respected her caring and sustained her strength. The women who reached for her in the anguish of travail extended her motherhood in their own. Martha Ballard needed her patients as much as they needed her.

"How long God will preserve my strength to perform as I have done of late he only knows," Martha wrote on January 15, 1796. She had begun the new year still exhausted from the old.

For both of them, 1795 had been a strenuous year. In February, while she was climbing "mountains of ice" at the Husseys' landing ("almost fatigued to death"), Ephraim was mending his way through crusted snow along the river between Hallowsell and Vassalboro. In late April, when she was falling from her horse on a muddy road to the Hook, he was in East Andover hacking his way from beech tree to elm. In June, while she was weeding beans and cucumbers and bleaching cloth and nursing the sick, he was leading a gang of men "Laying out a road to New Sharon on Sandy river." Ephraim spent a total of fifty-nine nights in the woods in 1795, not quite as many as Martha passed sitting with laboring women or coiled in wakefulness in unfamiliar beds, yet for a man who had seen his seventieth birthday it was a notable record. Endurance was a theme of his life as of hers.

"Mr Ballard went to Captain Cooks to have a glass put in his compass," Martha wrote on January 27, 1795. "He also sett out to survey the Town of Varsalborough this afternoon. Expects to be gone the remainder of the week." By the time her husband returned, Martha had delivered three babies, including a new grandchild, a daughter born to Sally and Jonathan in a rented house at the mouth of Bond Brook. When the baby was four days old, the ice in the river broke, undamming a winter flood that sent the young family flying into the night. Martha found Sally and the baby at the Burtons' house, "Comfortable to admiration. . . do not find that she has taken Cold notwithstanding shee was out three or four hours on her sled in a Sleigh. They did but just Escape before their house was started from the foundation and the Chimney thrown down." While the men busied themselves retrieving whatever of the family's "affects" they could, Martha nursed the mother and infant, giving thanks for their preservation. "May they and all Concerned give praise to his great name, to him who is kind to the Evile and unthankfull, whose tender mercies are over all his works,"

she wrote.² Though she no doubt included all of humankind, even herself, among the "evil and unthankful," the prayers may have been weighted toward Jonathan, whose behavior still gave her concern.

Jonathan wasn't the only one of the Ballard children to add to her worries in 1795. When Dolly recovered from the mumps to marry Barnabas Lambarde in May, Martha prayed that her daughter's health might be up to the new responsibilities. Implying "the author of Mercie to Bless them by restoring her impaired health and granting them long to liv in lov and harmony," Martha may have been thinking of the pregnancies that would inevitably follow. Both of Dolly's sisters had babies in 1795. Lucy Towne gave birth to her tenth child in September, a frail little girl who died two hours after delivery ("it had an obstruction of breath at the Nostrils"). Hannah Ballard was so ill after the birth of her second child in October that she became delirious; not for six weeks was she well enough to sit at the table.

In November, new and unexpected troubles struck the family. Returning from a delivery on November 15, Martha was surprised to find Ephraim at home—he had left five days before on what was to have been an extended surveying tour. Her explanation was brief and breathless: "They were assaulted when a sleep last Thursday night in the wilderness by men they knew not, who robd him of his papers and instruments. They demanded them of him with a muskit presented at his breast. May we Ever praise God for his goodness in preserving him and his assistants from hurt in person." In the margin of the day's entry she noted her latest delivery, summarized the story of the assault, then added: "This is the 600th Birth at which I have attended Since I Came to this Eastern Clime."

That she reached her 600 milestone on the same day as Ephraim returned with his alarming news was a coincidence, yet for both of them the demands of life in an "Eastern Clime" were accelerating. At midnight on November 26, two weeks after the attack on her husband, Martha sat down to summarize the day's events in her diary. It had been an ordinary day. In

most respects her account was just as ordinary. Weather. Comments on her own work and that of her husband and sons. References to Derius, the male helper who was then living with them, and to her own hired girl, Sarah Neal. And then, just the briefest glimpse of her own discouragement:

Clear and Cool. I have been doing my housework and Nursing my Cow. Her Bag is amazingly Sweld. Derias went from here. Mr Ballard and Ephraim got wood home. Cyrus Cleand wheat and went to the fort. Sarah went to watch with Mary Densmore. Doctor Williams came there. Shee returnd and Sarah Densmore with her at 11 hour Evening. I have been picking wool till then. A womans work is never Done as the Song says and happy shee whos strength holds out to the End of the rais. It is now near the middle of the night and Mr Densmore Calls me to his house. I sett up till day.

"A womans work is never done." The words dropped gently onto the page. The song Martha was thinking of was probably an American version of an English ballad first published in London in the middle of the seventeenth century. She could easily identify with the harassed housewife of that song:

*There's never a day, from morn to night,
But I with work am tired quiet;
For when the game with me is at the best,
I hardly in a day take one hour's rest.*

Even without the demands of midwifery and nursing, there was work enough to do:

*Sometimes I knit, and sometimes I spin,
Sometimes I wash, and sometimes I do wring,
Sometimes I sit, and Sowe by my selfe alone,
And thus a woman's work is never done.*

Unlike the woman in the ballad, however, Martha had no young children at home. There were no toddlers to take "from their naked beds,/To put on their clothes and comb their heads." Nor was there a sucking infant, "that at my breast/Doth knaw and bite, and sorely me molest." She had surmounted the early trials of motherhood. Yet there were still three and sometimes four men in the house to cook and wash for, poultry and pigs to feed, and a cow to tend to; and for the first time in years she had no daughters at home. Since Dolly's marriage in May, she had endured a succession of temporary workers—Party Easty, Sarah Neal, Nabby Jewell—never certain whether they would be there when she returned from a delivery.³ "Maids may sit still, go, or run,/But a Woman's work is never done." Martha sat up all night at the Densmore house on November 26, then rushed off to a delivery the following day ("I had a Severe turn of Cramp in my Limbs in the night). She went from that delivery to another, suffering a second fit of cramp, then came home in a rain storm to her unfinished chores: "I have done my housework and Boild brine. Took down pumpkin which was Dried." Unlike the religious sentiments with which she usually framed her experience, the old song made gender the defining reality in a woman's life. Behind the song was the even older proverb, "*A man works from sun to sun*, but a woman's work is never done."

~~"The day she learned of the attack on Ephraim. On December 31, she updated the tally: 'Birth 608th Since I Came to this Town. Two weeks later, after coming home from another delivery to find her house in arms,' she again recorded her total: 'This is the 612th Birth I have attended at since the year 1777.' Although counting deliveries was a traditional habit among midwives, it was unusual for Martha to give so much attention to numbers. Three times in eight weeks she computed her lifetime total, the tally seeping forward painfully from 600 to 608 to 612. She had begun to doubt her ability to hold out 'to the End of th rais.'" Yet how could she grow weary when her husband, ten years her senior, was still setting his compass by the stars?~~

In the months after Ephraim was forced at the point of a musket to give up his surveying instruments to an army of squatters, Martha devoted the emotional center of her diary to laundry. On January 4, 1796, as you have read, she was washing clothes, alone, when her neighbors the Livermores and two other friends came to call. "I laid my Washing aside when my Company Came," she wrote, "and finisht it after they went except for rinsing." Such an interruption might have been a minor irritation (or a welcome pleasure) had she not been called away early the next morning to a woman in labor. Not until three days later was she able to finish her wash. The next week, "Bulah" (Beulah Prince), a black woman came with her child to spend the night and to do the laundry, but she could not stay, nor was washing the only insistent chore for a lone woman in a house full of men.¹⁰

On January 15, Martha returned from a delivery to compose a diary entry that for the third time that winter summarized the course of her career, a diary entry that was simultaneously a celebration, a lament, and a prayer. "Birth 4th," she wrote in the margin, even though this was only the third delivery of the year. "This is the 612th Birth I have attended at Since the year 1777. The first I assisted was the wife of Petron Warin, July 1778." She crowded this last bit of history into the margin, the handwriting getting smaller and smaller as it moved down the page. In the main entry she had written: "I returned home and find my house up in arms. How long God will preserve my strength to perform as I have done of late he only knows. May I trust in him at all times and do good and hee will fulfill his promis according to my Day. May he giv me strength and may I Conduct accordingly."

Martha prayed not for ease or for release from her burdens, but for *strength*, for the physical ability to continue the work she had done for so long. It was strength to endure to the end of the race she had asked for in November. It was strength that she now called for, twice in a single entry. She was only a few weeks short of her sixty-first birthday. Her body ached. The attacks of colic were coming more frequently. She had no one

to preserve order at home when she walked out under the stars to serve her neighbors: "find my house up in arms." The image is a curious one, as though the floorboards, pothooks, and bedsteads had risen against her. It was not her husband and sons who were disturbed. If they had been home at all, they had gotten their supper and breakfast themselves, leaving their platters and mugs, unmade beds, and stiffening socks behind them. It was no human enemy but Martha's *house* that had taken up arms against her.

The phrase "in arms" recurs in the entry for April 27, 1798, when she was again without a servant yet obliged to spend five days away performing deliveries. "I returned home at 10 hour morn," she wrote, "find my house alone and Everything in arms. Did not find time to sit down till 2 pm." The phrase is idiomatic, of course, yet it suggests an attitude. A house could be an adversary. Turn your back, and it rippled into disorder. Chairs tipped. Candles slumped. Egg yolks hardened in cold skillets. Dust settled like snow. Only by constant effort could a woman conquer her possessions. Mustering grease and ashes, shaking feather beds and pillows to attention, scrubbing floors and linens into subjection, she restored a fragile order to a fallen world.

This instrumental, near-adversarial relationship to her house is obliquely confirmed by the dearth of positive references. She celebrated the growth of lambs and parsley in her diary, but never the arrangement of her furniture or rooms. There is only one entry that suggests anything like an effort at decorating, and Dolly was responsible for that. "Dolly put new Trimming on my Case Draws. We moved it into her Bedroom," Martha wrote on a November day when she was still recovering from attending two deliveries in twenty-four hours. In the same entry she noted that Sally had done the washing and helped Dolly dress nine chickens for cooking. "I have not done much work," she explained. "Have not got over my fatigue." That was no doubt true, yet it is also clear that she preferred it that way. Whenever possible, she delegated routine housework to others.

In her mistress, "Child washing" was an important statement.

something on the order of "got across the river safely." She didn't mind doing heavy work in the garden or barn, but there were certain perennial tasks of housekeeping she avoided when she could. "I have washt the first washing I have done without help this several years," she had written on January 4, 1793, a few weeks after Hannah and Parthena had "gone to housekeeping."¹² Fortunately, Dolly and Sally Cox had soon replaced them. There is little difference between a diary entry for 1790, "The girls washt & scourd the East and bedroom floors," and one for 1795, "My Girls have made me 2 Barrils of Soap this weak," except that the identities of the "girls" had changed. Hannah and Parthena had done the washing and scrubbing in 1790; five years later it was Dolly and Sally who made the soap.¹³

Martha's curious focus on washing in the autumn and winter of 1795-1796 relates to much broader themes in her own life and in the history of women's work. She had defined herself as a "gadder," as a woman who left home, frequently, to care for her neighbors. Yet she was also a housewife, a dutiful and productive housewife, who had more than enough work to accomplish at home. Those two impulses were resolved in the first ten years of the diary by the presence of her daughters. The trials she faced after 1795 not only demonstrate the importance in her own life of her career as a midwife, but they show what it meant to regulate one's work to the rhythms of mothering.

Historians have distinguished three general systems of labor in early America: chattel slavery in the South, indentured servitude in the mid-Atlantic region, and family labor in New England. Scholars have perhaps given too little attention to the complexities and contradictions of that system of "family" labor. For one thing, a family labor system was inherently cyclical. A couple spent their first years of marriage raising workers and their last bereft of help. The middle years were the harvest time of family life: a man who was unable to clear his land or fence his fields when he had grown sons at home would not have a second chance, nor would there ever be a period in a woman's life when her productive power was greater. What Martha was

January 1796

221

experiencing, then, was the inevitable passing of a stage in the life cycle of her family.

Yet the gradual progression in the development of any family from hired help to family help and back to hired help was never just that. Martha's diary suggests that the presence of daughters in the home actually attracted other workers. She had been fortunate in her daughters, and even more so in being able to keep other long-term helpers who worked beside them. When Dolly's dressmaking business called her away from home, Sally filled the void. "Dolly went to Colonel Sewalls, Sally washt," Martha wrote, or on a day when both girls were home, "Dolly and Sally have washt, scourd my puter & washt the kitchen."¹⁴ It is no accident that Martha's midwifery practice and her textile production grew together during the years her girls were in their teens and early twenties. Summoned in the middle of the night or caught with a "lingering" labor, she could count on "the girls" to do the ordinary chores as well as the spinning and weaving. Nor should we conclude that the advantages were all on her side. Midwifery credit brought calico and ribbon into the household and helped to provide teapots and crockery for brides.

The particular mix of boys and girls in a family, and their order, also helped to shape a family's destiny. One wonders how Martha's and Ephraim's lives might have differed had their youngest child been a girl or their oldest son better fitted for adulthood. As it was, Cyrus and Ephraim were still living at home in 1795 when the last of the girls had gone. Had Cyrus married or the three older girls survived diphtheria or had Lucy remained in Hallowell, Martha might have had granddaughters old enough or near enough to help her into old age. Instead, she struggled to help Hannah and Sally (and eventually Dolly) with their babies, all the while managing her own household and carrying on her midwifery practice.

There had been a time in early New England, and perhaps in some parts of the region there still was, when aging fathers could dominate their sons through the power to dispose of land. Ephraim had experienced such a system. He was thirty-eight

ment" to which Patty "subscribed her name." Since Ephraim had both written and witnessed hundreds of legal documents, one suspects his involvement. Yet the penetration of legal language, and legal attitudes, into the household, came from the young women as well as their employers. Even Sally Cox, toward the end of her term, "showed great anxiety about her wages." Sally Fletcher simply walked out, returning to collect her "duds," as Martha wrote, and threatening to "sue us in a weak from this time if we did not pay her what was her due." Martha huffed, "She looks thin fased to what shee did when shee left us."¹⁸ The crimes of these young ladies remain obscure; their attitude was familiar. Like the armed men who burst from the woods to attack Ephraim or the traders whose lawsuits filled the Court of Common Pleas, they were determined to get what they thought was their due. At such moments there must have been a comforting congruence between Ephraim's troubles and Martha's, a shared sense that the world had indeed slipped from its familiar orbit, that the axis of the universe was changing.

Perhaps it was. In recent years, historians have connected the political revolution against English authority with a wider revolution against hierarchical relations of all sorts. John Adams alluded to that argument in his famous answer to Abigail's request to "remember the ladies": "We have been told that our Struggle has loosened the bands of Government every where. That Children and Apprentices were disobedient—that schools and Colleges were grown turbulent—that Indians slighted their Guardians and Negroes grew insolent to their Masters."¹⁹ English visitors to post-Revolutionary America were astonished at the lack of deference shown by household workers. "To call persons of this description servants or to speak of their master or mistress is a grievous affront," one English observer wrote. He told of approaching the house of a gentleman and asking the young woman who answered the door whether her master was home. "I have no master," she replied. "Don't you live here?" he asked. "I stay here," she answered. "And who are you, then?" "Why, I am Mr———'s help. I'd have you to know, *man*, that I am no *sarvant*; none but *negers* are *sarvants*."²⁰ By that

definition, Beulah Prince, who helped Martha with the washing on January 13, was one of the few *servants* in Hollowell. Yet Beulah too came and went. There had been slaves in the Moore family when Martha was a girl in Oxford. Hollowell's non-whites were free.

Such changes should not be exaggerated, however. Saucy servants also appear in New England records in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century. Keeping a maid was a fundamental problem in an economy that relied on family labor. Martha's trials had less to do with the Revolution than with the inevitable transitions in her maturing family. The problem was not that she had a harder time attracting neighbors' daughters in 1796 than in the earlier years, or that girls like Sarah Neal stayed for shorter periods, it was that she no longer had her daughters and Parthenia or Sally Cox to maintain the stability her household regimen required.

As 1796 drew to a close, Martha effected a kind of comedy, blithely dismissing Elizabeth Taylor in December ("I am determined not to pay girls any more for ill manners"). But by the middle of January she was desperate. She was horrified by Elizabeth Taylor's bad manners, by Patty Easy's theft, and by Sally Fletcher's "thin fased" behavior, but most of the time she seemed grateful to have any help at all.

Diary entries for the spring and summer of 1798 are typical. On May 8, Martha sent her husband to Wintthrop to see if he could get Hepsy Brown to come and work for her. He was unsuccessful. Polly Barbareck came on May 10 but left again the next week, Martha giving her four shillings for her service and a small looking glass. On May 30, Ephraim went to Sidney to "seek a girl" but couldn't find one. Nabby Smith came on June 1 and stayed about six weeks. Happy days: "Nabby and I went into the field and gathered strawberries after we finish our washing." That was on June 25, but on July 17 there was another crisis: "Nabby left me." The effect on Martha's morale—and on her diary—was marked. Crisp and confident entries gave way to long lamentations, and in a few places even developed into vignettes of woman's oppression. The day after Polly Barbareck

~~Martha~~ Martha scrubbed the bedroom and kitchen even though she had a funeral to attend that day. During the next few days she was ill. Her sense of abandonment may account for the length of the diary entry for May 22 and 23 and for its tone:

I have been very unwell. I Eat a little cold puding and Cold milk twice in the coars of the day and perform part of my washing. I Laid myself on the bed in the bedroom was not able to rise from there. My Husband went to bed and not come to see me so I lay there in my Cloaths till 5 hours morn when I made shift to rise. I got the men Breakfast but was not able to Eat a morsel my self till after 3 pm but I finisht my washing. How many times I have been necasatated to rest my self on the bed I am not able to say. God grant me patience to go thro the fatages of this life with fortitude looking forward to a more happy state.

The old virtues—duty, hard work, service to others—had turned against her. If Ephraim noticed her little demonstration of despair, he made no response. God was her only ally; her only defense was to serve until her strength failed, then wait for somebody as self-sacrificing and as dutiful as herself to respond. "My daughter Pollard and Mrs Dingley here, helpt me do my work, washt my kitchen," she wrote after one illness, and again, "I have done a larg wash and am fatigued. I brewed also. Daughter Lambert came before I had finisht. She assisted me."²¹

Despite her domestic trials, Martha delivered more babies in each of the two years after Dolly's marriage than in any other year in her career. Although deliveries declined in 1798 when she was truly ill for a time, and when the illness and death of her daughter Lucy Towne took some of her attention, they rose again in 1799. Commitment to her neighbors only partly accounts for her struggle to keep moving. In the fifteen years since her fiftieth birthday, she had come to identify with her calling as a midwife. She had no wish to abandon it.

* * *

January 1796

227

The last three years of the eighteenth century were important ones for Hallowell. In February 1797, the Massachusetts legislature separated the three parishes, creating two towns. The southern parish remained Hallowell. By June the middle and northern parishes, Martha's part of the town, had become Augusta. Separation didn't diminish commercial rivalry between the two sections. The presence of Daniel Cony in the state legislature soon assured two decided victories for Augusta. "The middle plet of the Kenebec Bridge was finisht and there were 7 discharges of the field piece and 3 cheirs," Martha wrote on September 9, 1797. On November 21, she continued, "The Kennebeck Bridge was dedicated. Mr. Ballard and son Cyrus attended. David Wall, James Savage & Asa Fletcher were burnt some by the Carriages taking fire thro Carelessness." Augusta acquired additional luster in February 1799, when it became the shiretown of a new Kennebec County.²²

During this period of expansion, the town voted to build a new road "to Sidney in the route to Belgrade," a small decision that had more effect on the Ballard family than any of the others. The new road would cut across the farm that Jonathan had purchased from Savage Bolton, creating a fork that would become known in the nineteenth century as Ballard's Corner. In December 1799, Martha and Ephraim moved to a new house on the road to Sidney. During construction, Martha always referred to it as "Mr Ballard's house" or "his house," perhaps from long habit, perhaps because consciously or unconsciously she felt excluded from the decision. She could hardly have opposed a move that would at last give the family a homestead, yet the consequences, as we shall see, were far more fateful for her than for Ephraim.

Ephraim had always been a steady but quiet presence in Martha's diary. In 1800, he moved to the forefront of her struggles with her girls. "I workt very hard in my garden, then had my evening work to do by reason of Hepsy's going to walk streat with Lydia Nudd," she wrote on a spring day in 1800, continuing the same theme the following day: "I have had my house work to do and more than all my hard work to bear frowns

~~important thing that happened~~ in the diary. Martha had long used it to measure her own accomplishments. Now she poured into its pages her own feelings, her growing sense of injustice and abandonment, her struggle to overcome despair. Each task accomplished became a kind of witness in her case against Hepsy—or her husband—or the world. "Mr Capin his wife and son Ephraim Came here, took Breakfast," she wrote. "I rose early, put on a kettle of yarn to boil, then milkt and got breakfast and did my washing, then went to the spring for water, but alas how fatigued was I when I reached my house."²⁵

During the first two years at the new farm, Martha was repeatedly ill, her old problems perhaps accentuated by the hard work of making a new garden and reestablishing domestic order. When the family had moved from the mills in 1791, she had had the help of her girls. Now, she was left to struggle alone and offer what help she could to Sally, who was often pregnant. "God grant me strength to bear my toil and affliction." The prayer was repeated over and over, and eventually God, or Ephraim, heard. On November 28, 1800, when she was doubled over with a fit of "colic," he got out of bed, made her some tea, and warmed a brick for her stomach.

Martha's descriptions of her own illnesses are opaque, yet it is clear that some of her problems were gynecological. She had long since passed menopause, perhaps before the diary opened, but in the early years at the farm she was troubled by recurrent vaginal bleeding, a problem that had begun just before the move. On June 8, 1799, she had written, "I found myself to be after the manner of woman." In 1806, she added in the margin of that entry, "I have remained in that situation every [month?] since." She had another unexplained "infirmary" (perhaps hemorrhoids or a prolapsed uterus) that sometimes made it difficult for her to sit in a chair.²⁶ The colic also continued to trouble her. During one attack in October 1801 she "had a humour come out on my skin which was very tedious to bear. They gave me a decoction of snake root & saffron." She finally sent for Dr. Hubbard, who came on October 15 and "gave some prescriptions but his opinion is that it is not provible I Ever

shall enjoy a good state of health again." She pondered the prognosis for the next few days, keeping to her bed most of the time. On October 20, she was up picking wool, gathering hollyhock seed, and cutting broomcorn. On November 8, she stayed up all night attending a woman in labor.

~~Her midwifery practice had passed its peak, however. Deliveries dropped from fifty-one in 1799, the last year at the Howard farm, to twenty-six in 1800. By 1802, she was down to eleven deliveries a year. Poor health was one problem. (She recorded twenty-one days of illness in 1800, seventy-five by 1802.) The location of the new house was another. Jonathan's farm stood on a broad plateau in an isolated neighborhood high above the river. The road from the meeting house was breathtakingly steep, enough to keep Martha away from church and the stores except when the weather was especially pleasant and her health good.~~

~~One of her brief pleasures during this period was the arrival of Dorothy and Stephen Barton, who had returned to Maine after ten years in Oxford. They lived for a while in the center of Augusta before moving to a farm in Mala (now Windsor, Maine). "I have not been able to sit on a Chair this day by reason of my infirmaty," Martha wrote on September 1, 1801.~~

~~I swept my Chambers, lower rooms and seller, then left home to be free from work. Walkt down to Mr Moodys. There rested a little and went on to Brother Bartons. Laid down on the Bed a little while then Sister and I went to Shuball Pitts. I tarried there all night.~~

~~The visit seemed to do her good. She felt well enough the next day to call on several friends and to deliver Betsy Gill's baby on September 3. The next day she attended a lecture at the meeting house, meeting her husband there. There was still tension between them. Perhaps he was annoyed at her abrupt departure. Though he had a horse, he "went on and left me to walk." Fortunately, he stopped at Thomas Bonds, who now lived at Jones's mills, where Martha "overtrook him and wrode~~

~~informed that~~ a man by the name of Dunphas is apprehended for abusing his wife. The widow Getchel has been so imprudent as to liv with him." Her use of the term "imprudent" to describe Olive Getchell's behavior is characteristically reserved; a more zealous Christian might have said "wicked." The next day, she reported that "Jonathans wife Came home fatagued both in Boddy & mind. Her Sister Getchel was apprehended and brot down for Tryal, before Justice North. Shee was not found guilty on Tryal." Even though Olive escaped legal censure, her troubles, like Hitty's, were enough to exhaust Sally—physically and emotionally.

The family drama is real enough. So too is the graphic account of John Davis's death. The child lived a little more than a month after he was burned. Martha wrote something about his condition or care on nineteen of those thirty-five days. She herself nursed him on seventeen days, sometimes around the clock. Including the autopsy, she recorded eleven visits by Dr. Colman, five by Dr. Cony, and three by Dr. Page. Colman apparently had primary care of the boy. Interestingly, Page and Cony never appeared together. Presumably Page, who lived in Hallowell, was a substitute for Cony, whose house was just across the river near Fort Western. Other than Martha and Hitty, seven women were involved in John's care. Mrs. Saunders, presumably Mrs. James Saunders of Augusta, appears three times. She and Olive Fletcher were both with Martha when she dressed the child for burial. Perhaps they helped Hitty nurse her child after he was removed from Martha's care.

The doctors prescribed the poultice of corn meal, rum, and onions, but Martha was responsible for applying and changing the dressings. One of them recommended a clister. She administered it. Whether she or they, or all of them together, counted the worms the child expelled, we do not know. The sight cannot have been pleasant. John was probably infested with *Ascaris lumbricoides*, an intestinal parasite that produces an adult worm the diameter of a lead pencil and as much as fourteen inches long.

Ascariasis is a backyard infection, common to areas where little children defecate in dooryards and orchards or where hu-

February 1801

247

man waste is used to fertilize vegetable gardens. Both practices may have been common in Maine. Eggs are spread through the soil by chickens, insects, pigs, winds, and rains, infesting adults as well as children. John's death didn't end the problem on the Ballard farm. On May 21, 1802, Martha wrote, "Daughter Ballard pukt up 6 long worms," and, on August 3, "Jack pukt 6 very Larg worms." The worms don't cause death, but they do deplete the bodies of young children. A twentieth-century estimate says that twenty worms harbored in a child's intestine can consume two to three grams of carbohydrates a day. Certainly, Martha considered them a serious threat to health. On September 29, 1801, she wrote, "Little Samuel Gill dies of dysentary & worms." Although there was no physiological relation between John's burns and *Ascaris*, the close monitoring which his illness required may have allowed Martha to discover them.¹⁵ Certainly, they put an additional strain on his body.

~~On February 19, 1801, a week after John's death, Esquire Davis came to the Ballard house. Martha wrote that "He gave Mr. Ballard 8 1/2 Dollars on account of the trouble we had with his son." The entry is curious. This is one of the very few times in the diary when Martha's economic activities were included in a family account. Since she was the one who nursed John, it is surprising that Ephraim would settle the account. Was she elsewhere in the house at the time? Or was Davis deliberately ignoring her? Probably what the entry reflects is an ongoing economic relationship between the two men; Ephraim did a great deal of surveying for Esquire Davis during this period. It may also be a consequence of John and Hitty's residence in the house (and presumably their consumption of fuel and food). This was a rare event in Martha's practice; her accounts could be independent of Ephraim's because she usually did her work at other people's houses without implicating him for any sort of expense.~~

~~Martha Ballard spent parts of seventeen days caring for John. If the \$8.50 was for her work alone, she was paid an average of fifty cents a day. Contemporary physicians charged from fifty cents to a dollar for a visit, including medicine.¹⁶ Presumably,~~

in which the physicians pointed out the three divisions of the small intestine—duodenum, jejunum, ileum—and the colon, a sequence commonly described in eighteenth-century medical literature, much to the dismay of one physiologist, who complained, "Anatomists have usually reckoned three small intestines, though nature has formed but one."²²

In her description of the February 4 autopsy, Martha carefully distinguished between those who "performed" and those who participated as "attendants." Among the latter she included herself, her son Jonathan, and Judge North. The men may have attended simply out of curiosity, but more likely they were official observers or witnesses selected by the parents. Jonathan, of course, was the child's uncle; North, a close business associate of the father. Martha's role was more complex. She was a witness of a special sort. At Rachel Savage's dissection on March 13, 1808, she had noted, "There were 12 Doctors present and 3 midwives." Whether there were other attendants on that occasion we do not know, but it is clear that midwives, like doctors, attended autopsies because of their calling as healers.

The practice was well established in England by the 1730s, when Sarah Stone wrote her treatise on midwifery. She cautioned women against men who saw their study of anatomy as giving them a claim to practice obstetrics, "for dissecting the Dead, and being just and tender to the Living, are vastly different." Not that women should disdain anatomy:

I have seen several Women open'd; and 'tis not improper for all of the Profession to see Dissections, and read Anatomy, as I have done. But had I inspected into them all my life, and had not been instructed in Midwifery by my Mother, and Deputy to her full six years, it would have signified but little; nor should I have dared to have undertaken such a Profession, lest any Life should have been lost thro' my ignorance; which I am well assured, thro' the blessing of God, has never happened.²³

In the long-term history of women's medicine, the routine presence of midwives at autopsies is an extraordinarily interest-

ing phenomenon. As guardians of women and children, midwives presumably ensured proper reverence for the bodies. From the doctors' point of view, inviting midwives to observe was perhaps a professional courtesy, a way of including them in an important educational event. At the same time, it helped to validate the activity and perhaps to reassure anxious relatives. Later in the nineteenth century, however, as autopsies shifted from homes to hospitals, as medical education became more institutionalized, and as definitions of appropriate feminine behavior narrowed, that role ceased to be either necessary or possible.

In 1820, a professor at the Harvard Medical School published an anonymous treatise in which he argued that women should no longer be employed as midwives because their character would be destroyed by acquaintance with the dissections essential to thorough instruction in medicine.

It is needless to go on to prove this; it is obvious that we cannot instruct women as we do men in the science of medicine; we cannot carry them into the dissecting room and the hospital; many of our more delicate feelings, much of our refined sensibility must be subdued, before we can submit to the sort of discipline required in the study of medicine; in females they must be destroyed; and I venture to say that a female could scarce pass through the course of education requisite to prepare her, as she ought to be prepared, for the practice of midwifery, without destroying those moral qualities of character, which are essential to the office.²⁴

This was a classic double bind: Women could not qualify themselves to practice midwifery without mastering general medicine, but learning general medicine would disqualify them as women and therefore as midwives.

In Maine in the early nineteenth century, no one worried about the refined sensibility of Martha Ballard. She administered clisters, counted intestinal worms, prepared bodies for burial, and observed dissections, all the while recording appropriate

religious sentiments in the pages of her diary. The Harvard treatise raises a larger question, however. The doctor's insistence that medical discipline subdue sensibility identifies him with the scientific effort to separate observation from feeling, to objectify and quantify experience.²⁵ Because that ethic, once praised as the source of scientific progress, has come under severe criticism in recent years, it is worth asking about Martha's sensibility. Was her ability to attend autopsies a sign of insensitivity? Did familiarity dull feeling?

In her account of John Davis's illness, there is just a hint of the distancing which some historians have associated with early responses to infant death.²⁶ The child had always been "John" in the diary, but on February 2, as death grew near, he became first "the patient" and then "it."

I laid down by the fire at 11, was Call'd on at midnight when an alteration in the patients breathing took place. It was not able to swallow after that nor had it any great struggle. Its life went out as a Candle.

Still, there is a gentleness in that entry that suggests Martha was moved by the little boy's death. "He was [a] promising Child," she wrote. "How oft are our Expectations Cut off."

Her account of Nabby Andros's death also suggests awareness of pain, of both spirit and body. "Oh, how distress'd a being shee is," Martha wrote. "May God be pleas'd to shine on her soall by the influence of his holy spirit and giv her comfort before shee goes hence to be here no more." The day before Nabby's death, she reported finding the family "very distressed." She brought practical comfort: "Help't remove Nabby. We put her Bed out and I made her as Clean as I could and tended her till Evening when I left Mrs. Cowen, Ingerham, & Cypher to watch." The next morning, she was called to put on Nabby's grave clothes and observe the autopsy.²⁷

In Martha's account of Parthenia Pitts's last days, expressions of compassion alternated with the precise observations of an experienced healer. "I was at Shubal Pittses all day. She is very low

Excrisid with sever gripings, & loose stools. God only knows how it may turn out. I sent for my hors but find her so ill I harried thro the night. Shee had Entervails of Paine & rest but weak indeed."²⁸ Each day Martha found a new reason for concern. Parthenia "had a distress turn by Eating a little meat." "Her hands & feet cold." "Her mouth & throat very sor." She "was very much put to it for Breath." "Poor creature endures her illness with great patience."

In the entries describing Parthenia's last hours, the juxtaposition of facts and feelings is striking:

September 1. Old Mrs Pollard & Mrs Barton watcht till near day when I rose & they retired to take some rest. At 6 O Clock shee desird Mr Pitts & I to move her & fix her Bed. We did & laid her in again. She Expir'd in a very short space without a struggle Except distress for Breath. We have reason to hope our loss [is] her gain. I came home from Mrs Pitts' after we had perform'd our last ofice of friendship Except her interment. My son Ephraim went to inform her friends at Winthrop. It is four months this day since I was Call'd to see my dear Neece who was seisd with this her last illness, which shee has born with Christian meekness and humility. She has manifested her regard to Christianity by an open profession of religion & receiving the ordinance of Baptism. We morn the los of her Company, but have the greatest reason to hope that shee has Chang'd this for a world in which shee will be free from all pain and sorrow, join'd with glorified saints to sing Redeming lov.

September 4. I walkt to Mr Pitts this morning, where I saw the operation of a dessection performed on his decesed wife. Her Lights were found to be very much ulcerated, & a Skerrous utera.

Martha moved from a simple record of Parthenia's last moments to quiet remembrance of the four-month vigil. Parthenia was both "Mrs Pitts" and "my dear Neace." By the end of the pas-

22 5 *At home*

Cloudy and some rain. I have been at home. Done my work, Brewed &c. Am very much fatigued.

23 6 *At home. Jonathans wife Bakt here.*

Clear part of the day. Daughter Ballard here to Bake. Shee made Nuts for Ephraim.

24 7 *At home*

Clear part of this day. I have done my hous work and cleand the Chambers, mended stockings &c. I do feel very much fatigued.



Martha's fatigue grew deeper as she entered her seventieth year. Although there were fewer deliveries to take her from her bed in the night, there was enough work in the house and barn to keep her back stiff and her fingers sore. She knitted, brewed beer, dipped candles, made vinegar from pumpkin parings, colored old clothes in cornstalk dye, leached lye from wood ashes and made soap. "Have got three Barrils full and some more," she wrote on March 25, 1803.¹ Spinning was easier now that there was a wool carding mill at Winthrop (Martha called it "the masheen"), but there were still lambs to birth and fleeces to wash. The Ballards had more than twenty sheep, not counting the one Luke Barton ran over with his sleigh on March 14, 1804.²

More exhausting than all the work were the emotional upheavals. "What a scean had I to go at Evening," she wrote on March 17, after Jonathan, the worse for an afternoon at Jones's Tavern, had burst into her house in a rage. This was not the first family gathering that had ended in anger and despair. Two years before, on a similar occasion, she had written:

Jonathans wife & Children supt here. He Came in Just as we sett down to Table in a great passion about his white

Mare being hurt. It overcame me so much I was not able to sett up. I Could wish he might see the folly and Evil of such Conduct and reform.³

Though the details in the two accounts are different, the underlying themes and images are the same—a peaceful supper, an impassioned man, an injured or unavailable horse. The first time, Martha felt her son's lack of control so deeply she was herself immobilized, psychologically struck down. The second time, fear for Lemuel Witham's safety propelled her into the middle of the fray, delaying her own collapse. "I followed on, falling as I went, till meeting Daughter Lambard was assisted by her. Son Lambard brought me home in his sleigh." Assailed by the bad child, she was uplifted and sustained by the good ones.

Yet when Hannah and Dolly came to visit her the next day, they only increased her sorrow. Like Job's comforters, they seem to have blamed her for the problem, or at least offered explanations or proposed solutions she could not accept. It was Jonathan who "spake very indecently" to her on March 20, but she used the plural when she prayed God "to forgive the offences of all who do ingure my feelings," adding, "May they Consider they may be old and receiv like Treatment."

Age surely had something to do with Martha's troubles. It wasn't just the physical process of growing old that made her life difficult, but a subtle passing of authority from one generation to another. The move to Jonathan's farm symbolized this transition. Martha and Ephraim were now old folks, living in semi-dependence on their son's land. If Jonathan had been a different sort of man, this might have been easier to bear. As it was, every outburst of temper was a deliberate assault on Martha's identity. "May the good God support me," she prayed.

In 1804 her problems were complicated by Ephraim's arrest for debt. ~~Thi is why Daughter Pollard had come to the house on March 17 and then gone on "to see her father," why Martha herself had gone to the town "Conducted by Lemuel Witham."~~ Ephraim had been taken on January 2. As Martha described it:

~~with Hannah and Dolly, the~~ Martha brought many of her problems on herself. She was a resourceful and independent woman, perfectly capable of predicting her need for wood and taking the steps necessary to get it. She had three grown sons and two sons-in-law nearby and several grandsons capable of helping. None of her children wanted her to freeze. Clearly, she was having trouble separating her practical need for wood from an emotional need for sympathy, for someone to listen to her, to understand her sorrows and acknowledge her burdens. Ephraim's imprisonment exposed her to a particular kind of neglect. Without a husband, she had no one on whom she had a first claim for care. A husband was one's "best friend," even if he did not always behave that way. Married children had competing obligations, wives and husbands of their own, and children, sometimes more children than a grandmother could comprehend. "I saw 13 of my grandchildren at son Lambar's," Martha wrote after one visit to the old Thomas tavern. She enjoyed her grandchildren, yet after all these years of struggle she felt an intense need for someone to lean on. There is a telling entry in the springtime, when she was struggling to put in her garden. "I have dug ground and planted Poland Beens," she wrote. "Feel much fatigued. The Childn helpt me some. Allin said he wisht to help me." ³² Martha only wanted the help her family wished to give.

~~Cyrus was a partial comfort helpful when he was there but too frequently gone. He remained a peripatetic miller, spending a few weeks or months at one site, going on to another. He left for Lincolnville the March after his father's imprisonment (George Ulmer, the leading landowner of the town, had solicited his help) but was back for corn planting in May. In October, he was gone again. "Cyrus left here to go to tend mill for Mr Pullin at Watervil. I wish him health and prosperity but alas how shall I do without him," his mother wrote. The next day, Jack Ballard, age thirteen, "Came and Cutt wood for us. He brot me 2 turns of water." ³³~~

~~Ephraim, Jr., had married Mary Farwell on February 5, shortly after his father's imprisonment. On February 21, Mary's widowed~~

~~mother (Martha now called her "Sister Farewell") came to tea. Ephraim and Mary followed local tradition by living apart after their wedding, though occasionally they spent a day together. "Ephraim's wife assisted me to do my housework," Martha wrote on one of those happy days. "I roasted a goos for supper which Son Town gave me." Mary followed another tradition by giving birth to a baby girl, at her mother's house, four months after her marriage. She and Ephraim went to housekeeping in a rented house in the center of Augusta in July. ³⁴~~

~~After the young couple went to housekeeping, Widow Farwell and her younger daughter Sally moved in with Martha for a time, hardly a solution to the wood problem but at least a source of companionship. The two women cohabited happily until Jonathan and Sally decided that they needed the house. ³⁵ On October 25, 1804, ten months after Ephraim's imprisonment, Sally Farwell returned from a visit to Jonathan's. "She informed me at Evng that my son was Determined to Come into this house within a fortnit and that I might tarrie here or go and liv in their house and see how good it was to bring water from this wel. O thou parent of the universe Cutt short thine afflictions and suffer me thine unworthy handmaid to see some Comfort before I go home."~~

~~To his mother, Jonathan's insistence on taking over his father's house appeared to be yet another instance of his impetuous and irrational behavior. To him it may have seemed like a practical and appropriate thing to do. His mother needed help; he and Sally needed a better house, a bake oven, and a decent well.~~

~~Jonathan was impulsive and perhaps given to hard drinking, but he was no ne'er-do-well. He had pieced together a 200-acre farm over a fifteen-year period, buying part of Lot #15 from Savage Bolton in 1787, the rest from William Howard in 1800, meanwhile acquiring the adjoining Lot #16 to the north. How much his father had to do with this, we do not know. By 1800, he had 348 acres of land in Augusta, more than three times as much as his father (though, as was typical of most farms in the town, only fifteen acres had been cleared and "improved"). ³⁶~~

~~His steady rise on the Augusta tax list was impressive, though~~

at least one of his neighbors found him crafty and mean-spirited. In December 1804, while his father was still in jail, Jonathan was indicted by the grand jury and in the subsequent trial convicted of "wickedly and unjustly devising and intending to defraud one William Stone, Junior." (The Stones were near neighbors; Martha noted the birth of their eighth child on March 21, 1804, in the diary entry at the beginning of this chapter.) According to the indictment, Ballard's hired hand, Cyrus Willson, had secured a horse from Stone by claiming he owned a farm in one of the back settlements and an acre of land in Hallowell, when he was, in fact, a mere laborer with no capacity to pay for a horse. Stone was not content to sue Willson alone, but pressed a charge of conspiracy against Jonathan. The jury was convinced. When Jonathan appealed the conviction, he again lost.³⁷ Of all the Ballards, Jonathan appears most frequently in county court records, both as a plaintiff and as a defendant.

Perhaps his acquisitiveness was another manifestation of the self-indulgent behavior that so distressed his mother. There is nothing to suggest he sacrificed in any way to help his parents during this period, though perhaps he would have argued that he was only trying to insure the survival of the next generation. In 1804-1805, he sold or mortgaged \$551 in land but added an additional \$1,635, some of it outside the town. In 1805, he finally acquired Daniel Savage's "homestead farm" with "buildings & saw mill," a property he had been purchasing piecemeal since 1798. Meanwhile, he was suing Noah Woodward, Jr., in the Court of Common Pleas and asking for executions of debt against John Robert and Savage Bolton. Such behavior was characteristic.³⁸ Between 1797 and 1803, Jonathan was a plaintiff in nineteen cases before the Kennebec County Court of Common Pleas, a defendant in ten. He won fifteen of the twenty-nine cases and lost the rest. His record before the Supreme Judicial Court was less impressive; he lost four of the five cases tried there. His one success was a token \$3.33 1/2 for reporting Benjamin Palmer for selling a pint of rum and half a pint of brandy without a license. Jonathan was not only involved in conflicts with his neighbor William Stone but with old friends like Theophilus Hamlin and with his mother's cousin Hains Learned.

March 1804

281

Now, it appeared, he had decided to take over his father's house. "This is 50 years since I became a housekeeper," Martha wrote on December 19. "I went to the Jail to see my husband." The next day, Ephraim came to young Ephraim's house, where Martha and Sister Farewell were staying. "He Express a wish for me to keep possession of this house at present." But when she returned from Sidney where she found Hannah already "safe delivered by Old Mrs. Savage of her 3d son and 7th child," Jonathan and Sally had moved in.

Ephraim's imprisonment now became her imprisonment. She became a lodger in her own house, taking one room as her own, giving over the rest to her son's family. She tried to preserve her independence, keeping her own fire, cooking her own meals, and shutting her door when she had to. Diary entries during this period refer to taking tea with her children or inviting them to "partake" with her, as though they lived across the fence instead of in the same house. Even with carefully drawn boundaries, however, cohabitation was difficult. Sally was "an inconsiderate or very impudent woman to treat me as shee does," Martha complained, adding that if her daughter-in-law couldn't "shew more manes and discretion," she should "hold her peace for the future." Did she deliver these sentiments vocally, or only in her diary?

Martha could have taken comfort in an English treatise on marriage published in 1624, which argued that: "The mixing of governours in an household, or subordinating or uniting of two Masters, or two Dames under one roof, doth fall out most times, to be a matter of much unquietness to all parties."³⁹ In fact New England families rarely combined two married couples in a single household. ~~It was common, however, for men to assign their widows a room in a house inherited by a married son.~~ When Ephraim's father, the first Jonathan Ballard, died in 1754, he had left his wife all his "indoor moveables and one cow" and "the use and improvement of the east end of my present dwelling house." In addition, his oldest son was to provide an annual allotment of Indian corn, rye, malt, cider, beef, pork, firewood, sheep's wool, flax, and the use of a horse and furniture "when she has occasion to ride and good and suitable attendance in sickness and health."⁴⁰

Ephraim had turned over the house in compensation and his son had failed to follow through. On May 25, Martha "went to the jail and slept with my Husband." Three days later, he was still "not Liberated yet." Finally, on May 29, Election Day, "My Husband was sett at Liberty."

Together at last, Martha and Ephraim celebrated with a dinner of new greens and vinegar and made peace with daughter Ballard by inviting her to tea. But if Martha thought her husband's release would remove Jonathan's family from the house, she was mistaken. On June 7, "Daughter Ballard told me if I wanted the privilege of my house I should not have it this summer. I Could wish to see peace." On July 27, "Jonas wife has shewn her tantrums. I could wish it might be the will of God that I might see other treatment." On August 11, "I could not sleep for noise in Jonathans family. I rose lit my Candle & wrote this."

On August 27, the summer almost over, Martha reported that a man had come to dig a cellar by the shop and that men were "giting timber for a house plain." Jonathan and Sally had decided to build a house of their own, though not soon enough for their mother's comfort. She began going to their old house, now vacant, to work and think. On September 11, she wrote, "Jonathans wife Called me a liar &c May God forgiv her. It would make a heathen Blush to read the whole she said if I should write it." The next day, she went to the old house to twist yarn, "Have been insulted, the door fastened upon on me twice &c. I have need of Patience and Grace to bear it." The conflict had probably become as difficult for Sally. On September 14, Martha wrote, "Son Jonathan's family removed from here to his old house." She celebrated by cleaning her bedroom and buttry and moving furniture.

On September 22, she "attended divine service." The Reverend Mr. Parker preached from the Book of Acts, and, to her great comfort, "he also shewed the Duties we ought to perform and shew they would be our Comfort in this life and our Everlasting happiness in that which is to Com. I Could wish it might have been the lot of all my Children to have heard him, but God is able to teach the heart. I pray he might."

March 1804

285

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Most historians have studied imprisonment for debt as an aspect of economic and legal history. Martha's diary shifts the focus from mortgages and lawyers to wood boxes and sons, showing how family history shaped patterns of imprisonment in an era of political and social transformation, and, conversely, how a volatile economy shaped family relations. The first half of Martha's diary, written when her family's productive power was at its height, portrays a self-confident and vigorous woman managing a household, acting autonomously, and trading with her neighbors. The second half shows how illness, fatigue, and an unlucky move could shatter such a world, expose a woman's dependence, and force her to lean on the uncertain arm of family affection.

Martha referred to the family tumults of 1804-1805 as "scenes." "What a sceam had I to go at Evening," she wrote on the day Jonathan attempted to whip Lemuel Witham. "It was yesterday this sien past," she wrote in the margin of the entry regarding the pig's potatoes. A scene was a wrenching event, a break in the flow of life. Unlike a day of accomplishment in which one could list tasks performed, some part of the world overcome and brought into order, it was over in a moment, yet it brought a fatigue deeper than any journey across the river or sojourn in the garden, a fatigue so draining that one did not want to lift one's head from the pillow.

In the next year, "the most shocking scene that was ever seen in this part of the world" convulsed Martha's neighborhood and all the country around. Shocking because it was so complete in its horror and so totally unexpected. There was nothing at all in Martha's quiet entries for the spring of 1806 to presage a mass murder, nothing to distinguish the Purritons from any of the other neighbors on Belgrade Road.

including her old right arm the Denmark} Captain Purinton (the title signified his militia rank) was a prosperous and respected Bowdoinham citizen. Why he decided to move upriver we do not know. Sometime before 1803, he purchased Lot #17, an "unimproved" hundred acres just above the Ballard farm. "Made Flower Bread for my self & Brown bread for Mr Purington," Martha wrote on May 6, 1803. Like most new settlers, he had erected a temporary shelter on his land, leaving his wife and children behind while he cleared space for a house and garden. He appeared in the diary ten times that summer. On May 21, Ephraim surveyed the new farm. Twice that month, once each in June and August, and five times in September, Martha did his baking. On October 4, "Mr Purington Paid me 6/7 for Bakeing for him this suner and 2/ for stalks & shock."²

Two years later, Purinton had managed to build a house and barn. In August 1805, he moved his family. "Two of Mr Purington's daughters Calld here at Evening," Martha wrote on October 21. There were eight Purinton children, four sons and three daughters big enough to work, and the baby, eighteen-month-old Louisa. Mrs. Purinton came to the Ballard house for the first time on December 13. She didn't appear again until May, though the visits from the children continued.

"Captain Purington's little sons [here] for herbs for their marm, shee being unweel," Martha wrote on February 18. On April 20, nineteen-year-old Polly, the oldest daughter, came on the same errand. The mother's illnesses may have impeded her ability to move around the neighborhood, yet they were not severe enough to demand a house call from Martha. Perhaps Mrs. Purinton was simply too busy to visit. She had work enough to engage her at home—there were two spinning wheels and tackling for weaving in the house, though the old loom was still in Bowdoinham. Ten lambs, seven piglets, and several calves were born that spring, and the garden needed planting. Seventeen-year-old James came to the Ballard house with his friend Peter Wyman on May 3 "for Balm Giliad, apple trees, & Curent Bushes." On May 7, Mrs. Purinton once again

April 1806

291

stopped in at the Ballards' for tea. Two days later, the Captain took time from his own work to carry Martha to and from a delivery. Gradually, the new family was taking its place in the neighborhood, weaving in and out of Martha's diary with other near neighbors—the Hartwells, Wyman's, and Gilberts. As new families settled in the area, it seemed less isolated, less limited to Ballards and Pierces, than before.

On the town tax inventory for 1805, James Purinton is credited with 100 acres of unimproved land. A year later, he had cleared six acres—two of tillage, four of pasture—a respectable ratio in this part of the world. Jonathan Ballard still had only three acres of tillage, four of mowing, and ten of pasture on his 200-acre farm.³ By all accounts, the Captain was a sober and industrious man, if a bit taciturn. He had a modest wife, strong sons and daughters, a sturdy house, good oxen, and a reliable horse. To all appearances, his farm was one more patch of civilization in a neighborhood dark with trees.

Then came that terrible day, July 9, 1806:

Clear and warm. My Husband & I were awake at 3 hour this morning by Mrs Heartwel and Gillbard who brot us the horrible tydings that Captain Purington had murdered all his famely Except his son James who must have shared the same fate had he not been so fortunate as to make his Escape after an attempt was made to take his life. He was wounded with an ax. He fled in his shirt only and alarmed Mr Wiman of the horrid scein who immediately ran to son Jonathans. They two went to house where the horrid scein was perpetrated. My son went in and found a Candle, which he lit and to his great surprise said Purington, his wife, & six Children Corps! and Martha he perceived had life remaining who was removed to his house. Surgical aid was immediately Calld and she remains alive as yet. My husband went and returned before sunrise when after taking a little food he and I went on to the house there to behold the most shocking scein that was Even seen in this part of the world. May an infinitely good God grant that

we may all take a suitable notice of this horrid deed, learn wisdom therefrom. The Corps were removed to his Barn where they were washt and Laid out side by side. A horrid spectacle which many hundred persons Came to behold. I was there till near night when Son Jonathan Conducted me to his house and gave me refreshment. The Coffins were brot and the Corps Carried in a Waggon & deposited in Augusta meeting hous.

Martha's account is vivid yet compact. As in the best folk narrative, a few details speak for the whole—James fled "in his shirt only," Jonathan "found a Candle, which he lit," the bodies were laid out "side by side" in the barn. Even the religious gloss is brisk. God is "infinitely good" regardless of what his children do. Good Christians can "learn wisdom" even from terror.

The economy of Martha's telling contrasts with the more self-conscious narrative published (and probably composed) by Peter Edes, editor of Augusta's *Kennebec Gazette*. Edes titled his broadside "Horrid Murder," embellishing the margins with a ring of dark coffins. Like Martha, he described Jonathan lighting a candle at the scene, a detail that must have been repeated over and over in the telling of the story, but he went further. Where Martha had been content with the single exclamation "Corps!," Edes went on to describe the dimly lit scene, body by body. The father lay in the outer room, "Prostrate on his face, and weltering in his gore," the bloody razor with which he cut his throat lying on a table by his side. "In an adjoining bed room lay Mrs. Purinton in her bed with her head almost severed from her body; and near her on the floor, a little daughter about ten years old, who probably hearing the cries of her mother, ran to her relief from the apartment in which she slept, and was murdered by her side."⁴

In the "outer room" with Purinton lay two little boys, one eight, one six. A third brother, age twelve, was found in an adjoining room, fallen on the hearth, with his trousers under one arm. "On the breastwork over the fire place, was the distinct impression of a bloody hand, where the unhappy victim

April 1806

probably supported himself before he fell." The boy apparently slept with his brother James, age seventeen, who had heard his mother's cries and rushed to the door of his room, where "he was met by his father with an axe in his hand." In "another apartment" were found the two oldest daughters and the youngest, the first "dreadfully butchered; the second desperately wounded, reclining her head on the body of the dead infant 18 months old, and in a state of horror and almost total insensibility."⁵

Edes's account discloses Martha's restraint. There are no severed heads or sheets soaked in blood in her story, though, having helped to lay out the bodies, she knew as well as any what condition they were in, and certainly she was one of the first to hear Jonathan tell what the candle revealed. With remarkable economy, her account composed the raw reality into a few telling images.

Her description of the funeral, held on July 10, has the same qualities. She began as in any other funeral entry in the diary, by naming the minister and the text; but as she wrote, the details quickly overwhelmed her form, drawing forth another tightly constructed narrative.

Cloudy, rained afternoon. My husband and I attended at the solum funeral of James Purington & his famely which he murdered. There was a prayer made by Reverend Mr. Stone, a discourse delivered by a Mr Taylor from Proverbs 25 C 28 V—he that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down and with[out] walls. There were a vast number of people attended. The performance was on a stage which was Erected before the meeting house. The houses near were Crowded, the street Crowded & the tops of Buildings Covered with people. Said Puringtons remains were Lodged in the Porch with the ax & raisor which he made use of to deprive his famely & himself of life on his Coffin, his Dear wife & 6 Childrens remains laid in the ally before the Boddy Pews. A solum spectacle to behold. May we all learn a profitable lesson from this dreadful scen

and may it pleas the God that rules [to] Sanctify this affliction to the surviving relatives and to us all. The funeral proceeded from the meeting hous, went over Kenebeck Bridge, then turned and went up the hill south and down second street, turned at the Jail, & went to the grave yard. He was interd without the wall.

Martha's prayer that God might "Sanctify this affliction to the surviving relatives and to us all" no doubt echoed Mr. Taylor's sermon—and hundreds of others she had heard in her seventy-one years. It wasn't the sermon, however, but the pageantry of the occasion that impressed her most powerfully, the ritualistic arrangement of the bodies, the funeral march, and the hundreds of people crowded in nearby houses, in the street, on the tops of the buildings. There had not been an event like this in Augusta since the commemoration of President Washington's death six years before. Martha had attended that ceremony, too, had noted the presence of the militia and a "larg concourse of people," but, unlike Henry Sewall, who had devoted two pages of his diary to the parade, had felt no need to describe it. This time she marked the route of the parade with great precision, carefully noting the march down Second Street to the jail, a purposeful and highly symbolic digression.

From the meeting house, past the wharves and stores, across the bridge, past the courthouse and jail, to the grave, the funeral procession recapitulated all the emblems of social order—ecclesiastical, commercial, and civil. Edes's broadside gave the order in which the marchers were arranged:

Senior Marshal,
The Coroner, and Inquest,
Rev. Mr. Haskell, Rev. Mr. Stone,
The Corpse of Mrs. Purrinton,
And her six children, according to their ages,
supported by bearers attended by pall holders,
followed by the surviving Son
and other relations.

Other relations, selectmen, clergy, sheriffs of the county, judges of the courts, military officers, magistrates, citizens and marshall.

A cart bearing the body of Captain Purrinton.

Everything about the procession reaffirmed the principle of order. Even the bodies of the children were ranked "according to their ages." The coroner and jury of inquest—citizens charged with establishing the cause of death—led the procession, followed by victims, close relatives, and, in Edes's phrase, "various classes of citizens properly arranged." The parade, like the arrangement in the church and the burials themselves, placed Purrinton outside the civil community. He lay in the porch of the church, his family within. Their coffins were borne by their neighbors, framed in the protective custody of clergy, magistrates, militia, and citizenry; his lay, untouchable, on a cart at the rear of the parade. They were buried within the yard; he was "interd without the wall," literally dumped from the wagon into the waiting hole. The ritual was impressive because the need for it was so intense. The ordering of the procession transformed a horrid scene into a solemn spectacle, an event from which one might take instruction.

What was there to learn from the Purrinton murders? For contemporaries, the most accessible mode of analysis was religious. Martha used much the same language in commenting on this event as on any other unexpected and troublesome death in the diary. When her little grandson, Samuel Adams Ballard, died on November 28, 1806, she wrote, "May the God of mercy sanctify his Chastisements for our Everlasting good." That is, God as the controlling power in the universe allowed death and sorrow but also provided ways to transform those events into good. ~~She expressed much the same sentiment regarding the Purrinton murders: "May an infinitely good God grant that we may all take a suitable notis of this horrid deed, learn wisdom therefrom," or, on the day of the funeral, "May we all learn a profitable lesson from this dreadful scene and may it pleas the God that rules [to] Sanctify this affliction to the surviving rela-~~

tal to remind him that now that his father, mothers, and brothers and sisters were all dead, he would soon come into possession of a considerable estate. "I entreat you to consider your danger . . . let it never be said that, the oldest son, and only surviving member of Capt. Purrinton's family has become a rake."¹¹

If given the opportunity to answer Merritt's accusations, the Universalists surely would have argued that the doctrine of universal salvation nurtured righteousness rather than sin; that their teachings were no more to blame for Purrinton's murders than Congregationalist doctrine for Henry McCausland's slaughter of Abigail Warren thirteen years before. Universalists would have disdained Calvinist efforts to breed fear in the hearts of their listeners; surely a true knowledge of God's love was a more powerful motive for good than an erroneous fear of God's wrath.¹² Despite differences in emphasis, however, the arguments of both groups began at the same point—predestination—and ended with the same consolation—an ultimate trust in God's goodness.

The oral history of Universalism contains an account of a triumphant sermon preached by Father Barnes of Poland, Maine, when all the Congregational ministers in the region refused to officiate at the funeral of a suicide. The theme of Barnes's sermon—"when all the designs of God in apparent ills are seen through, and his benevolent purposes understood, all that is now dark will become light"—is ultimately indistinguishable from Merritt's argument—"When we see that God has suffered these evils, which he could have prevented, to come upon us, we are to conclude that he has acted upon some wise and benevolent principle, worthy of himself."¹³ God is all powerful and all good. We must submit to his judgments. It is that theology which underlies the religious sentiments in Martha's diary: "May an infinitely good God grant that we may all take a suitable notice of this horrid deed, learn wisdom therefrom."

The Purrinton tragedy is a grotesque, an outlandish distension of the ordinary. Timothy Merritt understood how to reconnect the bizarre and the commonplace, how to read through the sen-

sational to dark—but common—truths about human nature. James Purrinton committed horrid sins: without God all of us are depraved. Mrs. Purrinton and her children died violently: all of us are subject to sudden death. A husband turned on his wife, a father on his children: all natural relations are secondary to the relation with God.

Merritt's method transcends his content. Interpreted with a different set of first principles, the Purrinton murders yield different lessons. Suppose the overarching concern was not the relation of believers and God but that of men and women. A feminist gloss on the murders might read: a man murdered his wife and children: in the patriarchal family all members are subject to the will of the father. Elizabeth Pleck has argued that "The single most consistent barrier to reform against domestic violence has been the Family Ideal," a constellation of ideas that affirms the privacy of the individual household, the hierarchical orderings of relations among family members, and the indissolubility of marriage. Although the family ideal enjoins mutual obligations, as well as rights, it allows forms of tyranny more comprehensive than those exercised by the state. Even today, she explains, "in many areas of law a stranger is entitled to more legal protection than a family member."¹⁴

To sustain this interpretation of the murders, one need not imagine a long chain of physical abuse leading up to the final slaughter, though such a pattern is possible. Purrinton's steadiness, his prosperity, his regard for his family, also fit the argument. The primary obligation of a father was to provide economic support; the primary obligation of a wife and children to love, honor, and obey. A wife went where her husband beckoned—even in death. Among the end notes to Edes's pamphlet is the text of the suicide note Purrinton allegedly wrote on the Sunday before the murders:

Dear Brothers: These lines is to let you know that I am going a long journey, and I would have you sell what I have, and put it out to interest, and put out my boys to trades, or send them to sea.

I cannot see the distress of my family—God only knows my distress—I would have you put Nathaniel to uncle Purinton, to a tanner's trade—I want James to go to school, until sufficient to attend in a store—Benjamin to a Blacksmith's trade, or to what you think best—But to be sure to give them learning, if it takes all—Divide what is left, for I am no more. James Purinton¹⁵

Abandoning his sons, Purinton cannot abandon the obligation (or need) to shape their destinies. He is compassionate and loving (their distress is his distress) and at the same time too focused on his own misery to endure. Delegating responsibility to his brother is apparently his solution to the dilemma. What is astonishing about the letter is his utter disregard for his wife and daughters. "My family," as he defined it, consisted of Nathaniel, James, and Benjamin, the three male children over the age of eight. Even five-year-old Nathan is ignored. Purinton must have known the law would allow his wife the use of a third of his estate and some sort of support for the other children, yet his only acknowledgment of their existence is that terse last sentence, "Divide what is left."

According to Edes, it was the discovery of the suicide note by the daughter that led to the murders. When she asked her father what he was writing, "He replied nothing, and immediately asked for his butcher knife, and said he wanted to sharpen it." When she brought it to him, he "made it very sharp," then stood with it before the looking glass, seemingly preparing his throat for the knife. She was so alarmed by the incident, she reported it to her mother, who searched for the note. The Captain calmly explained that he had no intention of contemplating suicide but simply "a presentiment that his death was near." Edes concluded that it was the expression of "terror and alarm" on the part of the women that caused Purinton to change his original plan, which was only to kill himself. "Seeing their distress, and anticipating how poignant it would be on his death, he no doubt determined to take them all with himself; believing they would thus lose their sorrows, suffer but a momentary pang, and be with him eternally happy."¹⁶

Edes's reconstruction of the event is shaped at every turn by the Family Ideal. No hint here that Purinton deliberately terrorized his daughter by asking her to bring him the knife, that he wanted his wife to find the letter, that he deliberately used the threat of suicide to manipulate and control her. In this account, he appears as a loving, if deluded, father. Presumably, he resolved to move his family to Heaven, just as he had recently moved them from Bowdoinham to Augusta. Ironically, Edes made the mother and daughter responsible for their own deaths. It was their dismay—not Purinton's inability to separate his will from theirs—that motivated the murders.

What James Purinton believed or felt we will never know. He may have been propelled by Universalism, by an overweening patriarchy, by an unresolvable conflict between family obligation and personal despair—or by other motives we can only dimly glimpse. Curiously, none of the commentators made anything of the fact that at the time of the murders his Bible was open to the ninth chapter of Ezekiel:

He cried also in mine ears with a loud voice, saying, Cause them that have charge over the city to draw near, even every man *with* his destroying weapon in his hand. . . . let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity: Slay utterly old *and* young, both maids, and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom *is* the mark.¹⁷

After all the lessons, neatly argued, we are left with a dark apocalyptic vision and an inexplicable slaughter.

"Polly Purinton here." Martha's casual entry of the spring takes on a Gothic quality in light of the horror that followed. The name "Polly Purinton" has an almost comic coziness, as though it belonged to a housewifely cat in some children's tale. It is not pleasant to think of Polly dead in bed with her wounded and murdered sisters. She was the oldest of the Purinton daughters, the one who accompanied her mother to church while her father sharpened his ax. The neighbors believed she

had at least some awareness of what was happening on that terrible night. As Edes explained it, "The oldest daughter and second son received many wounds in various parts of the body, which were probably caused by their resistance."¹⁸

Martha Purinton, who shared a bed with Polly that night, lived long enough to describe the murder. She said she was awakened by the blows on her sister. Winding herself in the bedclothes, she felt blows on her head and arm. "Her father then left her, though at this time she did not know or suspect who it was. She remembers laying her head over the edge of the bed, and hearing (to use her own expression) the blood run like a brook upon the floor—that she felt the blood from her sister's wounds, and was convinced she was dead." When she heard Jonathan Ballard approaching, she cried, "Glory to God! Do kill me again."¹⁹

Martha was taken to Jonathan's house, and as the diary explained, "Surgical aid was immediately called." There seems to have been some hope of her recovery. When the appraisers came to inventory the estate on the day after the funeral, they reserved a dozen pair of stockings, five skirts, three "womans Gowns," four "short loose Gowns," four pockets, a short cloak, two shawls, four linen and one silk handkerchief, an overcoat, a pair of silk mitts, two pair of mittens, three woman's bonnets, a blue petticoat, and a gold ring for her, with a chest to keep them in.²⁰ She lay at Jonathan and Sally's house for three weeks. Her grandparents, Benjamin and Anna Clifford, offered what help they could, though Sally was probably responsible for nursing.²¹

Martha Ballard assumed a different set of responsibilities the day after the funeral, she summarized her work of that day: "Mr. Purinton, his two daughters, & James P took Breakfast. He [James crossed out] dined. He & James supped and sleep here." The careful accounting was necessary since she and Ephraim would eventually make a claim on the estate for "boarding." Mr. Purinton was the Captain's brother, Hezekiah. The whole group was back the next day. Martha got dinner for them and "then was almost or rather quite giving up for a time," though she recovered enough to go to Jonathan's, where she received a pair of sheets and two shifts to replace those "which I Carried to Lay out the Dead." It was a clear day and hot enough to make cooking or

walking uncomfortable. The Purinton deaths had taken most of Martha's time now for four days and would continue to drain her energy for several more to come. Hezekiah and James slept at her house again on Sunday. She prepared supper for them and breakfast the next morning, after which they "left here Bound for Bodinham." She spent the rest of that day catching up on her dairying, churning three and a half pounds of butter, and making a cheese.

On Tuesday, she went to Jonathan's house. "Found Martha in a Low situation. Old Mr. Clifford there. I feel very feeble but have put a Baril of water to my plants." While the vigil continued at Jonathan's house, Martha and Ephraim tried to resume their lives. He went to the mill "to see about Boards to fens his Corn field"; she did her housework and "Bakt brown & flower Bread." He went to see a ship launching; she cleaned her cellar. Her lack of involvement in Martha Purinton's care is striking. This disengagement was probably a mark of Sally's growing competence as a nurse as well as the continuing coolness between the two women. On July 23, after returning home from a delivery, Martha again went to her son's. Her comment—"I saw Martha Purington's wounds Dress'd"—is ambiguous. Does the verb *saw* describe the role of an observer or an overseer?

She did not return. Her account of the young woman's demise was secondhand: July 28, "We hear that Martha is no better." July 29, "We hear that Martha Purington is near the Close of Life." July 30, "Martha Purington Expired at 3 hour this morning." July 31, "I have felt very unwell but went to son Jonathan's to see the Corps of Martha Purington. Patty Town went & helpt my daughter sew. Mr. Purington & Son took supper and Lodging here. Pary slept up Chamber." Then, on August 1, the day of the young woman's funeral:

Mr. Purington took Breakfast. They & Mr. Clifford, Getchel and a young man who lives with Mr. Getchel dined. Daughter Pollard and Patty & Jonathan Ballard Junior dined also. We all attended the funeral of Martha Purington. Mr. Meritt discarced from Job 1st C 20-21 vers. Then Job arose and rent his mantle and shaved his head and fell down upon the ground and worshiped and said, Naked Caim I

dition to greens, they produced seed for another crop. For old-fashioned gardeners like Martha, planting was a self-perpetuating cycle, like leavening bread with dough saved from an earlier batch, an interlocking chain in which fragments of one yield helped to assure another.

Historians have written a great deal about field agriculture in early America but not enough about the intricate horticulture that belonged to women, the intense labor of cultivation and preservation that allowed one season to stretch almost to another.¹⁷ Martha was proud of being able to gather a milk pan full of "Poland King" beans as early as July 11 of one year, of having green peas, from a fall planting, on October 4 of another, of having parsley "fresh and green from my garden for to put in my gravy" on December 17, and of serving stored cabbage from her cellar on March 13, only six weeks before she began the whole cycle anew.¹⁸

On May 10, Martha noted selling as well as planting seeds, reporting that Mrs Emery and two of William Stone's children "had garden seeds of me."¹⁹ There were more ambitious seed dealers in the town. Each spring Augusta's newspapers advertised "A general Assortment of GARDEN SEEDS for Sale by Joseph North."²⁰ A petty account book listing North's seed transactions survives from this period.²¹ Martha's home-grown seeds were a bargain. When she was selling an ounce of parsnip seed for two shillings, roughly forty-five cents, he was charging seventy cents for one-half ounce. His were no doubt imported seeds, produced by commercial growers. His terse account book gives no indication of varieties, however. Most entries simply say "garden seeds," though a few specify "Yellow Turnip," "Redish," "peper," "millin," or "Cuwcomber," North's spelling being as various and imaginative as Martha's. North also sold apple trees (he charged one customer \$1.80 for thirteen young trees) and "Lambar popels," presumably the Lombardy poplars that were becoming popular among the gentry.²²

There is a single entry under Ephraim Ballard's name in North's book, a purchase on May 29, 1807, of garden seeds worth twenty-five cents. Martha made no mention of the seed

purchase, but on May 30 she wrote, "Mr. Ballard planted beans in the garden. He planted Corn and pumpkins yesterday." If the seeds Ephraim got from North were indeed beans, corn, or pumpkin they must have been an unusual variety, something not already available in the family seed stock. The only thing unusual about the entry is Ephraim's involvement in the garden. Though he sometimes helped to dig it, it was almost always Martha who did the planting.

She dropped her first seeds into raised beds on the sunny side of the house, transplanting the young plants into the big garden when the ground was warmer.²³ A methodical and serious gardener, she showed concern for the soil, adding manure in the early spring (some of it shoveled from behind the outhouse) and lime in the form of ashes or plaster.²⁴

Her gardening entries are far more descriptive than other Augusta sources for the same period. Henry Sewall mentioned planting corn and wheat but seldom had anything at all to say about gardening, perhaps because that was Tabitha's work. Daniel Cony, who left a fragmentary diary from this period, used gardening references to mark the passing of the seasons: On April 5, 1808: "Dug asparagus bed. First vessel came up. Farmers ploughing." On May 5, 1808: "Plumb trees in bloom," On July 4: "Green pease, plenty."²⁵ As a record of the actual contents of his garden, however, the doctor's diary is useless.

Martha grew beans, cabbages, lettuce, parsnips, carrots, turnips, beets, cucumbers, radishes, onions, garlic, peppers, "peper grass," "French turnips," squash, "sugar and string peas," muskmelon, watermelon, pumpkins, and medical and culinary herbs (sage, saffron, coriander, anise, mustard, marigolds, camomile, parsley, and many more), though she did not mention asparagus. In her diary, even those old staples, beans and squash, came in several varieties. "Planted Cucumbers & three kinds squash," she wrote on May 10, 1809, and, on May 17, "Planted long squash by the hogg pen." The diary lists "Bannybiss Beans," "Crambury, Brown, & hundred to one beens," "yellow Bush Beens," and "wild goos Beens."²⁶ One year Ephraim planted "8 kinds of Beens at the South End of the Corn

field,"²⁷ and on July 9, 1801, perhaps in a stroke of whimsy, Martha planted one "yellow-eyed bean *on the rock*," the rock presumably a large granite outcropping, common in glacial New England, with a declivity or crevice filled with dirt. Corn and potatoes both came in two varieties, distinguished by color. Martha planted "purple" as well as "sweet" corn, and on June 16, 1807, reported that "the Blue potatoes I first planted are coming up."

By July, her currant bushes were bent to the ground with fruit, jewel-like globules of a brilliant red and an astringent tartness. She used them fresh, in pies or tarts, in sauces, and medicinal syrups.²⁸ Some of the fruit trees on the farm were already bearing when the Ballards moved there. On July 10, 1801, in the second year at the farm, Martha wrote, "We have Bakt apples, Cherry, Currant tarts, Custard and Wheat Bread." Eventually, she added English gooseberries to her garden, and, in May of 1806, set out young plum and apple trees in the orchard. Her shrubs and trees not only added variety to her table but provided additional commodities for trade. "Marshall Edson's wife here for cherries," she wrote on July 21, 1806, and, four days later, "Mrs. Howards made [maid] and Mr Fuller here for Cherries & Curents."²⁹ On July 27, 1811, the last summer of her life, she noted that "Warrin Stones wife Came and gathered our Cherries which were in the garden 22 quarts. She is to have half," adding "He [presumably Ephraim] sold them for 6 cents per quart." Whether Ephraim took it upon himself to market the cherries or whether he was simply Martha's messenger, carrying the fruit to town, we do not know.

Ripe currants and cherries added color to a garden predominantly green. There was little intentional ornament.³⁰ Even Marigolds were planted for their medicinal properties rather than their hue, though the bright yellow must have been attractive. Yet, with its trailing squash vines and flourishing cabbages, Martha's was the sort of garden a traveler might have found "pretty," that is, pleasantly productive, an oasis of order amidst the savagery of woods. "The gardens were rare for so new a place," an itinerant minister wrote of one Kennebec settlement,

adding by way of explanation that "onions, beets and parsnips were excellent."³¹

According to one descendant, Joseph M. Hall, "a remarkable floral taste," introducing into his garden "almost every flower which would bloom in our climate." But there is little evidence of that in his seed book. Daniel Cony at least noticed flowers. "Good hay weather," he wrote on July 25, 1808. "Roses in full bloom from 20th of June to the 15th of July. Season continued wet—very wet 'till 14th July, great crop of grass." For him roses, like asparagus, were emblems of the season. The one fully documented ornamental garden in the Kennebec was that of Dr. Benjamin Vaughan of Hallowell.

According to a family memoir, the doctor cultivated "a large garden of several acres tastily laid out, with broad paths and numerous alleys, whose borders were adorned with flowers shaded with currant bushes, fruit trees and shrubbery. The whole under the care of an English gardener."³² Timothy Dwight, who visited Hallowell on one of his famous journeys through New England, concluded that:

A more romantic spot is not often found, than that on which stands the house of Mr. V. a descendant of Mr. Hallowell, from whom this town took its name. . . . In the rear, as you recede from the river, but at the side of the house . . . lies a handsome garden, furnishing even at this time of the year ample proofs of the fertility of the soil. Behind the garden is a wild and solitary valley; at the bottom of which runs a small mill stream. . . . on either side, the banks, which are of considerable height, and sometimes steep, formed of rude forested grounds, and moss-grown rocks, are left absolutely in the state of nature. Along the brook Mr. V. has made a convenient foot-way, rather appearing to have been trodden out by the feet of wild animals, than to have been contrived by man, and winding over a succession of stone bridges, so rude and inartificial, as to seem the result of accident, rather than the effect of human labour.³³

The gardens people cultivated—and described—revealed their aspirations. For Daniel Cony, “farmers ploughing” was an economic forecast. Good crops meant prompt payment of rents and suits. Interspersed among his agricultural entries for 1808–1809 is a cryptic history of the settler war. “Goal burnt,” he wrote on March 16, 1808, without further comment or explanation. The only hint that he, as a representative of the Plymouth Company, was involved in pressing for settlement with the squatters is his entry for August 5, 1809, “Sent by Major Cony 27 contracts and deeds to T. L. W. Esquire.... Also sent duplicates Chas. Hayden plans and field notes.” (T.L.W., Esquire, was Thomas L. Winthrop of Boston, one of the Plymouth Proprietors, Charles Hayden a surveyor.) His account of the Malta War was even more clipped: “Armed men came into town to liberate the prisoners.”

In North's account book, politics, like agriculture, was reduced to sums. He debited Kennebec County for repairs to the jail after an attempted break, itemizing charges for “Iron pikets,” “percurring cedar posts”, hauling “plank & Joyc from the shore,” and “1 day about the vault,” as well as for “gittin shurt for McCauslan,” who was still the most visible prisoner.³⁴ Cony and North would have found congenial a poetic tribute to Augusta published in 1810. In the “sabbirious” air of the county seat, so the poet argued, law and justice reigned.

*There native Industry, with noble toil,
Improves his field, or yokes his patient team
To send the produce of his labors forth.
There, too, the Merchant deals in ten per cent,
All mindful of his gain; and vends his goods
For useful cash, that solace of our woes;
That sweet companion through the storms of life.³⁵*

“Useful cash” was Augusta's best crop.

Benjamin Vaughan's vision, at least as reported by Timothy Dwight, was more utopian. The gate between his well-ordered flower beds and “the wild and solitary valley beyond” symbolized a romantic harmony between art and nature, and by exten-

sion, perhaps, the hoped-for reconciliation between English gentility and the Maine woods. “This is the haven of the lover, of the saint and of the philosopher!” gushed an English visitor. Unfortunately, the real woods were inhabited by squatters and ducks.³⁶

In contrast to the crisp records of Cony and North and the effusions of Kennebec travelers, Martha's far more expansive record focused on the mundane work of gardening, the daily, incremental tasks that each season exacted. In May of 1809, she “sowed,” “set,” “planted,” and “transplanted” in at least half a dozen places, digging ground “west of the hous” on May 15 and starting squash, cucumbers, muskmelons and watermelons on “East side house” the same day. She planted “by the hogg pen” on May 16 and 18 on May 23 sowed string peas “N end of my gardin,” and on May 26, planted “south of the hous.” The plots she defined by the three points of the compass were no doubt raised beds, rich with manure, used for starting seeds in cool weather. The garden proper had a fence, which Ephraim mended on May 12. Whether it included the plot near the “hogg pen” we do not know. All of these spots, managed by Martha, were distinct from the “field,” which Jonathan plowed on May 15, and DeLafayette and Mr. Smith on May 27 and May 31.

Martha's was an ordinary garden, a factory for food and medicine that incidentally provided nourishment to the soul. “I have workt in my gardin,” she wrote on May 17, the possessive pronoun the only hint of the sense of ownership she felt in her work. The garden was hers, though her husband or son or the Hallowell and Augusta Bank owned the land. “I have squash & Cucumbers Come up in the bed East side the house,” she wrote on May 22. The garden was hers because she turned the soil, dropped the seeds, and each year recorded in her diary, as though it had never happened before, the recurring miracle of spring.

In May of 1809, as Daniel Cony cut his asparagus and Martha turned over the soil in her garden, Paul Chadwick of Malta, enticed by the promise of 100 free acres, volunteered to assist

ment from Ephraim, the struggle with Jonathan over possession of her house, and had come to a period of reconciliation. Age was a great teacher. "I feel very feeble," she wrote on August 3, 1807. "My husband complains also. We seem to be a feeble couple. May the Great parent support us thro life and may we be conformed to his will is the desire of me his undeserving hand maid." The reference to herself as "undeserving" is conventional, of course, yet the fervor of her religious sentiments was heightened in the years after the Purinton murders, a response less to the terror of those events than to her own growing awareness that her end was near. "Now I have lived to see this year end and may I reflect on the time past of my life and strive to amend my ways," she wrote on New Year's Eve 1807. The diary made it easier to "reflect on the time past," and Martha must have done so. Perhaps the extremes of passion she had witnessed in her own neighborhood and the growing cry of war in the country, the embargoes, the mustering of troops, the continuing harassment of surveyors, had helped her put her family problems in perspective.

Jonathan and Sally's new house relieved the immediate source of conflict with her children. The May 1809 entries reflect a new accommodation between the two families. Almost every night, one or more of the grandchildren slept at Martha and Ephraim's house, a strategy designed to relieve the crowding at home but also to provide help and support for the aging couple. But circumstances alone do not account for the shift in the diary. A telling entry for April 2, 1808, during a difficult period when Dolly and Barnabas Lambard and their six children were living with their parents, suggests that Martha deliberately excluded family quarrels from her entries. "I have been to son Jonathans to help her guilt her Bed guilt," she wrote, adding, "What else I have endured I wish not to write." Earlier she would have elaborated on her dismay if not on the immediate cause of the argument. A week later, in the margin of an entry mostly devoted to knitting, she wrote, "A young woman in distress. No more."

Martha took command of the one thing that was hers to shape—her diary, creating in its pages the order and restraint so often missing in life. "I have more trouble to see other ways than I

May 1809

337

know how to indure," she wrote on May 11, 1808, "but God is able to giv me strength and Fortitude." She did more than excise from her entries the arguments that so distressed her; she substituted other scenes more pleasant to read and remember.

May 5, 1808: "I have workt in my garden. Mr. Ballard and I dind at son Jonathans. We had Beautiful rice puding and Calvs head & harslett [organ meats]."

On October 18, 1808: "Daughter Ballard sent us a quarter muttun. Shee brot me bread on Sunday. They are very kind." Whatever her faults, Sally was a good cook.

On March 19, 1809, a different menu: "Son Jonathan sent for his Father & I to dine with him. We had moos meet stakes."

On March 12, 1810, pastoral unity: "Daughter Ballard came here. I went to the barn with her. Performed 2 Extractions for the Cows."

On June 19, 1811, genuine sympathy for Jonathan's continuing troubles: "Son Jonathan was put in jail for debt, an unfortunate thing for him at this time as the freshet is rising and his Lumber up river in a precarious situation. May all thing work together for his good here or hereafter is the wish of me his affectionate mother."

Martha never developed an intense and daily intimacy with Jonathan and Sally. The grandchildren are far more visible in the diary in these years than either of the parents. But she did learn to appreciate and accept the small gifts of love and care they were able to offer. Sally's burdens too, though immense, were lightened as Hannah and the boys grew old enough to help.

In these years of renewal, God gave Martha an unexpected gift, the strength to begin her work anew. ~~As we have seen, her mid-~~

~~wifery practice declined rapidly after the move to the farm. Between May 1, 1801, and April 30, 1809, she averaged less than one delivery a month; in 1808, she performed only three deliveries in the entire year. Suddenly in May 1809 the trend reversed. The Shaw delivery that began the segment you have read was only her second of the year (the first had been to Daughter Ballard on April 1), but by the end of the month she had attended three more deliveries, by the end of the year twenty-one.~~

The reason for the sudden shift is revealed in the May segment,

A MIDWIFE'S TALE

“troublers of others Peace have been Celebrated in History, have been Extolled and Admired” while “Real worth has been disregarded”? The deceased, he continued, was a true light upon a hill.

She was a person of Humility, Affability, Compassion, and on whose Tongue was the Law of Kindness; Her Ear was open to the Complaints of the Afflicted, and her Hand was open for the Supply of the Needy.

If others were so Unhappy as to divide into Parties, and to burn with Contention, yet she remained a Common Friend to all....

She was a Person Useful among the Sick, and ready to minister to them to the utmost of her Power.

As a Midwife, she was a Person of Superior Skill and Capacity; as was found by Experience in the most difficult Cases....

She regarded the Poor as well as the Rich....

She denied her self both Sleep and Rest, and spared neither Skill nor Pains for the Relief of those that were Afflicted and Distressed.

At last, when her Powers were broken, and Strength almost Exhausted, in one of the last instances of her Improvement; it being an Uncommon and seemingly a Desperate Case, her usual Dexterity and Success did not fail her.

Those Mothers in Israel, who are in these Towns usually employed as Midwives, will suffer me to Apply those words, Prov. xxi.29, I may say of You, Many Daughters have done Vertuously; but of the Deceased I may say, But Thou Excellest them all.⁴⁷

The ideals that permeate Eliot's sermon, old at the time of Martha's birth, shaped her life—and her diary. Her restraint in recording the sins of her neighbors, her humility in acknowledging her own, her charitableness, even her martyrdom and self-pity, were molded by this ethic of caring. But unlike the thousands of midwives and ordinary Christians who have al-

ways lived by these standards, Martha Ballard ensured that she would not be forgotten.

There was nothing in Christian tradition that said a midwife ought to keep a diary. In fact, most people, including Eliot, assumed that the works of women would be hidden from the world, though known to God. For some complex of reasons, probably unknown even to her, Martha felt an intense need to re-create her own life day by day in her diary. As a consequence, she left a eulogy more powerful than any New England pastor was capable of preaching.

She not only documented her prayers, her lost sleep, her deeds of charity and compassion, she savored and wrote down the petty struggles and small graces of ordinary life. The diary is a selective record, shaped by her need to justify and understand her life, yet it is also a remarkably honest one. Through it we know her as a Daughter of Zion who shoveled manure and bled cats, a pious midwife who religiously collected her fees and even treated herself, once in a while, to a new teapot or dress, a self-sacrificing neighbor who took naps while her girls washed, scolded her servants when they misbehaved, and occasionally quarreled with her husband. The diary tells us that Martha was a devout Christian and humble nurse whose intelligence sometimes made it difficult for her to attend church or to defer to her town's physicians, a loving mother who fought openly for possession of her house and sometimes felt abandoned and unappreciated. She was a gentle woman with a sense of duty and an anatomical curiosity that allowed her to observe autopsies as well as cry over the dead, a courageous woman who never quite learned to stay on her horse, a sharp-eyed and practical woman who kept faith in ultimate justice despite repeated encounters with suicide, murder, and war.

To celebrate such a life is to acknowledge the power—and the poverty—of written records. Outside her own diary, Martha has no history. Although she considered herself “the head of a family,” a full partner in the management of a household, no independent record of her work survives. It is her husband's name, not hers, that appears in censuses, tax lists, and merchant accounts for

her town. She is not listed in Hallowell's poor relief records, though we know she relieved the poor, nor in the earliest records of the Augusta First Church, though she was a member. Nor does any extant court record acknowledge the testimony she took from unwed mothers in delivery. Her name appears on a list of witnesses at the North rape trial, but no one, except she, preserved a record of what was said. Henry Sewall mentioned her five times in his diary, four in relation to births and once when she died, but he never explicitly identified her as a midwife or acknowledged paying a fee.

Without the diary, even her name would be uncertain. Although Oxford records note the baptism of "Martha," daughter of Elijah and Doratha Moore," Martha lost her given name as well as her surname at marriage.⁴⁸ For 58 of her 77 years, she was known as "Mrs. Ballard." Even Benjamin Tappin, the minister who "conversed sweetly" with her just before her death, was unsure of her name. Sometime after 1830, he took it upon himself to correct the early records of Augusta First Church. "It does not appear that any record was made of female members," he wrote, "but there is sufficient evidence that several females were considered members of the Church. I have taken the liberty, therefore, to add their names." Beside Ephraim's name, he wrote "Dorothy Ballard."⁴⁹ James North, Augusta's nineteenth-century historian, referred to her as "Mrs. Ephraim Ballard" in the body of his work and as "Hannah" in his brief genealogy of the Ballard family.⁵⁰ Fortunately, she had the good sense to write firmly at the end of one of her homemade booklets, "Martha Ballard Her Diary."

Ephraim Ballard left Oxford in 1775 to establish a patrimony in a land of wood. He eventually succeeded. Although the site of John Jones's mill is lost in the congestion of twentieth-century Augusta, and the old Howard farm, cut through by the railroad in the nineteenth century, is now the location of a city water treatment plant, Ballard's corner survives, the road running today almost on the line Ephraim marked in his first maps of the town. Near the spot where Jonathan and Sally built their house in 1805 is an early-nineteenth-century dwelling built by their grandson, an Augusta selectman named Ephraim Ballard.

Martha's Ephraim died in 1821, at the age of ninety-six, surrounded by three generations of descendants. Into the 1830s, his sons and grandsons were still assembling mill sites in the neighborhood and the women of the family were still struggling to maintain their autonomy. When Jonathan died in 1838, Sally received "in lieu of dower," a portion of the dwelling house with "exclusive occupancy and control of the West door leading out of said house," Delafayette's widow and her second husband to have the rest. Whether Sally adjusted to joint occupancy more easily than Martha we do not know, though an addendum to the record suggests otherwise: "The said Sally Ballard surrenders all right and control of the south door and entry."⁵¹

Martha did not leave a farm but a life, recorded patiently and consistently for twenty-seven years. No gravestone bears her name, though perhaps somewhere in the waste places along Belgrade Road there still grow clumps of camomile or feverfew escaped from her garden.

EPILOGUE

The doctor, who likes to believe that the mantle of her gifted ancestor fell on her shoulders, was born in Boston, 1851. She graduated from the Woman's Medical College of the New York Infirmary, in 1884, and carried on her medical work in Boston until 1913, when she retired to private life and took up her residence at Needham Heights, Mass. During the thirty years of her professional life, she was associated with the New England Hospital for Women and Children of Boston.¹

It is not surprising that Mary Hobart found inspiration in her ancestor's life. She was herself a pioneer.

Hobart began her professional life at the famous New York Infirmary for Women and Children, founded by Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell, the first woman in the United States to graduate from medical school. Blackwell had hoped that other women might follow in her footsteps, but when established medical colleges, including her own alma mater, Geneva College, closed their doors to female students, she was forced to open her own. Thanks to Blackwell's efforts and those of others like her, female physicians comprised about 5 percent of the profession in the late nineteenth century, a figure that changed little until the 1960s.² Mary Hobart spent the remainder of her professional life at another landmark institution: the New England Hospital, founded in 1862 by Dr. Marie Zakrzewska, was the second hospital in the United States run by women for women. Unabashedly separatist, it survived into the middle of the twentieth century, simultaneously committed to high professional standards and to female control.³

The year Mary Hobart received the diary was an important one for the female physicians of Boston. On June 10, 1884, after more than thirty years of debate, the Massachusetts Medical Society voted (63 to 47) to admit women as members. Marie Zakrzewska had first petitioned for membership in 1852. After repeated rejections (male leaders felt it was improper for men and women to discuss medical matters together), she gave up trying, vowing that if ever the society did open its rolls to women, she would ignore it. Still, when the opportunity finally became available, she

That Martha Ballard kept her diary is one small miracle; that her descendants saved it is another. When her great-great-granddaughter Mary Hobart inherited it in 1884, it was "a hopeless pile of loose unconnected pages"—but it was all there. The diary had remained in Augusta for more than sixty years, probably in the family of Dolly Lambard, who seems to have assumed custody of her mother's papers along with the rented cow. At Dolly's death in 1861, the diary descended to her daughters, Sarah Lambard and Hannah Lambard Walcott. James North no doubt consulted the diary at Sarah Lambard's house on Chapel Street in Augusta, extracting the few passages he included in his *History*.

Mary Hobart was ten years old when her great-grandmother Dolly Lambard died. She was thirty-three and a recent graduate of medical school when her great-aunts Sarah and Hannah gave her the diary. "As the writer was a practising physician," she later explained, "it seemed only fitting that the Ballard diary, so crowded with medical interest, should descend to her." In 1930, Hobart gave the diary to the Maine State Library in Augusta. In a letter written at the time, she summarized her own life in a few brisk sentences, referring to herself in the third person:

did not discourage her young colleagues from applying.⁴ Mary Hobart lost no time.

On June 16, less than a week after the society's vote, Charles Green of the Suffolk District Medical Society wrote to Dr. Francis Goss of the state society informing him that two women, one of whom was "Mary F. Hobart, M.D.," had applied for membership. "Before I can Examine into the Credentials of these women I shall need instructions as to what diplomas to recognize," he continued, adding, "Of course there are no women's colleges on the authorized list." He closed the letter, "Yours truly & in disgust."⁵

Conscious of her own place in history, Mary Hobart was drawn to her ancestor's diary. Her cousin Lucy Lambard Fessenden arranged the scrambled leaves of the diary in order and bound them in homemade linen covers. Mary had a mahogany box made in which to keep the now two-volume diary. "During her practice, it has been a source of vital interest to her colleagues as well as to her family," she told the state librarian. One can imagine the doctors of the New England hospital turning the pages of the old diary during the troubling decades at the turn of the century, a time when old traditions of separatism were being challenged by the gradual opening of male colleges and hospitals to women. What lessons did they glean from the faded pages?

Mary Hobart did not say. But some sense of the complex attitudes of nineteenth-century women toward the past can be gained by comparing Hobart with one of her relatives, Dorothy Barton's granddaughter Clara Barton. In 1882, while Mary Hobart was studying at the New York Infirmary, Barton was lobbying Congress to support the Treaty of Geneva, making possible the establishment of the American Red Cross, a success, as her biographer proclaims, "to be measured not only against the goals of humanitarians—where it stands as a stunning achievement—but also with the work of diplomats."⁶

Unlike Hobart, Barton was old enough to have known her Maine progenitors personally. Her grandmother, Dorothy Barton, had spent the last years of her life in Oxford during Clara's childhood. Clara was intrigued with her grandmother's feistiness and rebellion. She identified, too, with her father's and

grandfather's stories of war, which may help account for her own battlefield adventures. During the Civil War she fled her Patent Office clerkship in Washington, D.C., for the fields of Fredericksburg, Harper's Ferry, and Bull Run, collecting bandages and candles for military physicians, assisting with nursing, and, when no doctor could be found, standing in pools of blood and extracting bullets with her pocketknife. She may have been thinking of herself as well as her ancestors when she wrote a colleague who proposed compiling a history of American women, "From the storm lashed decks of the Mayflower . . . to the present hour; woman has stood like a rock for the welfare and the glory of the history of the country, and one might well add . . . unwritten, unrewarded, and almost unrecognized."⁷

Barton rebelled against the genteel femininity of her own generation by joining men in their own arena, proving her heroism in wholehearted commitment to her country's glory. Despite her public reputation as a self-sacrificing "angel of the battlefield," she was a conscious feminist, a lifelong supporter of women's rights and women's suffrage. At the same time, she was also somewhat conventional in her acceptance of male values. She remembered her grandmother's resistance to the pre-Revolutionary tea boycott, but she never questioned her father's and grandfather's commitment to war. She was the sort of woman who would have gloried in a "storm swept" canoe ride along the Kennebec but might have grown tired of the narrow theatre of birth.

In contrast, Mary Hobart was attracted less to the heroism than to the professionalism of her great-great-grandmother's life. To her, Martha was a "gifted" woman, a skilled practitioner, careful about her fees and sure of her methods. In some ways, Mary Hobart *had* assumed the mantle of her ancestor. She and her great-great-grandmother were both independent and resourceful women. Both specialized in the care of women and children. Both had problematical relations with the medical establishments of their time. Yet there were also important differences between them. Martha was a skilled practitioner in an ancient female craft, Mary an early entrant in a once exclusively male profession. Martha derived her authority from a local community of women.

Mary owed her profession and her identity to a new feminist sisterhood. Martha ministered to women of all social classes in their own homes. Mary cared for the poor in a public hospital. Martha was married and the mother of nine children. Mary was single, by choice and perhaps by necessity as well. Unlike women of her great-great-grandmother's generation, she was able to support herself independently, yet was expected to choose between marriage and a career.⁸

Mary Hobart cherished her ancestor's diary. Only a desire to make it "more accessible to a wider circle of antiquarian workers," combined with a fear that it was not quite safe in her wooden house, prompted her to donate it to the Maine State Library in 1930. The library promised to give her, in exchange, a typewritten transcription of the original. She never received such a transcription, though two years later the library presented her with offprints of Charles Elventon Nash's abridgment of the diary. Nash's version of the diary had been completed sometime before 1904 as part of a proposed two-volume history of Augusta. At his death most of the first volume had been printed but not bound or published. For almost sixty years the uncut signatures sat in wooden crates in a descendant's house. The state librarian apparently got wind of their existence and secured a print of the diary portion for Dr. Hobart. He apologized for not having provided the full typescript promised, but he assured her that Mr. Nash had "copied the most important parts of the Journal and also made a great many important and valuable footnotes."

Hobart was gracious in her acknowledgment of the gift, though obviously disappointed.

I am greatly indebted to your untiring zeal in obtaining and sending this reprint to me. Of course in its modern setting I miss the old-time paper, the quaint penmanship and especially the marginal notes which stated the various 'rewards' my great-great-grandmother received from her patients. Also, I shall never feel certain about the completeness, as much material is doubtless omitted. But I consider my self and my descendants—or, more properly speaking,

my heirs—fortunate in the possession of so good a copy &, as you say, Mr. Nash's introduction & footnotes will add to its value.⁹

Much of importance had indeed been omitted from the diary. As we have seen, Nash preserved about a third of the original. He recorded the dramatic journey across the Kennebec in 1789, the passage with which we began this book, most of Martha's account of the Purinton murders, and many of her casual references to public affairs. But he provided only an edited version of the births, salvaging genealogical but deliberately excising sexual content. He mentioned autopsies, but excluded her detailed descriptions of them, gave representative samples of her work entries, but cut or muted all references to family troubles. He omitted her description of the North rape trial and reduced to a minimum her lists of visitors, purchases, journeys, household work, gardening, and textile production.

Still, it took genuine commitment for a busy man to copy by hand hundreds of pages of an obscure diary, traveling to Boston to do so. Given the circumstances, Nash can certainly be forgiven for dropping generic references to weeding cucumbers or bleaching cloth. That he wished to preserve his own good name in the town by omitting scandal is also understandable. Unlike his nineteenth-century predecessor, he knew Martha's name and he gave her diary the prominence in his work that it had long been denied. His footnotes and index *are* useful, though the latter might have been more so had it included women's names as well as men's.

Nash's work deserved a better fate than it received. Although most of the first volume had been typeset and printed at the time of his death, no person then or for fifty years thereafter thought it worth completing and binding. In 1958, one of his descendants contacted the Maine State Library. The sill of the barn where the old crates were kept needed replacing. Did the State Library want to store them? Edith Hary had a better idea. With the help of two other women, she sorted through Nash's papers, collated the signatures, found a printer willing to experiment with binding the old paper, and in 1961 published *The History of Augusta: First Settlements*

and *Early Days As A Town Including The Diary of Mrs. Martha Moore Ballard*. "Mrs. Ballard made the difference," she explained.¹⁰

Through Hary's work, a new generation of schoolchildren, scholars, and readers have discovered the diary. Still, the promise made to Mary Hobart is yet unfulfilled. Martha Ballard's diary rests safe in a vault at the Maine State Library, a monument to a remarkable life and a testimony to the fragile web that connects one generation with another.

Appendix: Medicinal Ingredients Mentioned in Martha Ballard's Diary

Since the majority of Martha's medicinal entries are nonspecific ("made a syrup," "administered a clister," "gathered herbs," "used means"), it is not possible to develop a complete pharmacopoeia. The difficulty is compounded by the fact that in her lifetime many common garden vegetables or household staples had potential therapeutic uses. I have included here every ingredient for which she gave an explicit medicinal reference as well as others known *primarily* as medicinal plants and for which clear references to growing, gathering, or purchasing appear. I have included onions, for example, because she clearly used them medicinally, but not beans or radishes, even though herbals sometimes give medical uses for them. Where Martha mentioned growing or gathering a medicinal herb but did not indicate how she used it, I have given possible applications from contemporary sources.

There is not enough information in the diary to distinguish wild from cultivated herbs. Martha noted planting camomile and coriander in her garden and digging cold water root in "a field," but when she wrote that she "Cut up" catmint and tansy, we cannot be sure where she got them. Both are English plants, often cultivated in gardens, but in some places they had also become naturalized. Usually, however, I can distinguish local plants from imported ingredients on the basis of her descriptions.