INFORMATION TO USERS

This material was produced from a microfilm copy of the original document. While the most advanced technological means to photograph and reproduce this document have been used, the quality is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original submitted.

The following explanation of techniques is provided to help you understand markings or patterns which may appear on this reproduction.

1. The sign or “target” for pages apparently lacking from the document photographed is “Missing Page(s)”. If it was possible to obtain the missing page(s) or section, they are spliced into the film along with adjacent pages. This may have necessitated cutting thru an image and duplicating adjacent pages to insure you complete continuity.

2. When an image on the film is obliterated with a large round black mark, it is an indication that the photographer suspected that the copy may have moved during exposure and thus cause a blurred image. You will find a good image of the page in the adjacent frame.

3. When a map, drawing or chart, etc., was part of the material being photographed the photographer followed a definite method in “sectioning” the material. It is customary to begin photoing at the upper left hand corner of a large sheet and to continue photoing from left to right in equal sections with a small overlap. If necessary, sectioning is continued again – beginning below the first row and continuing on until complete.

4. The majority of users indicate that the textual content is of greatest value, however, a somewhat higher quality reproduction could be made from “photographs” if essential to the understanding of the dissertation. Silver prints of “photographs” may be ordered at additional charge by writing the Order Department, giving the catalog number, title, author and specific pages you wish reproduced.

5. PLEASE NOTE: Some pages may have indistinct print. Filmed as received.

Xerox University Microfilms
300 North Zeeb Road
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106
MASTERS THESIS 13-11,412

SPRIGG, June Stephanie
WOMEN'S EVERYDAY LIVES IN 18TH-CENTURY NORTHEASTERN AMERICA.
University of Delaware, M.A., 1977

University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
WOMEN'S EVERYDAY LIVES
IN 18TH-CENTURY NORTHEASTERN AMERICA

By
June Sprigg

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Early American Culture.

June, 1977
All rights reserved
WOMEN'S EVERYDAY LIVES
IN 18TH-CENTURY NORTHEASTERN AMERICA

By
June Sprigg

Approved:  
Dr. James C. Curtis
Professor in charge of thesis on behalf of the Advisory Committee

Approved:  
Dr. James C. Curtis
Coordinator of the Winterthur Program in Early American Culture

Approved:  
Virginia P. Dust
Dean of the College of Graduate Studies
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My warmest thanks go to Dr. James C. Curtis, for his tremendous enthusiasm and perceptive suggestions; to Susan Burrows Swan at Winterthur for generously sharing and comparing research notes and her imaginative ideas; and to the other Winterthur Fellows, whose friendship and support during these two years has made it possible to produce this thesis without losing the remainder of my marbles.
CONTENTS

Acknowledgements ........................................ iii
List of Illustrations ..................................... v
Abstract ..................................................... vi
Text ........................................................... 1
Illustrations .................................................. 35
Notes ............................................................ 41
Notes to Captions .......................................... 45
Bibliography .................................................. 46
Appendix ....................................................... 48

iv

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Spinsters..................................................35
   (from an 18th-century print)

2. Tombstone of Mary Harvey and infant........36
   (Deerfield, Massachusetts)

3. Kitchen scene.............................................37

4. Bed rugg by Elizabeth Foote.........................38
   (Connecticut Historical Society)

5. Woman whitewashing, after Lewis Miller........39
   (York County Historical Society)

6. Silver coffeepot by Joseph and
   Nathaniel Richardson.................................40
   (Mr. Wharton Sinkler)
ABSTRACT

My thesis on the everyday lives of women in 18th-century northeastern America comprises the first chapter of a 75,000-word book on the same subject to be published by Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., in 1978. As such, the thesis serves mainly to introduce the women whose diaries and letters have provided important primary source material, and to identify and describe their lives and writings (many of which appear for the first time in print.) Biographical notes in the Appendix provide further information on the forty women whose accounts I used extensively.

The other chapters, which are not included in this thesis, establish home and the duties of housewifery as the dominant context of 18th-century American women. I deal with women's responsibilities in marriage and motherhood; their role in providing food, clothing, and medical service for their families; and their educational opportunities and leisure activities.

Pencil illustrations (over 200 in the book) form an integral part of the text. Since material
culture supplies much of the information unobtainable from written documents, I find it appropriate to use sketches of the artifacts to provide a more complete picture of the daily lives of these women. Inspired in most cases by actual diary reference, the drawings document the objects familiar to women in 18th-century America. A representative sampling of the illustrations is included in this thesis.
I have been picking wool till 11 h. A woman's work is never done, as the song says, and happy she who's strength holds out to the end of the rais. It is now near the middle of the night, and Mr. Dinsmore calls me to his house. I set up all day.

Martha Moore Ballard
November 26, 1795
Augusta, Maine

It wasn't easy for Martha Ballard to leave her hearth and struggle through the dark drifts on a cold night in Maine. But Martha was a woman with a special skill, as well as fortitude. The capable hands that had plucked apart tufts of wool through the long evening in preparation for carding and spinning were hands that also dug roots and mashed herbs into medicines with a mortar and pestle. They were strong hands that gripped hard on those of a neighbor woman in labor; that gently cooled a forehead; and that lifted the baby to the arms of the mother. Martha Ballard was a nurse and midwife, as well as a mother and grandmother herself, busy with spinning, gardening, and cooking. Martha would rather have gone to bed; but when her neighbors needed her, she went.
Women like Martha Ballard are not found in history books. They were not famous in their own day, nor were they married to famous men. Just a few of the thousands of women who lived in America in the 18th century are familiar today; and those, usually the wives of presidents, generals, and gentlemen of means. Some of them, like Martha Washington, were content to remain quietly in the background, keeping house while their husbands worked to shape a new nation.

But others, like Abigail Adams and her friend Mercy Otis Warren, took an active interest in the development of the republic, particularly the role women were to play. Only half in jest, Abigail wrote to her husband John in 1776:

I long to hear that you have declared an independancy—and by the way in the new Code of Laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make I desire you would Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favourable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the Husbands. Remember all Men would be tyrants if they could. If particular care and attention is not paid to the Laidies we are determined to foment a Rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in which we have no voice, or Representation.
That Abigail's beliefs make sense to us now has led us to regard her as spokeswoman for her time. The fact is, though, that Abigail's outlook was not generally accepted in her own day. Few, including John, took seriously her arguments for women's rights. It's fine to admire Abigail for speaking her mind, but we have to remember that neither she nor Mercy spoke for most women in America, in large part because neither was really typical of American women.

Both enjoyed advantages that few other women shared: travel, academic interests, prominent husbands, and a circle that included some of the foremost doers and thinkers of the time. Mercy Warren wrote a history of the American Revolution in three volumes and composed satirical political plays sprinkled with learned references at a time when an estimated half of American women could neither read nor write. In spite of her "perticuliar" spelling, Abigail was likewise a literary woman who determinedly plowed through "Rollins ancient History" and other serious works. Pleased with his wife's efforts, John nevertheless teased her with a list of her faults. "In the Fourth Place you very often hang your Head like a Bulrush," he chided in mock.
severity. "This Fault is the Effect and Consequence of another, still more inexcusable in a Lady. I mean an Habit of Reading, Writing and Thinking. But both the Cause and the Effect ought to be repented and amended as soon as possible."³

During the war, Abigail like many other wives took over management of the farm. Unlike them, however, she packed thoughtful political comment with the homely news and homespun suits she sent to John. She wrote him in May, 1776, "We are just now ready to plant, the barly look charmingly, I shall be quite a Farmeriss an other year."⁴ Replied John, "I think you shine as a Stateswoman, of late as well as a Farmeress. Pray where do you get your Maxims of State, they are very apropos."⁵ Young Phebe Henshaw's concerns were more typical. When her husband William left for battle in 1775, she promised him from their home in Leicester, Massachusetts, "I shall send the things you wrote for soon: you may be sure I am not unmindful of your necessities—but shall send stockings shoes & other things as fast as I can get em made." Phebe added, "I am glad you sent me your dirty clothes."⁶
And while Abigail danced and dined with her husband in the courts of Paris and London after the war, the world for most American women was bounded by the trees and fields that bordered their homes. The nearest town was as far as many were likely to travel in their lives. Abigail appreciated her opportunity and commented to John, "Women you know Sir are considered as Domestick Beings, and altho they inherit an Equal Share of curiosity with the other Sex, yet but few are hardy eno' to venture abroad, and explore the amazing variety of distant Lands." She concluded that most women were "obliged to content themselves with seeing but a very small part" of their own country.  

At the same time Abigail and Mercy pursued their remarkable careers, women all over the country went about their own everyday business. What that was depended on each woman, of course, and the daily lives of American women could be vastly different. Servants and slaves rubbed their rough, tired fingers and bent again to their spinning wheels or steaming washtubs. In elegant drawing rooms, fashionable ladies rustled in silks and sipped fragrant tea from delicate porcelain saucers as smooth and white as their hands. Women in
town, baskets on arm, picked their way through dust and dung to market for squawking geese or strong-smelling cheese. Far off on the frontier, women working alongside their men heaved logs into place, and left fresh, sticky sap where they wiped away the dust. The scent of earth and drone of bees rose on waves of summer heat to farm women weeding in their gardens; schoolgirls yawned and mended their quill pens. The wives and sweethearts of sailors and sea captains shivered at night when the autumn waves crashed loud on shore; and on dark city streets, other women walked and waited to pick up sailors, sea legs unsteady with rum.

They were giddy young girls, grandmothers, and maiden aunts; they were German, French, Dutch, Spanish, Swedish, English, African, Native American, Scotch-Irish.

Despite their differences, though, there was much that these women had in common. Life for most of them centered around marriage and family. Their responsibilities included feeding and clothing their families, nursing them through illness, and bearing and raising children to become useful, decent citizens. The demands of domestic life were an integral part of most women's lives. Even Abigail Adams and Mercy
Warren recognized the importance of women's everyday work. While Mercy urged women to "be pursuing some mental improvement" by using their minds for intellectual pursuit, she cautioned them against neglecting "the duties of domestic life." The pen was to join the needle and ladle for useful purpose in female hands, not replace them. "But how miserable must that woman be," Mercy warned, "who, at the same time that she has both genius and taste for literary inquiry, can not cheerfully leave the pursuit to attend to the daily cares of the prudent housewife."

In addition to sharing many of the same responsibilities, most women fulfilled them in similar ways. Few of the necessities of life were available ready-made. Most households (over nine out of ten) provided their own food, clothing, and shelter at home on small farms, using what the land could offer. The natural sequence of sowing and growing, harvest, and fallow season thus gave a familiar pattern to the lives of most women. Although traditional work methods varied slightly in different areas, women churned butter, spun flax, and dried apples in the same basic ways throughout northeastern America.
Abigail Adams and Mercy Warren were extraordinary women whose spirited ideas have in two centuries become an important part of our way of thinking. But the lives of thousands of ordinary women—Abigail's "Domestick Beings" who stayed at home with their work and their families—played a far more significant role in the way America developed. The very nature of their accomplishments, however, has made it difficult to learn what their lives were like. Mercy's books endure; meals and mending don't.

The things women made and used tell part of their story. Samplers, spinning wheels, iron griddles, and homespun sheets all give helpful clues about the homes and skills familiar to most women. But often, very little remains. Nearly everything ordinary women touched is gone now, the homes and gardens they tended fallen to urban sprawl, the clothes they made and wore, long since thrown out. The simple, everyday tools and furnishings that played a part in their world have for the most part been lost, leaving elegant silver, satin, and mahogany to give a lopsided picture of the way most people lived. The land itself has changed, and the plants and animals once important to most housewives

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
have disappeared from our communities.

Everything that women touched can tell something about their lives. But it is the written accounts that give the most valuable insight into the hearts and minds of the women who recorded them. Their writings are scattered and few; it was not common for women in 18th-century America to keep diaries or write frequent letters. Many women couldn't write at all. Others who knew how usually had little occasion to write, except to figure their household accounts. Paper was relatively costly, besides. But there were always a few women inclined to put pen to paper—in 1774, Jemima Condict of New Jersey confided, "Sometimes after our people is gone to Bed I get my Pen for I Dont know how to Content myself without writeing Something." The pages that women like Jemima scratched over with goose quill pens are yellowed and brittle now, and the homemade ink faded and brown, but the words are alive with the spirit of each different character.

Many of the letters and diaries that survive were the result of journeys. Travel over mountains and rivers by wagon or horse was so harsh and tedious that long trips were rare, especially for women. Travellers
far from home sometimes occupied their long nights by scribbling accounts of the novelties of a new and different place. The best-known female traveller in early America is Madame Sarah Knight, who undertook an unprecedented trip (for a woman) from Boston to New York and back at age 38 in 1704. She was no ordinary lady, and kept no ordinary journal during her five months on the road. Blessed with a sense of humor that buoyed her spirits when the going was rough, and as sharp of eye as she was of tongue, Madame Knight had every bit of the spunk required to venture alone when it was almost unheard of for women to travel any distance. At one inn, the tavern-keeper's daughter babbled, "Law for mee—what in the world brings You here at this time a night?—I never see a woman on the Rode so Dreadfull late, in all the days of my versall life. Who are You? Where are You going?" and likely would have continued had not the tired and hungry Sarah rebelled. "I told her shee treated me very Rudely," recalled Sarah, "and I did not think it my duty to answer her unmannerly Questions."

The trip was challenging enough: she nearly plunged into a raging creek when her horse slipped,
and often she rode cold and alone far behind the
guide in the woods at night. Her now-famous journal
no doubt provided Sarah entertainment and solace during
the many nights she spent in strange beds in strange
taverns (which she rated from "tollerably well" to
"wretched.") Always a good-natured but sharp com-
mentator, she observed that the divorce customs
of the Indians in Connecticut—"on the least dislike or
fickle humour, on either side, saying stand away to
one another"—were not unlike those of the colonists
there. "And indeed," proper Bostonian Sarah continued
crisply, "those uncomely Stand aways are too much in
Vogue among the English in this (Indulgent Colony) as
their Records plentifully prove, and that on some very
trivial matters, of which some have been told me, but
are not proper to be Related by a Female pen, tho some
of that foolish sex have had too large a share in the
story."

Boston-born Ann Powell, another hardy traveller,
likewise kept a diary as she rode through the wilderness
from Montreal to Detroit in 1789. Like Sarah, Ann's
dry wit matched her powers of observation. Privileged
to attend an assembly of two hundred chiefs and their
squaws, Ann reported, impressed, "On seeing this respectable band of matrons I was struck with the different opinions of mankind. In England when a man grows infirm and his talents are obscured by age, the wits decide upon his character by calling him an old woman. On the banks of Lake Erie a woman becomes respectable as she grows old, and I suppose the greatest compliment you can pay a young hero, is that he is as wise as an old woman, a good trait of savage understanding."  

Travel was so difficult that in many cases people who moved away never again saw the family and friends they left. Letters were the only link with far-off loved ones; and many women doubtless felt comforted by sharing minute details of their new lives and new homes with correspondents far away. The months-long voyage, often made hazardous by the weather, made the three thousand miles between America and England or Europe especially vast. If Ann Hulton sometimes felt forlorn after her move from England to Boston in 1767, writing long letters to her friend Mrs. Lightbody home in Liverpool helped lift her spirits. Ann's descriptions of her new neighbors and their New England ways were not always flattering. "It's not so very cheap
Living in this Country as some imagine, tho' provisions are plenty," she reported in 1771, adding tartly, "I believe the People are so civil to us Strangers, or new comers, to make us pay more handsomely for every­thing, than they do their own people."\textsuperscript{13}

Ann Warder was another outspoken Englishwoman who left her family, to follow her American husband home to Philadelphia in 1786. Welcomed warmly by her in-laws, and generally pleased with her home in America's most elegant city, Ann spiced the letters she sent her sister with amusing accounts of Philadelphia foibles and fashions. "I warmly reprobated the too general practice of people here making such figures in the morning and when out such a show you can scarcely know them," she recounted mischievously of her visit with a very stylish lady. "This being exactly her case; she pretended as an excuse, that it was very extravagant wearing long gowns to go about the house." Undaunted, Ann retorted, "I told her if my husband's circumstances would not afford me a good long gown, I had rather wear a common worsted one always, than like her sit at home not fit to be seen by man sometimes, and when out a Duchess could not be finer."\textsuperscript{14}
The war years spawned many letters in families who underwent the hardship of separation. The messages Phebe Henshaw sent her husband William from their home in Leicester, Massachusetts, must have cheered him with their tender concern for his well-being while he followed his army's orders. He couldn't always obey her orders, though; in 1776 he apologized, "I am much oblig'd to you for your advice, I always bear testimony against prophane language, but it is very difficult to put a stop to it in an army." 15

The war took Rebecca Shoemaker away from her home, too, when she left her three children in their twenties in Philadelphia to join her husband Samuel in New York. The correspondence this good Quaker mother and her daughter Anna exchanged kept them close and helped lessen the disappointment when Anna's wedding took place in 1783, her parents unable to attend. They wrote frequently despite the uncertainty of wartime mails. In 1781, Rebecca entertained herself and Anna with mail seized and sent to her husband to censor. "I have been Amused this evening with reading intercepted letters which were sent to D[add y] to examine," she wrote unabashedly, "some curious ones
among them.— There are 2 from a Widow Lady Now in Philad., one of the Carolina Exiles, to her Very particular fr/Ten7d in Boston, who, she says, has never been one moment out of her mind since they parted, which is 8 months; wrote in a Very pretty hand indeed.— She will not believe he is unfaithful till she has it from under his own hand."16

Though she and her Sammy moved to New York because of their Tory sympathies, Rebecca had scant patience for political treachery. When Benedict Arnold's wife Peggy paid her a visit in 1781, Rebecca found little to approve. "She is amazingly improved in Beauty & Dress,— having really recovered a great Deal of that bloom she formerly possess'd, but did not bring in with her," sniffed Rebecca, "added to that a prodigious Alteration in her Dress which at some of her first appearances she did not attend to, & which she perhaps has found out must be done, to obtain that Kind of Consequence that all fine Lady's wish to obtain & preserve." Concluded Rebecca indignantly, "There has been a ball at Head Quarters since Gen A——— sailed, at which she was, & I am told by a Gentleman who was there, that she appeared like a Star of the first
Magnitude, & had every attention paid her as if she had been Lady Clinton.—Is not this a fine encouragement for generals to follow A——-'s example?"17

Favorite topics of women like Rebecca included family news, politics, dress, parties, books—and each other. Rebecca Franks, a well-known Philadelphia society charmer, purred from a visit to New York, "Few New York ladies know how to entertain company in their own houses, unless they introduce the card table. I don't know a woman or girl that can chat above half an hour and that on the form of a cap, the color of a ribbon, or the set of a hoop, stay, or capun." She finished in satisfaction, "I will do our ladies, that is in Philadelphia, the justice to say they have more cleverness in the turn of an eye, than the New York girls have in their whole composition."18

Rebecca's activities didn't escape the notice of Mrs. Shoemaker, who reported starchily, "Becky is passing time in the most gay & Dissipated manner imaginable—You cannot conceive a more constant round of engagements than she has, & her Levee attended by a Variety. It is not confined to young gentlemen, but She has Attractions for old men."19 Ann Warder, back
home in Philadelphia, would have smirked at Rebecca Shoemaker's comments on young women and older men. According to Ann, Rebecca's daughter Peggy had taken a husband "full double her age." Ann laughed smugly to her sister, "So thou see what a pitch they are got to for husbands in this country;--I scarce ever saw such strange matches as some."20

Sometimes women wrote letters in journal form to send as a packet to loved ones during a long separation. When 24-year-old Abigail May of Boston spent the summer of 1800 at the health spa in Ballston Springs, New York, she amused herself daily by writing a diary intended for her friend Lucretia Goddard. Partly to take her mind off the mysterious and painful affliction in her hand, Abigail enlivened her remarkable journal with sprightly vignettes of spa life: backgammon, bathing, billiards, music, dancing, needlework, and parties. Perceptive and good-humored, Abigail poked gentle fun at pompous generals, pretentious dandies, frivolous ladies—and herself. "But really my journal is quite a different affair from what I expected," she laughed, "habituated to the fire side—and very unused to travelling I concluded it requir'd
only the means to commence travelling and elegant
writing would follow of course—but now I find to my
very great mortification—that a very pleasant journey—
has produced a very stupid journal."21

Well-liked by the young men she met, Abigail
was nevertheless refreshingly independent. Obliged to
breakfast alone one day with a "batch of lawyers and
gentlemen," she asserted that she'd "rather have waited
till Christmas" for her meal than endure the insolence
of "these high and mighty Lords of the Creation as they
call themselves" who picked their teeth and stared at
her. Determined not to give the satisfied satisfaction of
returning their glances, she recalled, "I found such
beauties in my cup and saucer I look'd at nothing
else."22

Nor was she fond of the vain flattery that
marked fashionable conversation. "Buz, buz, on every
side our ears are assailed with compliments—addressed
equally to the old young ugly or handsome," sighed
Abigail "—tis the ladies must be flatter'd, tis the
part of the gentlemen to administer the soothing
essence."23 Preferring talk of books and politics to
the chatter of simpering beaux, Abigail concluded wrily,
"Why as sure as you live, I think there is some miscalculation in my age as I can only charm the aged, and so I intend to ratify the mistake by putting on mob caps, a lawn apron, round toed shoes, and spectacles...Tis therefore high time I descended into the vale of years to meet the ancients who feel willing to admit me into their society."  

Young Sarah Eve of Philadelphia shared Abigail's love of words and books. A wit as bright as her red hair sparked the diary she kept for her beloved father, gone at sea and on business for five long years, to read when he returned home in 1773. The wait was an anxious one. In November of that year she wrote, "Mama is very uneasy about my Father whom we have hourly expected these ten days; and indeed unless we see him soon, I fear, I shall become as superstitious as any superannuated maid in the Land—the other day upon opening the door, I saw a seagull fly over the house, which, they say, is a sure sign of some one belonging to the house coming from sea; the unexpected sight of which I declare, gave me such pleasure for a while, that I was ashamed to own it."  

Despite the prominence of her respectable and
prosperous Quaker family, Sarah was pleasantly down-to-earth, sharing Abigail May's dislike of pretention. After a dinner party where the conversation ran to flattery, fashion, and the hostess's silver candlesticks—"'Where, my dear Mrs. Hayes, says the doctor's Lady, did you get everything so much handsomer and so much finer than anybody else?' a proper stress to be laid on the word so," mimicked Sarah—she wrote in exasperation, "As soon as possible I had the company good-night except Capt. Stainforth who saw me safe to my brother's—I came home thanking fate that I had so little to do with high life and its attendants!"26

Girls away at school often kept diaries to record their lessons, practice their penmanship, and probably show to their parents as a chart of their progress. The best-known schoolgirl diary is that of Anna Green Winslow, staying in Boston with fond aunts who didn't give her a chance to be homesick for her parents far off in Nova Scotia. It was for them that Anna kept her delightful, whimsical journal, concerned equally with sermons and fashions, lessons and parties. Anna wrote anxiously in 1772, just after her arrival, "I hope aunt wont let me wear the black hatt with the
red Dominie \(\sim\) a long cloak \(\sim\)--for the people will ask me what I have to sell as I go along street if I do, or, how the folk at New guinie do? Dear mamma, you don't know the fation here—I beg to look like other folk. You don't know what a stir would be made in sudbury street, were I to make my appearance there in my Dominie & black Hatt."^{27}

Formal schooling for girls was more prevalent at the end of the 18th century than in the earlier years, although by no means common at any time. While most girls their age were at home scrubbing and spinning, 16-year-old Charlotte Sheldon and Julia Cowles, 12, attended Miss Pierce's "Female Academy" in Litchfield, Connecticut, and dutifully recorded their lessons as well as embroidery, dances, and games. Charlotte was a "monster for learning," according to her classmates, and relished her work. Poor little Julia tried hard but just didn't seem to take to her studies. In 1797 she noted, "I do not recollect any History that we read to day only that there was one Punic War"—only to add a week later, "We now began the second punic war."^{28} It was too much. She concluded plaintively, "Attended school, read in History, but I don't know anything what we read. I don't know as I ever shall again."^{29}
Some schoolgirl notebooks are little more than copy-books for perfecting elegant handwriting. New-England girl Lydia Gendell obediently practiced her ladylike curlicues, but chose a jaunty verse instead of the usual moral sentiment:

The Chois by a Young Lady

A Man that's neither high nor low,  
In party, or in Stature;  
No noisy Rake or fickle Beau,  
That's us'd to cringe & flatter;  
And let him be no learned Fool  
That nods o'er musty Books;  
Who eats and drinks & lives by Rule  
And waves my Words & Looks.  
Let him be easy frank and Gay,  
Of dancing never tir'd;  
Always t'have something smart to say  
But silent if required. 30

While many lively pages were written to be shared with others, some women kept diaries for their own use. At their simplest they are like the terse notations which Mary Holyoke of Salem, Massachusetts, kept for forty years—scarcelly more than housekeeping accounts and family and community records:

May 1761. 20. Began to whitewash. Dr. [her husband] taken with a Cold.  
22. Went to a Barbeque at Jonson's  
50 in Company. Dr not here.  
June 1. Mrs. Giles died in childbirth at
Mrs. Frye's.
8. Ropes moved to ye pest house with Small Pox.31

Other women faithfully recorded their everyday chores and amusements from barn-raisings to spinning "frolics," providing a valuable source of information about their daily lives. Two of the most interesting diaries remain together, the work of two sisters from Colchester, Connecticut. Abigail and Elizabeth Foote—better known as Nabby and Betty—were 18 and 25 years of age when they kept their journals during the Revolution. Despite the war, daily life went on as usual for the young women as they shared the housework with their mother and sister Mary, or Mol, 23. The dawn of April 18, 1775—the day of Paul Revere's famous ride—found Betty up and busy with an ordinary day's work:

I rose before the sun and made apple pies and dumplings for breakfast and Luna Jones and Sally Otis came back with us last night, we meeting of them and so stay'd to breakfast, but they said they would not if it had not rained. I did housework and spool'd a little and went to Mr. Martin Kelloggs and in the evening he came here, Rhoda Wells being here.32

Nabby and Betty wrote about their chores from making straw brooms to frying pancakes for supper, but they were too spirited to write only about work.
"Sparking," or courting, was a favorite topic, and with large families, privacy was none too available. While neighbor David courted Ellen, who stayed with them, both sisters kept an eye on the pair, particularly when they bundled, or slept together fully clothed—an acceptable form of courtship in many areas of 18th-century America. In May 1775, Betty wrote, "David came to see Ellen, but she was a bed but got up." The next morning, Betty added, "Tis now 8 o'clock and Ellen and David ain't up and I are a going to carding tow" to spin into coarse linen. One month later, on the day the bees swarmed in June, the couple "was cryed of," or announced their engagement. Even with wall-to-wall kin, romance flourished. Friend Sal had a "Spark" one night, "but hid him."

Ruth Henshaw, only a toddler when the Revolution separated her parents Phebe and William, grew up as the oldest of ten children at home in a small town near Worcester, Massachusetts. A good-natured, fun-loving girl, Ruth visited friends almost daily and danced at "assemblies" while quieter "speckled potatoes" (her pun on spectators) watched. When a young friend Joseph came to play parlor games one winter night in
1796, she "play'd chickens, & was beaten," but soon got even: "playd morris, and beat him."³⁶

Ruth earned her leisure hours with long stints at spinning and sewing; and her skill at the loom gained respect and jobs from her neighbors. She worked hard, and surprised herself one day when she "spun a little, sew'd a little, knit a little, prepared to do something but did nerely nothing."³⁷

The diary of another Massachusetts girl equals Ruth's in sprightly humor. Elizabeth Fuller, a minister's daughter from nearby Princeton, Massachusetts, kept a record of her busy days. Thanksgiving, though a holiday, was as active as the rest. In November 1790, Elizabeth noted: "Thanksgiving today we baked three ovensfull of pyes. There was no preaching so we had nothing to do but eat them. The pyes were a great deal better than they were last Thanksgiving for I made them all myself; and part of them were made of flour which we got of Mr H Hastings therefore we had plenty of spice."³⁸

Older hands kept some of the diaries. Like the Down East midwife Martha Ballard, Mary (or Molly)
Cooper of Oyster Bay, Long Island, was long married and settled when she put pen to paper. Contrary to the opinion of a French visitor to the United States—"American women are charming and adorable at fifteen, faded at twenty-three, old at thirty-five, decrepit at forty or forty-five, and subject to nervous troubles"—Martha and Molly were hardly defunct. They were too busy working. And what a pair they make. Martha was a contented grandma who wrote fondly of her family, her patients, and her garden.

But Molly was a cantankerous, downtrodden soul who never had a moment's rest, a nice word for anyone, or a good time. On a typical day she wrote, "I am more distrest than ever. I have dinner to cook. My Company will not go to Meeten dirty and distrest. I set myself to make something out of littel." Molly celebrated her fortieth wedding anniversary in 1769 with the gloomy reflection, "This day is forty years since I left my father's house and come here and here have I seene littel Els. But harde labour and sorrow crosses of every kind. I think in every respect the state of my affairs is more than forty times worse than when I came here first. Except that I am nearer the desired haven." Considering
the way her husband treated her, it's not easy to fault her bitterness. Where was he on the day Ben Hildrith came with two men? Holly was "up late and much freted with them and their two dogs which they keep at table and in the Bedroom they did nothing but drink themselves drunk all the day long and sent for more rum."42.

At best, these diaries reveal more than what women did; they tell us how the writers thought and felt about what was important in their lives. These women saw their world with laughter, pain, worry, joy, and anger; through their words, so can we.

The anguish of ill health or the loss of loved ones remains sharp in words written two centuries ago. At home in Philadelphia on a bright February day in 1785, 50-year-old Elizabeth Drinker wrote sadly, "Doc'r. Jones paid me a visit: gave me little or no, encouragement, respecting ye disorder in my Breast—I think I never saw ye Trees look prittyer: not even in ye Summer Season, than they do this day, so beautifully bespangled with frost—were I in perfect health I should enjoy it much."43
In one terrible season in 1790, young wife and mother Aletta Clarke of Delaware, numbed with shock and foreboding, recorded death after death, day after day. Aletta's grief climaxed when her own sister, just twenty years old, died in childbirth. "Mama goes home," wrote Aletta. "She carried poor Sister Sally's clothes home with her, to keep them for the child she left."44

The saddest diaries are those full of the heart-ache their lonely writers had no one else to tell. The pages 24-year-old Patty Rogers wrote reveal the unhappiness and narrowness of her life in Massachusetts in 1785. A painfully insecure girl burdened with the care of an invalid father, Patty's sad attempts to find love ended in misery when the young man she'd given herself to burned her passionate letters "for her own good" and abandoned her to marry another neighborhood girl. It was impossible to avoid seeing them frequently. Rumors spread quickly, and Patty suffered further shame when a young man she supposed a friend took advantage of her trust in his consolation by taking "liberties that would not have been strictly decent had they come to light."45

Rebecca Dickinson of Hatfield, Massachusetts, getting along in years, returned to the emptiness of
her house one night and wondered in sorrow "how it come about that others and all the world was in Possession of Children and friends and a hous and homes while I was so od as to sit here alone." Pouring her soul into her journal one September night in 1787, she wrote, "Come to this house about half after seven and found it dark and lonesome here i walked the rooms and cryed myself Sick and found my heart very stubborn against the government of God who has set me here for to try my fidelity to my lord who knows the best way."46

The topic of marriage was another major concern to many of the women who wrote. While Rebecca mourned her spinster state, sassy young Jemima Condict of New Jersey was tired of prods to find a husband. Determined to take her own good time, Jemima teased her poor suitors unmercifully. "Thursday I had some Discourse with Mr. Chandler. he asked me why I Did not marry," wrote Jemima in 1774. "I told him I want in no hurry. Well Said he I wish I was maried to you. I told him he would Soon wish himself on maried agin." But why, begged hapless Mr. Chandler. "Because," Jemima retorted, "you will find that I am a cross ill contrived
Pese of Stuf I told him that I would advise all the men to remain as they was for the women was bad & the men so much worse that It was a wonder if they agreed. So I scard the poor fellow & he is gone."48

Temporarily safe from the snares herself, she reported of a wedding the next year that the groom "Cryd when he was maried"—"at which I Dont a bit Wonder," Jemima declared, "for I think twas anuf to make the poor fellow bellow if he had his wits about him, for I am shure She can beat him."49

As lively as Jemima's words show her to have been, her diary reveals another more serious side. The Bible and church played a very important part in most women's lives, giving them rules to live by and a firmly held notion of their place in the order of things: behind men. Nearly every diary shows evidence of the writer's concern with religion. Some, like Jemima, kept detailed records of the sermons they heard at meeting. Many gave thanks to God or prayed for strength during times of trouble. Others, like Quaker Ann Cooper Whitall of Philadelphia, dwelt often and at length on their spiritual distress. "Oh, I think could my eyes run down with tears always for the abominations of the times," she wailed in 1762. "So much
excess of tobacco; and tea is as bad, so much of it, and they will pretend they can't do without it; and there is the calico. Oh, the calico! We pretend to go in a plain dress and plain speech; but where is our plainness?" Concluded Ann dolefully, "I think tobacco, and tea, and calico may all be set down with the negroes, one as bad as the other."  

But not everyone shared Ann's prissy piety. Long sermons and hard pews in the meetinghouse made it hard to concentrate sometimes. Confessed schoolgirl Charlotte Sheldon in 1796, "Attended meeting all day, wasn't very much edified." Minister's daughter Elizabeth Fuller was more blunt. "Sally has got home from Meeting," she wrote of her sister. "She went ankle deep in snow & mud all the way. I am glad I had not so much zeal." 

The women who committed their words to paper could not have known that two centuries later, their letters and diaries would give us a rich and remarkable glimpse into the world they knew. They wrote for themselves and their friends, not for historians, and we have to keep certain considerations in mind as we read.
The large majority of diaries and letters that survive from the 18th century date from its last quarter, for several probable reasons. More women had the education, opportunity, and inclination to write; and more of what they wrote was likely to survive. We can read only what has escaped fire, damp, and the zeal of generations of attic-cleaning offspring. Some diaries didn't survive their writers' lifetimes, through accident or design. In 1789, Rebecca Dickinson noted, "I have just finished reading a quare of Paper which was wrote by me in the year 1777 an account of Mr lymans first Coming to this town the too first Sermons and the text from which he first Preached"—then burned them. "They are wrote and Spelt So Poorly," she explained, "that it works me to See them."  

It is also important to remember that these women spoke for themselves, and not necessarily for the many others who did not leave their thoughts on paper. Our information depends further on what they chose to write about, and subjects that were too intimate or too ordinary are likely to be absent from their pages.

We may have problems with their language, particularly because nonstandard spelling was the gen-
eral rule even among educated writers. Words like "grisset" and "scutch" have disappeared from common use, along with the cooking and textile-making tools or processes they signify. Other words we think are familiar may mislead us. When Nabby Foote "made harness," she referred to part of a loom, not horse equipment. And reading that another young weaver put "garlits" on her loom is baffling until we learn that "garlits" was a type of linen cloth.

Problems of interpretation can add further confusion. The precise meanings of words such as "sensibility" and "sparkling" are uncertain. Interpreting moods is even more challenging. Try as we might, we can't entirely shake off our 20th-century outlook. We have to be careful not to assume that standards we take for granted today were necessarily a part of 18th-century thinking. Instead, we must try to understand the world these women knew given their experience alone.

The diaries and letters can't tell us everything about women in 18th-century America. But they can bring to life the women who wrote them. Distinguished by their desire to record their experiences in their own words, the women who left these accounts were remarkable.
Because much of what concerned them was typically a part of other women's lives, however, the information they left provides valuable insight into the lives of the women who shared their world but did not write about it. When we combine the written accounts with an understanding of the objects and occupations familiar to women two hundred years ago, we can look beyond their words to common daily routines that, once forgotten, are not easy to reconstruct.
How sad the sight to see a woman Singel above fifty and not merried something is the matter. She is come for a husband haveing no luck in her own land but why does these foolish thoughts come dont happyness be wholly in the mind—1

Rebecca Dickinson

The role of wife and mother was so important in the loth century that life as a single woman could be painfully difficult. Old maids were satirized in pictures and in print. Sneered one newspaper in 1790, "An old maid is one of the most cranky, ill-natured, mazzotty, peevish, conceited, disagreeable, hypocritical, fretful, noisy, gibing, canting, censorious, out-of-the-way, never-to-be-pleased, good for nothing creatures... Of all things on earth she says she hates a man, because every man hates her."2
I am not very well in health, am extremely thin, more so than ever you knew me, I dont mean to alarm you, but will tell you the cause. I have again set out a nine months Voyage and expect a tedious passage, as the beginning proves the Lord only knows whether it will be a safe one.

Nancy De Wolf
September 21, 1793

Nancy's anxiety during her pregnancy was justified: childbirth was a leading killer of women in the 18th century. Nancy survived the birth of her daughter, but the grim faces peering from Mary Harvey's tombstone in Deerfield, Massachusetts, tell a sadder story:

In Memory of
Mary the Wife of
Simeon Harvey
Who Departed this
Life December 10th
1785 in 39th year of
Her age on her left
Arm lieth the Infant
Which was still Born
Colde o I am dirty and tired almost to death
cooking for so many people freted almost to death...
I am much hurried giting vittels.4

Molly Cooper
March, 1769

Not all women disliked cooking as much as Molly did.
But bending over a sooty open hearth made "giting
vittels" hard work on housewives' backs. Most 18th-
century kitchens boasted little more than simple iron
utensils like the pot, skillet, griddles, andirons,
kettle, trammels, crane, fork, ladle, and skewers
shown here.

Fig. 3
Betty, Nabby, and Mol Foote kept so busy with household chores that the magnificent blue-and-white bed rugs they found time to create are all the more remarkable. Bed rugs resemble hooked rugs, but were worked with a needle instead of a hook and were never intended to cover a floor. Betty stitched loops of thick yarn close together on a sturdy fabric backing, using a stick or quill to form loops that were uniform in height. Their unusual patterns and beautiful workmanship place the Foote sisters' rugs among the finest surviving examples; the similarity of the designs make it likely that one hand drew them all. Betty may have a special reason for all her careful work. Into the border near her initials, Betty worked the year "1778"—the year she married Rev. David Huntington.
Fine clear day. Nothing particular—as few Gentlemen love scrubbing, rubbing &c took advantage of Dr T's absence to have the parlors &c well cleaned.

Anna Maria Thornton
March 5, 1800

"Rubbing and scrubbing" formed an important part of the duties of housewifery. A sketch by Lewis Miller shows a woman busy whitewashing walls, part of spring housecleaning for many women. A carpenter from York, Pennsylvania, Miller spent most of his eighty-plus years drawing his friends and neighbors at their daily chores, providing a rich source of information about life in the 18th and early 19th centuries.
One of the Richardson's had some business with Aunt Nancy to day, and I got her to show him an old fashioned tankard and cup which he says will made a handsome coffee pot. In their present form they are useless, being of an uncommonly antique appearance. If thee approved of it I would have them converted into one; the rest I meant not to have changed and it will be a saving of expence."

Anna Rawle
July 10, 1783

Before the general use of banks, many prosperous families kept their wealth in silver for safekeeping, show, and use. Silversmiths commonly remodeled pieces to suit clients like Anna and her aunt—one reason so few early forms survive. The new coffee pot may well have resembled the one that Joseph and Nathaniel Richardson made three years later when Anna's sister Peggy married Isaac Wharton.
NOTES


3 ibid., p. 42.

4 ibid., p. 128.

5 ibid., p. 131.

6 Phoebe Henshaw: "Letter, Leicester, Massachusetts, to Cambridge, Massachusetts, July 16, 1775" (manuscript). American Antiquarian Society.

7 Adams, ibid., p. 50.


11 ibid., p. 39.


20 Warder, ibid., p. 51.


22 ibid.

23 ibid.

24 ibid.


Emily Noyes Vanderpoel: *Chronicles of a Pioneer School from 1792 to 1893* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; 1903), p. 18.

ibid.

Lydia Gendell: "School notebook, 1777-80" (manuscript). Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library.


Elizabeth Foote: "Diary, entry for April 18, 1775" (manuscript). Connecticut Historical Society.

ibid., May 11, 1775.

ibid., May 12, 1775.

ibid., May 2, 1775.

Ruth Henshaw: "Diary, entry for January 4, 1796" (manuscript). American Antiquarian Society.


Mary Cooper: "Diary, entry for September 17, 1769" (manuscript). Oyster Bay Historical Society.

ibid., July 13, 1769.

ibid., August 1, 1769.

Elizabeth Drinker: "Diary, entry for February 3, 1785" (manuscript). Historical Society of Pennsylvania.


Patty Rogers: "Diary, entry for August 4, 1785" (manuscript). American Antiquarian Society.


ibid.

Condict, ibid., pp. 40-1.

ibid., pp. 46-7.


Blake, ibid., p. 320.

Rebecca Dickinson: "Diary, entry for June, 1789" (transcript). Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association Library.
NOTES TO CAPTIONS

1  Rebecca Dickinson: "Diary" (transcript). Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association Library.


4  Molly Cooper: "Diary, entry in March, 1769" (transcript). New York Public Library.


BIBLIOGRAPHY


Vanderpoel, Emily Noyes: Chronicles of a Pioneer School from 1792 to 1833, Being the History of Miss Sarah Pierce and Her Litchfield School. Cambridge, Massachusetts; 1903.


APPENDIX

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

To help readers wishing to pursue their interest further, this section provides brief biographical information on the women whose writings I have found particularly useful; identifies the sources of these selected documents; and offers a concise summary of the accounts, highlighting what I found to be the most significant information.

Adams, Abigail Smith (1744-1818)


Wife of the second President and mother of the sixth, Abigail was remarkable in her own right. The daughter of Rev. William Smith and Elizabeth Quincy of Weymouth, Massachusetts, met John when she was 15, married him in 1764 at age 19, and during the next ten years bore him three sons and a daughter. In her 74 years, Abigail combined housewifey duties in New England with the demands of her husband's political life that took her for several years to London and Paris, returning to America in 1787.

Akerly, Margaretta


Margaretta's letters to her sister Catherine at home in New York include accounts of studies and needlework during her schoolgirl days at the Moravian school in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, 1796-1801.
Bailey, Abigail Abbott (b. 1745)

Manuscript journal in the form of reminiscences, New Hampshire Historical Society.

New-England Abigail married Asa Bailey in 1767 at age 22 and later recorded her miserable life with him.

Ballard, Martha Moore (1735-1812)

Diary published in History of Augusta, Maine by Charles Elventon Nash (1904.)

Martha, the daughter of Elijah Moore and Dorothy Learned, married Ephraim Ballard in 1754 at age 19 and settled in Augusta, Maine. The diary she kept in her sixties records a life busy with household chores such as washing and gardening, and her work with herbal remedies as a nurse and midwife.

Bascom, Ruth Henshaw (see Henshaw, Ruth)

Bleecker, Elizabeth De Hart

Manuscript diary, New York Public Library.

Young Elizabeth filled the elegantly bound journal her husband-to-be gave her with accounts of fashions and diversions in New York at the end of the 18th century.

Clarke, Aletta Clowes


Aletta Clowes married 24-year-old Miers Clarke in 1785. For the next twenty-one years, Aletta and Miers were busy raising eight daughters:
Mary, Sarah, Hannah, Elizabeth, Lidia, Ester, Anna, and finally, another Aletta. As a young wife she recorded daily happenings including illnesses and deaths in her home in Sussex County, Delaware.

Clifford, Anna Rawle (see Rawle, Anna)

Condict, Jemima (1755-1779)


1779 was a momentous year for Jemima, the third child of Daniel Condict and Ruth Harrison of Orange, New Jersey. Married early that year to her first cousin, Aaron Harrison, Jemima gave birth to their son Ira. By November, the 24-year-old wife and mother was dead. Aaron later remarried; her son did not live to reach his teens. Jemima's faithful record of weekly sermons was enlivened with the originality and humor of her observations on marriage, dentistry, travel, and her work at cooking and weaving.

Cooper, Mary

Manuscript diary, Oyster Bay Historical Society; transcript, New York Public Library.

Married in 1729, Mary (or Molly) bore at least one child, a "dear son Caleb" in 1754, who died in his youth, to her grief. Mary's unhappy marriage and never-ending household chores make up most of the diary she kept from 1769 through the 1770's.
Gowles, Julia (b. 1785)

Diary published in Chronicles of a Pioneer School from 1792 to 1833, Being the History of Miss Sarah Pierce and Her Litchfield School edited by Emily Noyes Vanderpoel (Cambridge, Massachusetts; 1903), pp. 17-19.

Twelve-year-old Julia kept this diary of her studies and diversions in 1797 when she was a student in Litchfield, not far from her home in Farmington, Connecticut. Julia was a younger classmate of Charlotte Sheldon (a.v.)

Dewees, Mary


Mary's cheerful outlook in spite of bed bugs and crowded nights in small cabins make her diary of a trip across mountain wilderness from sophisticated Philadelphia to frontier Kentucky interesting reading.

De Wolf, Nancy

Manuscript letters, American Antiquarian Society.

The letters Nancy wrote to her mother, Mrs. Love Lawrence at home in Lincoln, Massachusetts, told of her family, cloth-making, and difficult pregnancies in Nova Scotia in the 1790's.

Dickinson, Rebecca (b. 1738)

Transcript of diary, Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association Library; diary published in A History of Hadfield, Massachusetts by Daniel White Wells and Reuben Field Wells (Springfield, Massachusetts: Published under the direction of F.C.H. Gibbons; 1910), pp. 206-7.
Besides accounts of her work as a seamstress and the daily events of her small Massachusetts town, "Aunt Beck" confided her sorrow at being an old maid to the diary she kept from 1787 to 1802.

**Drew, Abigail Gardner** (1777-1868)

Manuscript diary, American Antiquarian Society.

Abigail described her early years and amusements on the island of Nantucket, including her marriage in 1795 at age 18 to Gershom Drew, Jr.

**Drinker, Elizabeth Sandwith** (1735-1807)


Daughter of Quaker merchant William Sandwith and Sarah Jervis, Elizabeth became Henry Drinker's second wife in 1761 when she was 26. Her five children kept their Philadelphia home lively (four others she bore died before the age of five.) By the end of her 73 years, Elizabeth was grandmother to 25 and the author of a journal on family and local events from the 1770's to the 1790's.

**Eve, Sarah** (1749/50-1774)


Life in Philadelphia as the daughter of a prosperous sea captain and merchant meant a fine education and lively society for Sarah, one of six children of Oswell Eve and Anne Moore.
Sadly, Sarah died at age 25 three weeks before her intended wedding to Dr. Benjamin Rush. The diary of daily events she kept for the benefit of her father away at sea reflects her intelligence and sense of humor.

Foote, Abigail (1757–1852)
Foote, Elizabeth (1750–1845)

Transcript of diaries, Connecticut Historical Society.

The daughters of Israel Foote and Elizabeth Kimberly, Betty and Nabby grew up with sister Mary (b. 1752) and brother Israel (b. 1755) in Colchester, Connecticut. In 1778 28-year-old Betty married Rev. David Huntington; Nabby took Nathaniel Foote, a relative, as her husband in 1791 when she was 33. Lively as well as long-lived (Nabby lived to 94; Betty, 95), the sisters provided a good account of daily life and household chores at the time of the Revolution.

Franks, Rebecca

Manuscript letter, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Fashionable, outspoken Becky reported on gossip and hat styles from Flatbush, New York, to her friend Abby at home in Philadelphia in 1781.

Fuller, Elizabeth (1775–1856)


Elizabeth, one of ten children of Rev. Timothy Fuller and Sarah Williams of Princeton, Massachusetts, spent her 81 years unmarried.
The diary she kept at age 15-17 from 1790-1792 recorded her busy daily routine including spinning, weaving, and dressmaking.

Gendell, Lydia (1762-1809)

Manuscript notebook, Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America.

Lydia became the second wife of William Dawes in 1795 when she was 33. She had one daughter, Mehetable May, and died at age 47 after fourteen years of marriage. Lydia practiced her penmanship in the notebook she kept as a Massachusetts schoolgirl from 1777-80.

Harrison, Jemima Condict (see Condict, Jemima)

Henshaw, Phebe Swan

Manuscript letters, American Antiquarian Society.

Phebe married Colonel William Henshaw and raised their ten children in Leicester, Massachusetts, in the years following the Revolution. Phebe's letters to her husband during the war assured him of his young wife's concern and the family's daily life at home.

Henshaw, Ruth (1772-1847)


The daughter of Colonel William Henshaw and Phebe Swan Henshaw (q.v.), Ruth grew up in
Leicester, Massachusetts, as the oldest of ten children. On Valentine's Day in 1804 she married Dr. Asa Miles, a Dartmouth professor, when she was 32. Widowed shortly thereafter, Ruth remarried in 1806, this time to Rev. Ezekiel Bascom. Ruth began her diary at age 17 and kept accounts of her spinning, weaving, quilting, courting, and travels for the rest of her 74 years. Ruth is best known today for the pastel portraits of family and friends that she drew in the early 19th century.

Holyoke, Mary Vial (1737-1802)


Mary was the second wife of Edward Augustus Holyoke, M.D., of Salem, Massachusetts, and mother of three daughters: Margaret, Elizabeth, and Susannah (who died at age 13.) The doctor evidently knew his business: he outlived his wife by 27 years, dying at last in 1829 at age 101. For forty years Mary kept a record of births, deaths, and chores like soap-making and housecleaning in the brief entries of her journal.

Hulton, Ann


Ann left England to join her brother Henry (then Commissioner of Customs in Boston) and his family near Boston in 1767, and spent the next decade comparing England and New England in sprightly letters to her friend Mrs. Adam Lightbody back in Liverpool.
Knight, Sarah Kemble (1666-1727)

Diary published as The Journal of Madam Knight with an introductory note by George Parker Winship (New York: Peter Smith; 1935.)

Young Bostonian Sarah Kemble married an older widower in or before 1689 and distinguished herself by acquiring respected legal skills. It is the narrative of her round trip between Boston and New York in 1704 at age 38, however, that has made her the best-known female diarist in colonial America. In 1713, her daughter Elizabeth married Colonel John Livingston of New London, Connecticut. The next year Sarah made another trip, this time to join them. Spry as ever in her fifties, she opened a house of entertainment there—hopefully better than many she encountered on her famous trip!

Laurens, Martha (d. 1811)

Memoirs of the Life of Martha Laurens Ramsay by David Ramsay (Charlestown: Printed and Sold by Samuel Etheridge, Jun'r; 1812. Reprinted in Philadelphia; 1845.)

His bookish daughter Martha was a bright spot in Henry Laurens' home in Charleston, South Carolina; eight of the twelve children his wife Eleanor Bell bore before her death in 1770 died in infancy. David Ramsay chose Martha as his third wife in 1787. The year after she died, he wrote and published her memoirs as a tribute to his beloved wife.

May, Abigail (1775-1800)


The first year of the 19th century was a sad one for Bostonians Colonel John May and his wife. Despite hopes for her recovery, their daughter Abigail (her mother's namesake) died of a chronic ailment before she reached the age
of 25. The journal Abigail kept the summer before her death while "taking the waters" at Ballston Spa, New York, is a wonderfully written account of spa life, fashions, billiards, and books by a well-read, intelligent, and good-humored young lady.

**Morris, Margaret Hill** (1737-1816)


In 1758, the 21-year-old daughter of Richard Hill and Deborah Moore married William Morris, Jr., a dry goods merchant in Quaker Philadelphia. His death eight years later left Margaret a widow with three children and one on the way. She moved across the Delaware River to Burlington, New Jersey, to live with her sister Sarah, wife of George Dillwyn. After their sister Milcah moved with her husband Dr. Charles Moore from Burlington to Montgomery Square, Pennsylvania, Margaret's journal kept her up to date on local events of the Revolution.

**Porter, Elizabeth** (b. 1747)


Elizabeth began her diary of daily events at home in New England and kept it for a half century.
Powell, Ann  (b. 1769)


Boston-born Ann made her first long trip when her Loyalist father John moved his family to Canada. The diary she kept in 1789 at age 20 on the trip from Montreal to Detroit shows her to have been a keen observer of the wilderness and its Indian inhabitants.

Rawle, Anna  (1758-1828)


The daughter of Rebecca Shoemaker (q.v.) by her first husband, Francis Rawle, Anna grew up in Quaker Philadelphia with her younger sister, Peggy, and brother Billy. 25-year-old Anna married merchant John Clifford in 1783 and gave birth to four children of whom only one daughter survived childhood. The Revolution, which separated Anna and her mother and stepfather, provided occasional news for Anna's letters, but other important topics were her wedding plans, fashions, fabric patterns, and reports of life at home in Philadelphia.

Ripley, Sally  (b. 1785)

Manuscript diary, American Antiquarian Society; also, Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America.

The diaries Sally kept as a teenage schoolgirl in Greenfield, Massachusetts, in 1799-1800 include prim accounts of schoolwork, card games, girlish amusements, and an account of the solemn
public service she attended on the death of George Washington in 1799.

Rogers, Patty (b. 1761)
Manuscript diary, American Antiquarian Society.
Life at age 24 was not happy for Patty, a native of Massachusetts; her diary reveals the burden of an invalid father and an unhappy love affair.

Sheldon, Charlotte (1760-1840)
Diary published in Chronicles of a Pioneer School from 1792 to 1833, Being the History of Miss Sarah Pierce and Her Litchfield School by Emily Noyes Vanderpoel (Cambridge, Massachusetts; 1903), pp. 10-17.
Charlotte was the daughter of Dr. Daniel Sheldon of Litchfield, Connecticut, and his first wife, who died when Charlotte was four. Weakened by illness as a schoolgirl of seventeen, Charlotte spent the rest of her sixty years an invalid. The diary she kept as a 16-year-old classmate of Julia Cowles (q.v.) recorded her studies as well as parties, fashions, and hobbies.

Shippen, Nancy (1763-1841)
Diary published as Nancy Shippen: Her Journal Book compiled and edited by Ethel Armes (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company; 1935.)
The only daughter of William Shippen, Jr., and Alice Lee (of Virginia,) Nancy grew up beautiful and indulged in fashionable Philadelphia. Her unhappy marriage to Henry Beekman Livingston began in 1781 when the 18-year-old bride moved with her new husband to his home in New York state. Two years later she left him, taking her beloved daughter Peggy, and later unsuccessfully sued for divorce. Throughout her bitter union she apparently remained in love with a former suitor, Louis Otto. When he finally married
another woman in 1790, Nancy gradually slipped into religious fanaticism and remained on the fringes of sanity for the rest of her 78 years.

Shoemaker, Rebecca

Transcript of letters, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

In 1756 Rebecca married Francis Rawle of Philadelphia. His death in a hunting accident five years later left Rebecca with three children: Peggy, Billy, and Anna Rawle. In 1767, Samuel Shoemaker became their stepfather. Her letters to her daughters at home in Philadelphia during the Revolution while she and Sammy stayed in New York are filled with fascinating commentary on politics, prices, fashions, and some of the leading figures of the day.

Thornton, Anna Maria Brodeau (b. 1774)


Before William Thornton had designs for the new U.S. Capitol, he had designs on Anna Maria Brodeau, the 16-year-old daughter of Ann Brodeau of Philadelphia, and in 1790 made her his wife. Anna Maria kept the diary she began in 1800 for over sixty years and filled it with accounts of life in the young city of Washington, D.C., and her husband's activities, her Wedgwood china, and managing her well-to-do household.

Warder, Ann Head (c. 1754-1829)

Letters published as "Extracts from the Diary of Mrs. Ann Warder" in The Pennsylvania Magazine of...

Englishwoman Ann married John Warder, a Philadelphian who settled in London on business, in 1776. Ten years later, he returned to Philadelphia taking Ann and their oldest son Jeremiah, living for the first year with his widowed mother. Ann amused herself and her only sister, Elizabeth, at home in England, with entertaining and often opinionated accounts of the family and prosperous Quaker society.

Warren, Mercy Otis (1728-1814)

Published works include The Adulterer (1773); The Groom (1775); The Blockheads (1776); The Motley Assembly (1779); Poems, Dramatic and Miscellaneous (1790); and History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution in three volumes (1805.)

Born in Barnstable, Massachusetts, to James Otis and Mary Allyne, Mercy married James Warren at age 26 in 1754; they settled in Plymouth and raised five sons. Mercy was a longtime friend of both Abigail and John Adams, although her History nearly finished their friendship. John was so outraged at what he considered her unflattering account of his actions that they were not reconciled for nearly five years. It was "Mercy's work that led him to grumble, "History is not the Province of the Ladies."

Whitall, Ann Cooper (d. 1797)

Diary published in John M. Whitall: The Story of His Life by Hannah Whitall Smith (Philadelphia: Printed for the Family; 1879.)

Married in 1739 to James Whitall, the daughter of John and Ann Cooper settled into her home in Red Bank, New Jersey, and became a family legend. Age didn't mellow her snap: during the Revolution, Ann
reputedly scolded the Hessians as she treated their wounds and dismissed a thief by slapping his face and ordering him to leave. Her concerns with her faith dominate her diary.

**Winslow, Anna Green** (1760-c. 1779)

Diary published as *Diary of Anna Green Winslow: A Boston School Girl of 1771* edited by Alice Morse Earle (Boston/Cambridge: Houghton, Mifflin and Company/The Riverside Press; 1894.)

Anna, the daughter of Joshua Winslow and his cousin Anna Green, left her home in Nova Scotia as a girl of twelve to stay with her aunts in Boston while she attended school. According to family tradition, she died before the age of twenty. The journal she kept to send to her parents reflects her light-hearted personality and records fashions, entertainment, and her lessons.