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A Midwife's Tale

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Transcript

The American Experience: A Midwife's Tale

Written and Produced by
Laurie Kahn-Leavitt

Directed by Richard P. Rogers

Based on a book by Laurel Thatcher Ulrich

Executive Producer: Margaret Drain
Senior Producer: Mark Samels
Series Host: David McCullough

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[KEY: MO = Martha Ballard voiceover, LO= Laurel Ulrich voiceover, M = Martha Ballard dialogue, L = Laurel Ulrich on camera]

[NOTE: The transcript retains the original spelling from Martha Ballard's diary.]

David McCullough, Series Host: Good evening and welcome to The American Experience. I'm David McCullough.

You are about to see a film of rare power that captures, as few films ever have, the way people lived in the early years of the new United States of America, a time more distant and different from our own than most people have any idea.

Martha Moore Ballard was born in 1735. She died in 1812. And that's about all that would be known of her life had she not kept a diary, something few woman did then. It's not known what she looked like. Nor did she figure ever in what are commonly thought of as historic events. There is only what she herself wrote with her quill pen steadily in a steady hand, day after day for twenty-seven years, never

missing a day.

For more than a century the diary remained in the private possession of her family. For another half century it sat in a vault at the Maine State Library, less than half a mile from where Martha Ballard had lived. No one paid it much attention. The few historians who took a look as years went by concluded it was unimportant, largely trivia.

But then in the 1980's, while researching another subject, historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, whom you will meet in the film, saw the diary, began reading, and realized with growing excitement how much more there was than first met the eye.

And so began eight years of close research and the telling of A Midwife's Tale, as Professor Ulrich titled her Pulitzer Prize winning book. For producer Laurie Kahn-Leavitt, director Richard Rogers, and a cast of more than a hundred to film the story took another five years.

A Midwife's Tale, the life of Martha Ballard, based on her diary...

A Midwife's Tale

1st Birth

MO-April 24, 1785. I was called to Colo Sewall's wife in Travil. Stept out of the Canue & Sunk in the mire. Shee was not So ill as to call in other assistants this Day. I Slept with her till about 1 h morn when Shee Calld her Neighbours to her assistance. mrs Sewell was ill till 3 h pm. mrs Brooks, Belcher, Colman, Pollard and Voce assisted us. Shee was thro Divine asistance made the Living Mother of a Living Son, her 3rd child.

M-The Head is out...

(Baby crying)

MO-Colo Sewall gave me 6/8 as a reward, Conducted me over the river.

LO- I don't know what Martha Ballard looked like. Still don't know after...

Diary Shot

LO-...all the years that I spent working with the diary.

L-Mrs Vaux and daughter and Nathan Howard...

L reading in library

L-...returned from Boston...(cont under MO and LO)

MO-I went to Mr Savages...(cont under LO)

L-...I went to Mr Savages...

LO-She became for me a voice.

L-...Sally Pierce sleeps here.

MO-...Sally Pierce sleeps here.

L-...Lad of Washington ate supper here...

LO-But that took a long time.

MO-Lad of Washington ETT Supper here. Hannah Cool gone to see her Sister Peggy who is Sick.

LO-Before she was a voice, she was a mark on a page...

M writing

LO-...and I really began to learn about Martha Ballard through her marks, her scratching of a quill pen, day after day after day for twenty-seven years.

L turning pages

LO-My connection to the past, like any historian's, is through the stuff that's left behind. It's not an imaginative connection, although imagination is part of it...

M making ink

LO-...it's about documents, it's about sources, it's about clues, it's about the leavings, the shards, the remnants of people who once lived and don't live anymore.....Without documents, there's no history. And women left very few documents behind.

L looking at microfilm

LO-Reading the diary let me see a world I hadn't seen before. But it was very difficult to work with. My first task was to try to find some way to create order out of just a succession of facts.

MO-March 29, 1802...

LO- Ah, oh, so Clarissa was there....she had company....

L Using data sheets

MO-...Clear foren, Cloudy aftern. I have been mending Stockins and Legins for mr Ballard & Cyrus. mr Ballard is gone East Side of the river to Collect Taxes. I am informd that John Brown is in Jaol for Committing a Rape on his own Daught of 11 years of age.

MO-July 4. Clear. independence of America observd in this Town. we Bakt a quartr of Veal...

Shucking Stringbeans

MO-... & Began to Spin our Cotten

LO-...AT HOME...

L Working with Data Sheets

L-...DELIVERY, MEDICAL, VISIT, OVERNIGHT, CHURCH, BAKED, BREWED, CLEANED, GARDENED, MEND, SEWED, SPUN, WOVE...

LO-Some other historians who had looked at this diary said, well, there were interesting parts, but it was filled with trivia, and that's what I loved about it. The story was in the details.

M Writing at Night

MO-July 23, 1787. Clear. the Girls washt. mrs Ellis & Bolton here, gave me Some Coffee, Tea & Sugar; they Dind...

Making Prepares Syrup

MO-...I made a Syrrup for mrs Savage.

Walking in mud, getting in canoe

LO-It's the dailiness of Martha's diary that helps us to understand the really important differences between the eighteenth century world and our own world, and what it means to be a woman in that world.

MO-July 25...

M examines Hardin Boy

MO-...A Shower this morn. Isaac Hardin Came for me to go and See his oldist Son, Sick with the rash; it has Sweled on the Neck. mrs Harris, Savage & Foster there.

L Working with Diary Copies, Datasheets

L-(reading) And Polly Savage, Polly Hamlin here. Half the Savages are there. Isaac, little Isaac...rode horse to plough...(cont under LO)

LO-A diary like this is... it's just filled with names. Kind of like walking into a room and just seeing a...

Roomful of Strangers

LO-...bunch of strangers, you don't know who they are, and not sure if you care.

L Working with Diary Copies, Datasheets, Maps

L-So he's next door.

LO-I had to get to know the people whose names were in the diary. I needed to know where they lived. I also needed to think about where they were economically.

L-two oxen, one cow, three years old and two swine....

M prepares herbs

MO-Clear. I left mrs. Hodg and infant Cleaverly at 9 h morn. Calld at mr Westons, Pollards, mr Foster & mr Savages.

L- medical, medical, medical...

L working with Datasheets

L-...medical, and overnight...

LO-When I finally was able to connect Martha's work to her world, I could begin to create stories. And the first story had to do with her work as a healer.

L-...Six overnights. Obviously this is an epidemic....

Kid almost falls in fire

Mrs Hardin-It's a long journey.

Little Hardin Girl-Mother!

LO-Martha called it Canker rash, which in more modern terms is Scarlet Fever. And it was life-threatening, and people were dying.

MO- July 27. Isaac Hardin Came for me. Says his child has the soar on its throat. Gave him some root, and gargled his throat, which gave him great ease.

MO-Clear & very pleasant...

M making sausages

MO-...we killed a swine which wd 174 lb.. I Salted it yesterday Eving...

M continues while the girls spin

MO-...I was Calld to see mr Savages Dafter, find her very Low. Set up with her all night. Shee pukt up a considerable quantity of phlegm and Seems Some revivd.

LO-There were doctors in Martha's town, but she was usually the first one called. In twentieth century terms, she was a physician, pharmacist, and nurse, as well as a midwife.

M-Hannah, will you finish this?

Dolly-Yes, marm.

LO-She was also a good neighbor. You were never alone in time of illness, and that's a fundamental difference between her world and ours.

L works with map

L- OK, so we've got Martha going from the Fosters to see Lydia...(Cont under LO)

LO-As I began to map Martha's movements through the town, I found I could actually map the spread of the disease.

MO-July 28. [Calld] to Revd mr Foster to See him; find him very Sick with the rash.

Mr Foster is Sick

M-Good, the rash is moving down. Open...

Mr. Foster-Ahhhhh....

M-Your throat is red.

Mr. Foster-I must preach tomorrow.

M-Drink your tea, Mr. Foster.

Rebecca Foster-Have you seen Peg Cool today?

M-She's near expiring.

E and Dolly are Sick

MO-[Returned home to find] mr Ballard & Dolly unwell. I Batht their feet & gave them Some herb Tea. I feel much fatagud my Self.

Shot of barn with cow in foreground

Medium shot of Sawmill

M in canoe daytime

MO-July 30. mr Williams has Bled again & is very poorly.

M at Col Howards

MO-August 5. Clear morn. I was Calld at 9 o Clok to mrs Howards to See James, he being very Sick with the Canker Rash; tarried all night. Colonal Howard made me a prest of 1 Gall Rhum & 2 lb Sugar on account of my atendance of his famely in Sickness.

Night shot w/ moon

M rubbing child's feet with onion

MO-August 6. I am at mrs Howards, watching with her Son. a very Severe Shower of hail with thunder and Litning began at half after one, Continud near 1 hour.

M wakes up

Offscreen voice #1: Fire! Fire! Fire!

Voice #2: Fire! Fire across the river!

Voice #3: Go to the fort! (Voices continue under MO)

MO-went out about Day. Discoverd our saw mill in flames.

M watches sawmill burning

MO- The men at the fort went over, found it Consumd together with Some plank & Boards. I tarried till Evinng.

Burning Mill

MO-Left James Exceeding Dangerously ill.

M watching sawmill burning; Hannah enters scene

MO-my Daughter Hannah is 18 years old this Day.

LO-Martha is in the middle of an epidemic, she's exhausted, and then she sees the sawmill in flames and this is her husband's mill.

CU Pan of smoldering timbers

LO-And then she adds, "My daughter Hannah is eighteen years old this day..."

Diary CU of "Hannah 18" entry

LO-It seemed out of place to me until I began to put together the rest of her experience of that week.

William McMasters sickness

LO-She's nursing a small child, William McMaster, and he dies.

MO-August 11. Clear. Calld from mrs Hds to mr mcMasters to See thr Son William who is very low. Tarrid thr the night.

Mrs McMaster (singing)-Hey my kitten, and hey my kitten deary, Such a sweet pet as this Was neither far nor neary. Here we go up and up and here we go down and downy. Here we go backward and forward and...

MO-at mr mc Masters, their Son very sick. I Sett up all night. mrs Pattin with me. the Child very ill indeed.

William McMasters dies

MO-August 13. William mc Masters Expired at 3 O Clock ys morn. mrs Patin & I laid out the Child. poor mother, how distressing her Case. near the hour of Labour and three Children more very Sick.

Diary Page

LO-I read this entry and I was very moved by it. But I was also puzzled. It's uncharacteristically emotional.

L Talking Head

L-And then I began to do more research into Martha's life and into the incidence of epidemics in the eighteenth century and suddenly it, um, it just all fell together in one place. It really almost gave me chills when I thought about it. Because in 1769, one of the worst epidemics in New England hit Massachusetts and in Martha's home town of Oxford, Massachusetts, diphtheria ran through the community, and Martha lost three daughters within a few weeks. Three little girls...and she was pregnant that summer...and Hannah was the child that was born in the summer of the epidemic, and you know that entry, that bland entry, "Hannah is eighteen years old this day" that meant absolutely nothing to me before, suddenly told me,

M washing dead child

LO-that as Martha nursed other women's children, she was recalling her own experience.

Ballards wake up

MO- Clear & warm. I have been at home, workt in my Gardin Some. Spent Some time Seeking my Turkeys & knitt some.

LO- Martha and Ephraim Ballard moved from Massachusetts to the frontier of Maine during the American Revolution. When the diary opens, Martha is fifty years old and has five children still living at home, ranging in ages from seven to thirty-one.

MO-Cyrus Carried 1 Bushl wheat & 1 of Indien meel to mr Carr. I have been Doubleing & Twisting Thread. the Girls washt.

MO-Clear and hott. I was at home all Day Collecting herbs. Hannah ironed and Parthenia spun cotton.

LO-Parthenia is Martha's niece, Parthenia Barton, who lives with the family for a number of years and becomes almost a daughter.

MO-Jonathan out to look for Loggs.

MO-Son Ephraim Cutt his finger.

MO-planted Garlic Seed, Dolly Sowd Some Pees.

MO- mr Ballard Gone to settle with mr Gardner, Pirkins, & Moore for Building ther Mill. A Cow is loos in town.

MO-I atended worship. Dolly was fritind by a Baire between here & Neighbr Savages.

LO-We know especially the kind of work that each member of the family did. What we don't know are some of the things we'd really like to know, that is, who slept where, and was this a playful household or was it a house where father ruled? Is this a harmonious family? Martha says very little in the diary about her relationship with her husband, but I don't think we can jump to the conclusion that it was a cold and formal relationship because she addresses him as Mr Ballard. What about privacy? How did they behave with one another? These are questions that the diary can't answer.

Girls washing, Sally arrives

MO-Clear. Sally Pierce here to Spin Shoe thrd. Drank Tea. the Girls washt.

Archives

LO-I remember when I started to do women's history that the response I would get from nearly everyone when I would go into an archive or a library and tell them that I was interested in women in the eighteenth century and the answer would be, (gruff voice) "You won't find much!" And it's really true; there's almost nothing in surviving sources about Martha Ballard, except, of course, for the diary. It's easy to find evidence of her husband, Ephraim. He was a surveyor...

L looking at large map

LO-...and his maps are all over the archives. As a surveyor...

E's signature

LO-... he was caught in the middle of the conflicts over land that exploded in Maine in the years...

E surveying

LO-...after the American Revolution.

Map shot

LO-The Ballards moved to the Maine frontier as part of a larger migration. It was a time of geographic mobility and political upheaval...

E and Others Cutting Wood

LO-...a time of great uncertainty. No one knew what kind of a world would be born out of revolution. No one knew who owned the land....

MO-April 21. Clear. mr Ballard Surveying for Judg North. I've been at home. the mrs Pages and mrs Cumings Calld here.

LO-Ephraim had a rough start in Maine. Some of his neighbors called him a rank Tory. I think he had moved on to find new opportunities for his sons: more land.

LO-Trees are obstacles to farming, but they are also very rich and important resources and the idea is to cut down trees, turn them into lumber, ship them out.

E and others milling lumber

LO-For a very long period in the diary, Martha and Ephraim are renters. Ephraim's renting the mill, and they're living in a rented house. They own land, but the land isn't cleared.

Man-One hundred.

MO-June 11...

M in garden

MO-...Clear & warm. I have been at home, workt in my Gardin Some. Hannah washt. mr Ballard went to mr Craggs

Girls weaving

MO-mr Savage made the irons for our Loom. I paid him 4 Shillings in Cash. mrs Pollard here to warp a piece.

LO-In the early part of the diary, Martha and her daughters carded and spun, prepared yarn and thread, which they took to neighbors to weave. But as the girls grew into their teens, they began to weave, and that's an advantage for Martha, because if they're there, doing the milking and the washing, she can go out and deliver babies, and midwifery is the best paid of the female occupations.

M on horse

LO-In over a thousand births, she doesn't lose a single mother at delivery, and very few babies.

MO-October 10. at mr Sewalls.

Mrs Sewell's Birth Scene

(Mrs Sewell screams)

M-It's early yet. Let's get up and walk.

Mrs Sewell-No. I can't do it. I can't bear it. Go for the new doctor.

MO-they were intimidated & Calld Dr Page who gave my Patient 20 drops of Laudenum which put her into Such a Stupor her pains (which were regular & promising) in a manner stopt till near night.

LO-The new physician in town was Dr. Benjamin Page, and he seemed determined to engage in the practice of obstetrics. Not to come in in an emergency, as an older physician might have done, but really to be part of normal deliveries. From Martha's point of view, Page was not only an upstart, he was a bungler. Eventually the doctor left, the opium wore off, and Martha delivered the baby.

M- Good, good...

MO-Shee was {safe} Delivd at 7h Evn of a Son, her first Born. I left her Cleverly at 10 & walkt home. I received 12 shillings as a reward.

M walking down path

MO-April 17. mr Livermores Swine in our field a number of times. I went my Self & informd him.

M riding horse-closer

MO-September 2. {Clear and pleasant}. thee girls moovd Beds. There was a thief Whipt at the post for Stealing Cloath fm mr Ebenz Farwell.

M walking in snowshoes

MO-February 2. Snowd. I was Calld to See Black Hitty. Shee was Deld of a Son before I arivd, Sally Cocks gave me a Snuff Box.

M at Mrs. Fosters

MO-August 25, 1789. Clear. I went to See mrs Foster.

LO-I didn't pay any attention to this diary entry- it was just another one of those visits.

Rebecca Foster-That was not the worst that has come to me since Mr Foster's absence...(cont under LO)

LO-but later I discovered it was really one of the most important entries in the diary, it was connected to a very complex story. Mrs Foster was Rebecca Foster, the wife of the young minister...

Mr. Foster preaching at church

LO-...Isaac Foster, who had been settled a few years before in the town. Martha was very fond of Mr Foster, but not everyone in the town liked him.

Foster-The plain truth is an enlightened mind...(cont under LO)

LO-He was perhaps a little bit of a prickly character himself, there was lots of trouble, and eventually he stepped down, and went off to try to find another job, and when he was away, a really terrible thing happened to his wife.

At Mrs. Fosters

Rebecca-They could do nothing worse than they have unless they killed me. North has abused me worse than any other person in the world.

CU of North at church

LO-Judge North was a very powerful man in the county.

E and Col North at Tavern

LO-He also happened to be one of Ephraim Ballard's employers.

North-We need to know the names of every squatter and the date of settlement for each...(cont under LO)

LO- They were associated in business and in town government.

At Mrs. Fosters

Rebecca-I believe it is best that I...(cont under MO)

MO-but Shee believd it was best for her to keep her troubles to her Selfe as mutch as Shee Could till her Husband returnd, which Shee hopt wd be soon.

M-Never mention it to any other person. You will expose yourself and cause yourself harm.

LO-Rebecca Foster discovered she was pregnant. And that forced her to break the silence.

Weaving

MO-October 1. mr Savage here, informs that mrs Foster has Sworn a Rape on a number of men among whome is Judge North. Shocking indeed!

LO-When the story came out and Martha was called to testify...

Diary shot - CU on margin of page

LO-...she went back to her diary and wrote down everything she could remember.

MO-Today I Calld to mind mrs Foster Saying Colo North had positively had unlawfull Concourse with a woman which was not his wife.

At Mrs Fosters

Rebecca-I know it was North. He is guilty.

LO-Despite North's power, the case went to trial ...

Judges in Mist

LO-... judges came from Boston, Martha was called to testify, a verdict was rendered.

MO-At Pounalboro...

Diary Entry

MO-... mr Ballard attended Coart. North acquitted to the great Surprise of all that I heard Speak of it.

In church New preacher

Rev. Parker-But how comparatively small is the number of...(cont under MO).

MO-Cloudy & a Sprinkling of rain. mr Parker preacht in this Town. I Did not attend my Self.

M in garden

MO-I have been at home. the Seeds begin to Cum up in the gardn.

MO-Sunday, August 2, I had String Beans, the first we have had from our garden.

LO-She virtually stopped going to church for almost four years.

Mist shot

River shot

LO-...The Rebecca Foster story led me to think about the entire diary differently.

Snow shot

LO-How many other stories might there be hidden in those cryptic entries about visits?

M collecting herbs

Barn shot

JO- I'll buy those logs off of Springer for a song and a dance...

Jonathan and Sally kiss

J-...and push them on down to Papa's mill.

Sally-Oh Jonathan.

J-Oh Sally.

MO-November 21. Cloudy part of the Day, the Gentle men who were Chosen as referees in the Cause between Peter Jones & my Son Jonathan Sett this day. they gave Jones £8 damage & the Cost of Coart was 2 pound 5 shillings. I could wish my son might learn to govern his temper for the futer.

M at store

MO-Clear. I houghd my Cabbages & went to the hook. I purchast at the Stores of thread what Cost 1/6, tape & Bob 1/6...(cont under LO)

LO-For a point in her life, Martha Ballard had a, just a perfectly functioning domestic system, the girls busy at their work, she developing her own occupation. But the end of all this labor was to launch the girls in households of their own.

Quilting B

Parthenia-Look.

Hannah-Let me see it.

MO-my Girls had some neighbors to help them quilt. They began to quilt at 3 in the afternoon. Finisht and took it out at 7 (in the) evening. Mrs Rockwood & Mrs Pollard Came to help. We Bakt mins and pumpkin pies.

Daytime indoor dance scenes

MO-There were 12 gentlemen took tea. They danced a little while after supper.

LO-There seems to have been no real stigma against premarital pregnancy. The stigma is on the person who refuses to marry the woman. As long as they marry, everything's fine. And the watchful eye of the midwife and the other neighbors helps to assure that they do marry.

Evening outdoor dance scene

Jonathan Ballard and Moses Pollard (Singing)-Her pretty leg was seen, and something else and something else and what I know, but dare not tell.

MO-The young folks Behaved exceedingly cleverly...were all returned home before the 11th hour.

Indoors, another dance

LO-I don't think Jonathan wanted to marry Sally Pierce, or maybe he didn't like to be told what to do.

Sally Pierce's birth scene

MO-October 23rd. I was Calld to See Sally Pierce at 9 h morn, the rideing very bad. Sally Declard that my Son Jonathan was the father of her child.

M-Push, push, push...Sally I have to ask you now, who is the father of the child?

S-Jonathan

M-Jonathan who?

S-Your son, Jonathan Ballard.

M-Push. Push.

J and S married

MO-January the 11th, 1792. Clear & very Cold morn. Jonathan has not been at home Since yester day. I

have been at home, mended a Coverl'd & knitt Some. Jonathan was married to Sally Peirce.

Laurel Working

LO-It may seem cruel to be questioning a woman at the height of labor about the name of the father of her child, but in fact this was part of the judicial system of the 18th century. Sally Pierce had gone to the justice of the peace and sworn a child on Jonathan. And the way that she assured that she could win that case was to affirm that testimony before the midwife at the height of labor.

H's marriage

MO-October 28. thee Matrimonial writes were Cellibrated between mr Moses Pollard off this Town and my Dagt Hannah this Evng. Esq Coney performd the Ceremony.

P's Marriage

MO-November 18. rainy. mr Pollard & Pitt Dind here, thee latter was Joind in thee Bands off wedlock with Parthenia Barton. the Ceremony pirformd by Saml Dutton Esq. I have been at home. we had no Company Except our famely attend.

Weaving

LO-The wedding is almost a non-event. The girls stay at home after the wedding, they go back to work spinning and weaving and for several weeks the men come and go, sometimes they stay overnight, sometimes they don't. The real event is when all these household goods are gathered up and the girls go off to housekeeping.

H goes to housekeeping

LO- After Hannah and Parthenia married, Martha no longer used their first names in the diary. She called them "Daughter Pollard" and "Mrs Pitts."

MO-Clear but very Cold. mr Pollard Came & Conducted my Dagt & his Spouse home to Hous keeping. I have been at home, washt my kitchen.

M writing in diary at night

MO-my famely is reduced to four in Number. Cyrus has been to the fort, Ephm to work with his OXen for mr Livermore, & now this year is Come to a Close. May we begin a New one in the Servis of our Great Master, who will reward his faithfull Servants.

P sick at Pitts'

MO-May 1, 1794. {A frosty morn.} I was informd that {my niece} mrs Pitts was unwell & went to See her. I tarried all night.

P sick at Ballards'

MO-June 24. Clear. mrs Pitts Came here, had a feavour fitt.

M on horse

MO-June 30. Clear. I was Calld at 9 h morn to my Daughter Pollard who was in Labour. her women

were Calld and Shee was safe Deliverd at 1 h Pm of a Daught, her first Born...

H's baby

MO-... I tarried with her allnight. Shee is Cleverly.

P drinks from cow

MO-July 22. I was at Shubal Pittses all Day. Shee is very low, Exercisd with Severe Gripeing & loose Stools. God only knows how it may terminate. I Sent for my hors, but find her So ill I tarried thro the night.

MO-July 23. Clear. mrs Pitts rose about an hour by Sun in the morn, went out & milkt the last milk from the Cow into her mouth & Swallowd it. it is recommended as very Beneficial by mr Amos Page.

H and baby visit P

P-She's lusty.

H-I don't think she favors our side of the family.

P-Oh, she does favor her papa.

MO-her pain Still Continues & God only knows what will be the event. may Shee be prepared.

M and Shubael change P's bed

MO-September 1: Shee Desird mr Pitts & I to moov her & fix her Bed. we Did & laid her in again.

P dying, neighbor peels potato

M washes P's body

MO-I Came home from mr Pittss after we had Performd our last Office of friend Ship. it is four months this Day Since I was Calld to See my Dear Neace who was Seisd with this, her last illness, which Shee has born with Christian meekness and humility. we morn the los of her Company but have the greatest reason to hope that Shee has Changd this for a world in which Shee will be free from pain and Sorrow, jointd with Glorified Saints to Sing Redeeming lov.

M walks home

Horse grazing in pasture

Autopsy

MO-September 2. Cloudy forenoon, a very rainy afternoon. I walkt to mr Pitts this morning where I Saw the Dessection of his decesed wife. The operation was performd by Drs Colman, Cony, and Page. Her Lights were found to be very much ulcerated & Skerrous utera.

Funeral w/singing

ALL(singing)-Why do we mourn departing friends, or shake at death's alarms? Tis but the voice that Jesus sends, to call them to his arms.

Funeral procession in rain

LO-Martha's reference to lights suggests that Parthenia may have died of a lung disease. Maybe it was tuberculosis, which was a great killer of young people in this period.

M washes old clothes

MO-October 11. Clear. I have been washing Old Cloaths which ought to have been Done long ago.

M sassed

LO- In 1795, the last of Martha's daughters married.. And she could no longer write in her diary, "Girls washed." She was dependent on hired helpers.

M-This thread is too weak

Elizabeth-Mrs Dutton thought my spinning was good enough.

M-I'm your mistress now.

Elizabeth-I have no mistress.

M-Do you live here?

Elizabeth-I sleep here.

E and Little E make a map

E-North, go north to Long Pond, 2, 3, 4, 5...

M makes beer and hired girl preens

LO-For Martha and Ephraim, the axis of the world was changing. A new political order was creating a new social order - less deference to authority, more concern about rights, and they experienced that as loss rather than gain.

MO-I am determined not to pay girls anymore for ill manners.

E out surveying

LO-In 1795, Martha is 60 years old, Ephraim is 70, and that they're still hard at work. He's away fifty nine nights that year surveying, and she's away even more. Ephraim's work is risky. He's employed by wealthy Boston merchants who think they own the land. He's surveying land that the backcountry settlers believe is theirs. And they don't want him there...

MO-May 5, 1796. Clear and windy. mr Ballard and P. Bullin Sett out to Survey the Settlers Lotts at Bangor on the Penobskiot river.

M in cabin w/fleas

MO-mrs Caton has been ill and was Deld of a Son at 2h 30m pm, and of a Dagt at 3 h. I tarried all night, have had but little Sleep this three nights. mr Simeon Clearks wife watcht. I Could not Sleep for flees. I found 80 flees on my Cloaths after I came home.

Sally Fletcher packs her duds

MO-Sally {Fletcher} took her Deeds and threatend to Sue us in 1 weak from this time if we Did not pai her what was her due. Shee looks thin fased to what Shee Did when Shee left us.

E attacked

Settler dressed as Indian-Deliver up god damn you Tory!

Settler dressed as Indian #2-Deliver the canisters, deliver the papers!

MO-November 15. mr Ballard and men were assaulted when a Sleep last Thursday night in the wilderness, by men they knew not who robd him of his papers and instruments. may we Ever praise God for his Goodness in preserving him and his assistants from hurt in person.

M 600th birth

MO-This is the 600th Birth at which I have attinded Since I Came to this Eastern Clime. I receivd 9/, made a prest of 1/6 to the infant. I returnd home and find my house up in arms.

M house up in arms

LO-I don't know how much of Martha and Ephraim's troubles is just the natural evolution of the life cycle. They're getting older, they have a greater need for support. And how much of it is that the world, too, is changing.

MO-how long God will preserv my Strength to perform as I have Done of late, he only knows.

M writes in diary at night

MO-Clear and Cold. I have been Doing my house work and Nursing my Cow, her Bag is amazeingly Sweld. 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.

Parade

LO-In 1800, a few months after the death of George Washington, the town put on a parade. There was the usual assembly of public officials, and at the head of the parade, sixteen young women, daughters of the town's merchants and judges and doctors, each to represent one of the sixteen states of the union. And they were all decked out with black cloaks and white banners, symbols of liberty and the new republic. 1800 was the year Napoleon's armies marched into Italy. 1800 was the year Thomas Jefferson defeated John Adams in an election so bitter it went to the 36th ballot in the House of Representatives. In 1800, the number of lawsuits in the county court began to expand almost exponentially. In 1800, the Reverend Mr Isaac Foster died a penniless drunk in Rehobeth, Maryland. Not long afterward according to rumor, his wife Rebecca headed off to Peru with her son, hunting for gold.

Cart takes belongings to new house

MO-Cyrus went and brot the team and Carried 1 Load of our things. Carried the ash Box, a Bed and bedstead, and Beets, & F. Turnips & Gardin roots.

LO-I'm not sure how Martha felt about the transition of 1800. The family had, in one sense, achieved the

dream that had brought them to Kennebec County in the first place, that is they now had cleared enough land and were able to establish a farmstead, and as Martha put it in the diary, "Mr Ballard's house" had now been constructed. And of course it was Mr. Ballard's house. The Revolution hadn't changed the fact that married women couldn't own property.

The new house

The house was constructed on land that was in Jonathan's name, so two things were happening, the old couple were moving into the house, but at the same time there was a kind of shifting, in family authority toward the son and heir, and this set up a very interesting kind of tension.

E-To our contract and our new house.

M-I'll have to start a new garden.

MO-April 29, 1800. Clear fore part of the day...

M and E hoe in Garden

MO-...Cloudy at Even. I have been digging and moving dirt in the garden the most of the day, have made my hands very sore. I went to my Son Jonathans a little while before night.

Ballards' house in snow

LO-The family fortunes were rising, but Martha's were declining. The farm, unfortunately, was up on a ridge, high above the Kennebec River, and that seems to have made a real difference in her practice.

Ballards' house in spring

LO-It was harder for other people to come and find her, in a more out of the way place. She recorded 51 deliveries in 1799...

Geese flying overhead

LO-...which was the last year in the old house.

E and little E leave for surveying trip

LO-In 1800, that declined to 26, and by 1802, it was down to 11.

E and little E come home

M-Are you all right, Ephraim?

MO-August 29, 1802. my Lott is Singular but with Patience I wish to Conform to it. my husband returned at Evng fm Balls town much fatagued with his Jouney, had a fitt of Shakeing. I heat a Blankett and put it about him at about 3 h morn. he, being relaxed, Dirtied the Bed.

M helps him change

MO-I rose, Shirted him and removed the dirty lining, went to Bed again...

M lies awake next to E

MO-...but was so Cold that I Could not Sleep.

LO- I know from Ephraim's records, but not from Martha's diary that he had been attacked again in the woods. He gave up surveying in the back country and took on the job of town tax collector.

E goes to jail

MO-January 2, 1804. Clear. I feel very unwell. my husband Came home at 4 {this afternoon}. Took a little food. Complains of feeling the pain in his Stomach, but was Called by John Sewall to answer an Execution of 800 Dollars. was by him Conducted to the Jail in Augusta and Committed.

LO-He was in debtors' prison.

E in jail

LO-But the nature of his debt was a little bit unusual. This wasn't a personal debt. He had failed to collect the town taxes. Instead of going after individual taxpayers, they just jailed the tax collector. It was really a kind of house arrest, or maybe even a bit less than that. He could go out and do some kind of work during the day. He could not go home, because the Ballard farm lay outside the bounds.

Chickens in snow

Sheep in snow

M soap barrel breaks

MO-March 12. Cloudy part of the day. I have been helping do house work. brewed and have Soap in hand as the hoops of the Barrel Sprung. it was not so when I had a husband with me.

House in snow

M gets wood in snow

MO-Clear part of the Day. Son Jonathan Came here this morn and treated me very unbecomingly indeed. O that God would Change his Stubborn heart and Cause him to behave in a Christian like manner to Parents and all others.

J attacks Lemuel

MO-March 17. {Jonathan} Came up on foot with out his hat. took Lemuel from his Supper, and Struck him.

Lemuel-But I waited!

J- Damn you you lazy... I'll show you waited!

Lemuel-No Please!

Lemuel runs out of house, followed by J

M- Jonathan!

J-God damn you! Where the hell do you think you're going?

M runs after J and falls

M-Jonathan! Stop it Jonathan!

MO-Shaw and Burr went on after to prevent his being deprived of life. I followed on falling as I went.

Dolly and Hannah comfort M

D-Mother, he was in drink.

H-You cannot stop him, you'll hurt yourself chasing after him

MO-March 18. Daught Lambd and Pollard here. my comfortors are much as Jobs were. [O] that my Patience may hold out. it is very Strange that men Cannot behave like rational beings.

M wanders aimlessly around empty house

MO-December 17. Clear. went to son Ephraims. then met my husband in jail. he Express a wish for me to keep possision of this hous at present. Somewhat Discomposed in my mind. I wish to retain my reason if it be the wil of the great Parent of the univvers.

M writes

LO-Martha's despair is reflected even in her handwriting.

E and jailmates toast and sing in jail

Daniel Cony -To the president!

ALL-To the president...

Ephraim-To the honorable Daniel Coney!

ALL- Daniel Coney...

Man- To the candor and impartiality of the judiciary!

Daniel Cony-To the fair sex!

Eprhaim-Welcome Brother Debtor...

ALL sing Welcome Brother Debtors (cont over cut)

M hacks up fence for fire wood

LO-We get the story from Martha's point of view, and it would be interesting if we had a diary from Jonathan or Sally. Here we have this old mother, she needs wood, she needs water, she needs help, our well isn't any good, we've got all these kids in this old house. Why don't we just move in? She could be fine in one room. She doesn't need this whole house. There are glimmerings of this in the diary.

MO-I've been geting wood, broke the old logg fence to pieces, and fatigued much to do it. Heard at Evng that my Son was Determennd to Come in to this hous within a fortnit. and that I might tarrie here [or] go and liv in their hous and See how good it was to bring water from his wel. O, thou Parent of the universe, Cutt Short thine afflictions and Sufer me thine unworthy hand maid to See Some Comfort before I go

hence.

M stuffs rags in window

MO-December 19. Clear and Cold. this is 50 years Since I became a hous keeper.

Ducks in river

M Leaves Pollards'

MO-December 23. Son Cyrus Came to Son Pollards...

C brings M home

MO-....we Dind on a fine Turkey and he then Conducted me home. I find son Jonathans family had taken possesion of my house.

J's family in M's house

Sally-Billy, I mean Ephraim, Jack!

J-Be still, you lazy drabs!

Iced-over mill shot

M pouring hot water, sleeps in clothes

MO-I have felt unwel, but have had the nois of Childn to Bear, some fighting, Some playing, and not a little Profannity has been performd.

MO-Clear and Cold. this is one year Since my husband was taken from me and Carried to Jail. A Gloomy year it has been to me. I have Sufered for fire but must bear it.

MO-January 6, 1805. Clear and cold. I was oblided to Sleep in my Cloaths or freas, unhappy Mother I am.

Gingerbread exchange M & Sally

Sally-I brought you some gingerbread.....(she waits).....Thank you.

M-You are rude.

Sally-I'm tired of your complaints.

MO-Shee is an inconsiderate or a very impudent woman. I wish her to Show more maners and discretion or hold her peace for the future.

M sewing

MO-May 9. a rainy day. Cleard Some of the manure from under the out hous. I have been So much better this afternoon that I took some Tea.

Iced-over barrel

MO-{Son Jonathans' Dear little} Saml Expired at 5 h ys morn. Saml was 19 months, 8 days & 3 hours

old when he Expired. may the God of mercy...

M still sewing, J's son has died

MO-...Sanctify his Chastisements for our Ever lasting good.

J's kids writing on slates

M-Let me see your letters. Oh, they're good.

M looks out window at trees

MO-my Husband has this day seen 80 revolutions of the Sun, he has ended this and began the 81th year of his age in Augusta jail.

M and E in jail

MO-May 25. Clear. I have been at {son} Ephms, went to Jail and Slept with my Husband.

LO-In 17 months, Ephraim is finally released from jail.

M and E in garden

LO-Jonathan and Sally immediately began to build a new house.

M with grandchild reading

LO-It looks as though Martha's going to have some peace and security in her old age.

(Child reads from emblem book)

Ballard house at night

MO-December 19, 1807...

M and E in bed

MO-...this is the annaversary of my Mariage, 53 years Since. O the Sceins which have past Sinc that time. I lay musing thereon, and slept but little.

James Purrington running in woods

M and E in bed

MO-July 9, 1806. my Husband & I were awake at 3 h yesterday morn by mrs Heartwel and Gillbard, who brot us the horrible tydings that Capt Purington had murdered all his famely...

James Purrington running in woods

MO-...Except his Son James, who must have Shared the Same fate had he not fled in his Shirt only and ran to Son Jonathans.

MO-they two went to the hous where the horrid Scein was perpetrated.

J finds murdered family

MO-my Son went in and found a Candle which he lit and to his great Surprise Said Purington, his wife & Six Childn Corps! may an infinitely good God grant that we may all take a suitable notis of this horrid deed, learn wisdom there from.

M and E still in bed

MO-what are we Cuming to in this Eastern world?

Nature shots

M writing

MO-April 2, 1808. I have been to Son Jonathans to help her quilt her Bed quilt. what [elce] I have endured I wish not to write.

LO-"What else I have endured I wish not to write." Well that could almost be the theme of the last few years of the diary. But it doesn't become a kind of sacharine document. It becomes again very much what it was at the beginning of the diary: a record of work, a record of activity, rather than a record of feelings.

M buys basket from Indian girl

MO-March 17, 1809. Clear day, Cloudy at Evng. Elisabth, the indn, here, let her have potatoes. A Son of John Babcocks here for a record of his Birth which was September 11, 1791.

M in garden

MO-Cloudy. I workt in my gardin, Sett Parsley & 3 quins trees by the Pigg pen, knit some. mr Ballard diging gardin & Setting hop poles. hear mrs Mosier is no Better

M in front of fire

MO-June 29, 1811. Clear. I have done my hous work, killd Buggs on my vines. Son Jonathan was put in jaill for debt, an unfortunate thing for him at this time as the freshet is risin and his Lumber up river in A precarious Situation. may all things work together for his good here, and here after, is the wish of me, his affectionate mother.

Final Birth

Mrs Saunders-It hurts here, harder. Yes, that's better, it's coming...

M-Mrs. Savage

MO-Clear and warm. I was Calld at 1 h ys morn to See the wife of Wilm Saunders who was in Labour. her illness Came on at 3h pm and I took her into my Care. Shee was Safe Delivd about 5 of her first Son & 3d Child.

M - Push, push. Head's out. Easy....easy....It's a boy, Mrs. Saunders. This one's a boy.

MO-I left her & inft Comfortable and reacht home at dusk in the Evng.

"Roomful of strangers" -- now no longer strangers but Martha's family at her bedside

LO-Suddenly, her midwifery practice picks up again. She's back on her horse, out in the middle of the

night. In fact, in the last four months of the diary she delivers almost as many babies as she did at the beginning. And then, at the end of April, 1812, she came home from a delivery exhausted and ill. She didn't want to get out of bed for several days. She just seemd to sink down.

MO-May 7, 1812. Clear the most of the day & very Cold & windy. Dagt Ballard and a Number of her Children here, mrs Partridg & Smith allso. Revd Tappin Came and Converst Swetly...

Diary Shot -- the last page of the diary

MO-...made A Prayer adapted to my Case.

LO-And then the diary just stops.

M Gardening

LO-If I could confront Martha in some way and speak with her, I think maybe the question I would ask her is: did you expect the diary to survive? Did you want it to survive? Did you expect your family to read it? I'm quite sure she never expected a world of two hundred years later to read it and be interested in her life.

Black

MO-May 7, 1812. Clear the most of the day & very Cold & windy.

END

CREDITS

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On-Air Promotion Producer
VINCENT J. STRAGGAS

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Field Production
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CHRIS PULLMAN

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Series Theme
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Series Theme Adaptation
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Senior Producer
MARK SAMELS

Executive Consultant
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Executive Producer
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Michael Azevedo
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Anita Harris
Gary Miller
Writers

Danielle Dell'Olio
Research & Technology

For WGBH Interactive

Kate Pullano
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Molly Frey
Technologist

Ted Sicker
Project Management

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Martha Ballard's Words

In 1785 Martha Ballard began the diary that she would keep for the next 27 years, until her death. At a time when fewer than half the women in America were literate, Ballard faithfully recorded the weather, her daily household tasks, her midwifery duties (she delivered close to a thousand babies), her medical practice and countless incidents that reveal the turmoil of a new nation--dizzying social change, intense religious conflict, economic boom and bust--as well as the grim realities of disease, domestic violence, and debtor's prison.

The following links will take you to stills taken from the diary of Martha Ballard. Please note that the files containing the images are quite large.



[A severe storm](#)
(157k)

[What Mrs. Foster told Martha](#) (139k)

[A birth recorded sideways](#) (109k)

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After the Revolution

When Martha Ballard began her diary in 1785, the Revolutionary War had been over for just a year. The states, still a confederation and almost entirely agrarian, had a total population of under 4 million. The former colonies were struggling through a major economic depression and just beginning to understand how to operate outside the confines of British rule.

By the time of Ballard's last entry, in 1812, the United States, now organized under a central, constitutional government, had a population of 10 million people.

The nation had changed dramatically in just under thirty years. The transition, however, was not an easy one, for either the military, political, and business leaders who had led the colonies to independence or for ordinary citizens like Martha and Ephraim Ballard.



From the Film, *A Midwife's Tale*

The period following the Revolutionary War was one of instability and change. The end of monarchical rule, evolving governmental structures, religious fragmentation, challenges to the family system, economic flux, and massive population shifts all led to heightened uncertainty and insecurity. Although the states had united politically under the Articles of Confederation in 1777, they did not yet exist as a united nation. Each state retained individual

sovereignty and operated under its own constitution. Congress struggled to hold the states together, and interests often clashed.

The weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation quickly became apparent. Congress could ask the states to provide revenue, but each state paid only what it could afford. Because of the inefficiency of state tax-collecting systems, Congress often lacked the money it needed to service its sizable war debts, to maintain the military, and to pay other costs of government. The weakness of the central government created a power vacuum, and towns, states, and federal jurisdictions vied for power and authority.

Money proved problematic in more ways than one. Before the Revolution, most business had been conducted on a personal level, but by the early nineteenth century, the states had chartered hundreds of banks and corporations. The new ability to readily borrow money—often printed by the new banks—unleashed tremendous entrepreneurial spirit, and great fortunes were made. Unfortunately, many currency issues lost their value, and the numerous currencies complicated interstate trade. Just as they rose, business empires collapsed, and the economy remained unstable.

In 1787, a group of delegates from the states wrote a new Constitution to replace the Articles of Confederation. The Constitution united the states as a single nation, strengthening the federal government and giving it the right to raise revenue, to coin money, and to maintain the military. The states surrendered their sovereignty, and could no longer coin money or raise armies of their own. The Constitution helped to stabilize the economy and fostered a bond of common interest among the states, but some feared the central concentration of power. To ease fears that the federal government might become oppressive, a Bill of Rights that guaranteed individual liberties was added to the document.

Socially, the new emphasis on egalitarianism and individual rights changed relationships and roles. Many British traditions were abandoned. The distinction of "gentleman" was disappearing. Most men

were now called "citizen," or simply, "Mr." And where once "gentlemen" did not work for pay, having an occupation now became a mark of respect.

Not all citizens, however, benefited equally from this republican fervor. The Constitution provided for the direct election of the House of Representatives, but the state governments specified who could vote. Most states restricted suffrage to free male property owners. The Constitution counted each enslaved African American as 3/5 of a person for purposes of representation and taxation, and slavery remained legal.

Women, too, experienced fewer benefits of freedom. Except in New Jersey, where they enjoyed suffrage from 1776-1807, women could not vote. They usually received less schooling than did men. In 1780, only half of New England's women could sign their names, and although literacy was virtually universal in New England by 1840, women's education was often limited to basic skills.

Nonetheless, women had been critical to the success of the revolution, running farms and family businesses in the absence of male family members who were away at war. Some women had worked outside the home even before the war as midwives, schoolteachers, or shop clerks; many returned to their former occupation as housewives at war's end. Others advocated eloquently for their fair share of republican freedom.

In a letter to her husband John, Abigail Adams wrote "Deprived of a voice in Legislation, obliged to submit to those Laws which are imposed upon us, is it not sufficient to make us indifferent to the publick Welfare? Yet all History and every age exhibits Instances of patriotic virtue in the female Sex, which considering our situation equals the most Heroick." But not until the Twentieth century would the female citizens who worked to build the nation be able to vote in its elections.

Not only republican ideals, but the huge expanse of wilderness territory at the fringes of the nation, contributed to Americans' sense of freedom. Following

the Revolution, many people left cities in the East and set out for the frontier. Tennessee's population increased tenfold; Ohio grew from a handful of settlers into the fifth most populous state, with half a million people. Although these settlers often headed west, some, like Martha Ballard, [moved northward](#). Between 1783 and 1820, the population of Maine grew 450 percent, from 56,000 to 300,000 inhabitants. As settlers spilled into the open territories, competing land claims created turmoil.

Wealthy absentee speculators who owned large tracts of land stood at odds with the settlers who felt they had a right to claim territory as they saw fit. The settlers, many of whom fought against the British, viewed their [struggle for land](#) as a logical extension of the war for independence. That Ephraim Ballard, Martha's husband, was set upon while surveying territory for an absentee landowner is not surprising. The "White Indians" who attacked him were not Indians after all, but settlers seeking to intimidate Ballard and his employer. Similar clashes over land took place across the country.



From the Film, *A Midwife's Tale*

[Religious conflicts](#) also occurred with increasing frequency, as new sects vied with established, community-oriented churches. Some states placed religious requirements upon officeholders, and certain sects endured persecution. While the Constitution's First Amendment ensured that "Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof," local disagreements about religion continued.

Americans worked to establish an orderly society, but their efforts sometimes fell short. According to historian Gordon Wood, American cities experienced increased rowdiness, labor strikes, and racial and ethnic conflicts after 1800. On the frontier, life was also harsh. One traveler observed that rather than becoming more civilized as their society progressed,

Americans were becoming less so. In the early 1800s, the consumption of alcohol reached an all-time high. By 1830, there were 20,000 distilleries nationwide and at a yearly rate of 5 gallons per capita, Americans drank more liquor than did any citizens of any European nation at the time—three times as much as Americans today.

Not surprisingly, Wood relates, the Founding Fathers expressed disappointment and despair in the Revolution's aftermath. John Adams feared that greed, disobedient children and apprentices, and turbulent schools and colleges would weaken the Republic. In 1813, he asked when, where and how "the present chaos" would be "arranged into Order." Thomas Jefferson believed that the nation was moving



Discussing the Declaration of Independence

backward rather than forward; Alexander Hamilton concluded that "this American world was not made for me," and by the time George Washington died, his hopes for democracy had waned. Benjamin Rush, a physician and signer of the

Declaration of Independence, eventually threw his notes and documents for a planned memoir of the Revolution into the fire. "America's revolutionary experiment on behalf of liberty," he wrote in 1812, "will certainly fail."

But despite the difficulties, the new nation survived. The conflicts witnessed by Martha Ballard and other Americans subsided. By the 1830s, writes historian Steven Watts, "a coherent cluster of values and attitudes appeared out of the wreckage of colonial tradition. It connected Protestant moralism, capitalist acquisitiveness and possessive individualism to establish a domestic ideal of middle-class life and the cult of the self-made man."

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A Midwife's Tale

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Writing it Down

Diaries and journals of early Americans are considered an honest, unembellished form--a key to our understanding of the past. The words, often written by ordinary men and women, provide valuable clues as to how people lived. Although the style and the form of diary writing has changed, the content continues to reflect the forces--economic, political, social and technological--that have affected the lives of Americans throughout our history.

In early America, most diaries were kept by men. In 1635, during his Atlantic crossing from England to the new land, Richard Mather wrote about his faith during a deadly storm. In the 1700s, minister Jonathan Edwards kept detailed records of his duties and castigated himself for his spiritual failures. And, for 55 years, the pious Samuel Sewall chronicled Colonial life from his vantage point as husband, father, businessman, and judge. Many Colonial diaries took the form of almanacs and logs covering men's experience in public life. In many cases, historians say, they were written to be read.

Although far more men than women knew how to write in Colonial America, some female diarists made their mark. Their words, like Martha Ballard's, provide a rare and different view of American society. In the 1700s, Abigail Bailey of New Hampshire wrote of her "wicked" husband's "vile intentions" toward their daughter; Mary Holyoke of Massachusetts recorded giving birth to twelve children, and burying nine of them; Elizabeth Fuller wrote of household work. "I spun three skeins," was all she wrote one day. At first glance some of the entries may seem trivial, but studied together they are brimming with important information and provide a

view missing from the accounts penned by men of the era.

In the early nineteenth century, with the publication of various European diaries, journal writing gained popularity in America. Among male diarists, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark chronicled their adventures in mapping the Northwest Passage; Henry David Thoreau wrote some two million words of meditation on his life in the woods; and New Yorker George Templeton Strong kept a diary that wended its way from the author's student days at Columbia University through his marriage, career on Wall Street, and the Civil War.

In the 1830s, as the centers of production moved from farm to factory, the spheres of men and women became even more divided. Males were deemed responsible for the public realm outside the home, and females, for the intimate, private, family domain, within it. Now, according to modern historian Margo Culley, the diaries of women became more introspective, a record of an inner life. As more women were educated, they increasingly chronicled their thoughts.

Rebecca Cox Jackson, a free African American woman who would become known as a religious visionary, described her spiritual transformation, in the 1830s. At mid-century, more than 800 women kept diaries of their wagon train journeys West and countless other immigrants and pioneers kept notes on their travels in the new land. In 1865, Eliza Andrews of Georgia wrote about recovering from the measles and of the devastation left by the Civil War. Also surviving from this time are diaries of early women doctors, nurses, and lawyers, as well as numerous journals in which schoolgirls confided their intimate thoughts.

In the twentieth century, diaries have remained a popular form. In *A Book of His Own : People and Their Diaries*, author Thomas Mallon divides chroniclers into travelers, pilgrims, creators, apologists, confessors and prisoners. Some write to keep track of their memories, Mallon suggests; others write for spiritual development; or to spark or explore their art. There are those diarists who wish to confess or celebrate

sins committed in life or of the flesh; still others, trapped in jails imposed by others or by their own limitations, use diaries to create imaginary lives. Well-known American diarists this century have included the aviator Charles Lindbergh; convicted assassins Arthur Bremer and Lee Harvey Oswald; politician Richard Nixon; actress Shirley Temple; dancer Martha Graham; and writers Joan Didion, F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald, Allen Ginsburg, Katherine Mansfield, Truman Capote, and the prolific European expatriot, Anais Nin.

Today, as in the past, most diarists are not well-known. They may be students of history, literature, languages and the like; scientists and naturalists who note their discoveries and ideas; and a multitude of others who write for their own spiritual or intellectual growth. Psychologist Ira Progoff offers journal writing workshops as a tool for changing lives. Writer Julia Cameron's three daily "morning pages" free the spirit, she says, for creative life. Others keep journals to discover what they think and feel, or to maintain some sense of order in a rapidly changing world.

Americans have been chronicling their lives since before the time of Martha Ballard.

Even though technology has expanded our ability to record information-- diaries can be found on paper, computer, video, film, or audio tape--the intrinsic value of diary writing remains the same. The records we leave behind will serve future historians as they attempt to understand the time we live in. What they will deduce about our lives and our society remains to be seen.



From the Film, *A Midwife's Tale*

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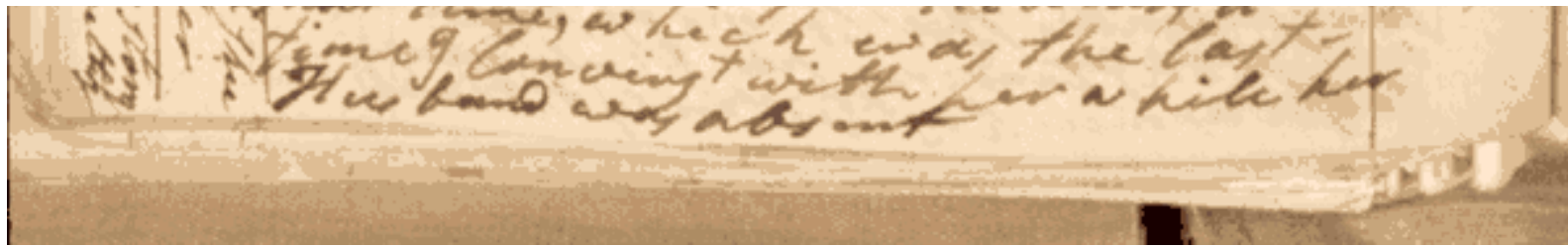
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Decemr 1789

would ~~admit~~ admit of -
 My testimony was that my Foster
 on the 17 of August Complain'd to
 me that shee had shee had receiv'd
 great abuses from people unknown
 to her such as throwing stones at
 her house striking to get in
 of lodg with her after relating
 those abuses said that way not
 the worst shee had met with since
 my Fosters absence but shee hoped
 they would not quite kill her
 that they could do nothing worse
 than they had unless they kill'd her
 shee also said that said North
 had abused her worse than any
 other person in the world had
 but shee believ'd it was to
 keep her trouble to her selfe
 as much as shee could till
 her Husband returned which
 shee hop'd w'd be soon shee also
 Complain'd on the 25th (the 9th of
 the day a right) of said North
 treating her worse than any
 other person had if said he did
 go after ^{any} other woman besides his
 own wife ^{or} her ^{ship} ^{wife} I found Exceedingly
 troubled when shee related her
 Treasels but not being any
 question for information did
 not descend to particulars -

with a ~~number~~ ^{number} of women ^{living} in the house ^{at} the time ^{of} the ^{complaint} ^{made} by ^{her} ^{husband} ^{North} ^{to} ^{me} ^{on} ^{the} ¹⁷ ^{of} ^{August} ¹⁷⁸⁹ ^{that} ^{shee} ^{had} ^{receiv'd} ^{great} ^{abuses} ^{from} ^{people} ^{unknown} ^{to} ^{her} ^{such} ^{as} ^{throwing} ^{stones} ^{at} ^{her} ^{house} ^{striking} ^{to} ^{get} ⁱⁿ ^{of} ^{lodg} ^{with} ^{her} ^{after} ^{relating} ^{those} ^{abuses} ^{said} ^{that} ^{way} ^{not} ^{the} ^{worst} ^{shee} ^{had} ^{met} ^{with} ^{since} ^{my} ^{Fosters} ^{absence} ^{but} ^{shee} ^{hoped} ^{they} ^{would} ^{not} ^{quite} ^{kill} ^{her} ^{that} ^{they} ^{could} ^{do} ^{nothing} ^{worse} ^{than} ^{they} ^{had} ^{unless} ^{they} ^{kill'd} ^{her} ^{shee} ^{also} ^{said} ^{that} ^{said} ^{North} ^{had} ^{abused} ^{her} ^{worse} ^{than} ^{any} ^{other} ^{person} ⁱⁿ ^{the} ^{world} ^{had} ^{but} ^{shee} ^{believ'd} ^{it} ^{was} ^{to} ^{keep} ^{her} ^{trouble} ^{to} ^{her} ^{selfe} ^{as} ^{much} ^{as} ^{shee} ^{could} ^{till} ^{her} ^{Husband} ^{returned} ^{which} ^{shee} ^{hop'd} ^{w'd} ^{be} ^{soon} ^{shee} ^{also} ^{Complain'd} ^{on} ^{the} ^{25th} ^{(the} ^{9th} ^{of} ^{the} ^{day} ^a ^{right)} ^{of} ^{said} ^{North} ^{treating} ^{her} ^{worse} ^{than} ^{any} ^{other} ^{person} ^{had} ^{if} ^{said} ^{he} ^{did} ^{go} ^{after} ^{any} ^{other} ^{woman} ^{besides} ^{his} ^{own} ^{wife} ^{or} ^{her} ^{ship} ^{wife} ^I ^{found} ^{Exceedingly} ^{troubled} ^{when} ^{shee} ^{related} ^{her} ^{Treasels} ^{but} ^{not} ^{being} ^{any} ^{question} ^{for} ^{information} ^{did} ^{not} ^{descend} ^{to} ^{particulars} -

III 23 in former of the three subjects no use in any father's name
 III 23 in former of the three subjects no use in any father's name
 III 23 in former of the three subjects no use in any father's name



December 23, 1789

My testimony was that Mrs Foster on the 19 of August Complained to me that Shee had Shee had [sic] receivd great abuses from people unknown to her, Such as throwing Stones at her house, Striveing to get in & lodg with her. after relating those abuses 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 that they had unless they killed her. Shee also Said that Said North had abused her wors than any other person in the world had, but Shee believd it was best for her to keep her troubles to her Selfe as mutch as Shee Could till her Husband returnd which Shee hop wd be soon Shee also Complained on the 25 (if I remember the day aright) of said Norths treating her wors than any other person had & Said he did go after an other woman besids his own wife & that his wife was jellous of him relating to the Chargs She now Lais. Shee Seemd Exceedingly troubled when Shee related her tryals, but not being aus any question for information did not descend to particulars at that time, which was the last ime I Converst with her while her husband was absent.

July 19

Clear our family all went to meeting but my self & Eph he is broke out with the rash sister Barton's son is much better she went from here with Mr Faught she went I was call to Mr Savages at 1 o'clock morn his wife in travail & was safe at 11 pm - of a After the dangerous for some time & born till day light a thunder shower

2
16
17
18
19
20
21

Clear Mr Faught here say, Gideon Barton is very well & Jester went from here this morn Mr Porter & Pamela left here for her father's on a visit & came home about day light & went to bed Eph is better will to school I went to Mr Savages after "she is very comfortable & will breath & lay here Mr Savages here an business with Mr Ballard

Cloudy & very cold for 4 days on Mr Ballard haughing potatoes & Caprid my Ballard sleigh home & was at Mr Westons & call Mrthys find my family all in bed on return

Clear I went to Leason Cony & of Factory Mr Church, & Capt B. C. King Mr Ballard went to a visit at a back & got some Corn & come home with him Pamela returned she was found in bed with Mr Porter yesterday

my family
very sick
at a young
last day
morn
1 o'clock
at 2 o'clock
at 3 o'clock
at 4 o'clock
at 5 o'clock
at 6 o'clock
at 7 o'clock
at 8 o'clock
at 9 o'clock
at 10 o'clock
at 11 o'clock
at 12 o'clock

22

Clear Mr William & wife of Sally's morn Barton of Betty's son from pity & own light to my Wolch here fore I went to Mr Savages & rest her infant find them cleverly Mr Jester more here for advice for his son who is bound by a fall which brought his knee Sally's sister has here & after we have part some rice pudding & I finish Mr Ballard's morn Hal's at 9 o'clock

23

Clear morn to David's morn



July 15-21, 1787

Clear. our famely all went to meeting but my self & Eph, he is Broak out with rash. Sister Bartons Son is much better. Shee went from here iwth mr Faught Bound for home.

X Birth. Isaac Savages Dafter. X I was Calld to mr Savages at 1 O Clok morn, his wife in Travil & was Safe Dld at 11PM of a Dafter, tho Dangerous for Some Time. I tarried till Day light. a thunder Shower.

Clear. mr Faught here, Says Gidion Barton is very well & Sister went from there this morn. mr Porter & Pamela Left here for her her [sic] fathers on a visit. I came home about Day light & went to bed. Eph is Better, went to School. I went to mr Savages after, Shee is very Comfortable. Gillbreath Sleeps here. mr [G Cowen] here on business with mr Ballard.

Cloudy & very Cold for y season. mr Ballard houghing potatoes. I carrid mrs Pollards Sleigh home & was at mr westons & Col Norths. find my famely all in Bed on return.

Clear. I went to Deacon Coneys & y Doctors, mr Churches, & Cap Belchers. mr Ballard went to a vessel at y hook & got some Corn. I Come home with him. Pamela returnd. Shee was joind in Wedlok with mr Porter yesterday. mrs. Church was Dilivd of a son last Tusday morn at 1O Clok & 20 m. Doct Coney operator. Jerymy Baddoks wife y Same Night of a Dafter. old mrs Fletcher performed the ofice of a midwife for her.

Clear. mr Williams & wife & Sally h. mr [] Barton & Betsy Town from Pitts Town[]. mrs Welch here for. I went to mr Savages, Drest her infant, form them Cleverly. mr Densmoore here for advice for his Son who is lambd by a fall which brousd his knee. Sally Peirce been here y after. we have Bakt Some rice pudings y Evinng. I finisht mr Ballard Linn Hoes at 9 & 3/4 O Clok.



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5. [Martha Ballard's midwifery skills.](#)
6. [The relationship between the midwife and the doctor.](#)
7. [Why Martha Ballard's family relocated to Maine.](#)
8. [The relationship between the scholar and the filmmaker.](#)
9. [The reaction of colleagues to the film.](#)

Laurie Kahn-Leavitt on:

1. [Raising money for A Midwife's Tale.](#)
2. [Actress, Kaiulani Sewall Lee.](#)
3. [The relationship between filmmaker and scholar.](#)
4. [Historical accuracy in the film.](#)
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