

# A MIDWIFE'S TALE

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*The Life of  
Martha Ballard,  
Based on  
Her Diary,  
1785—1812*

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Laurel Thatcher Ulrich

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1650-1750*

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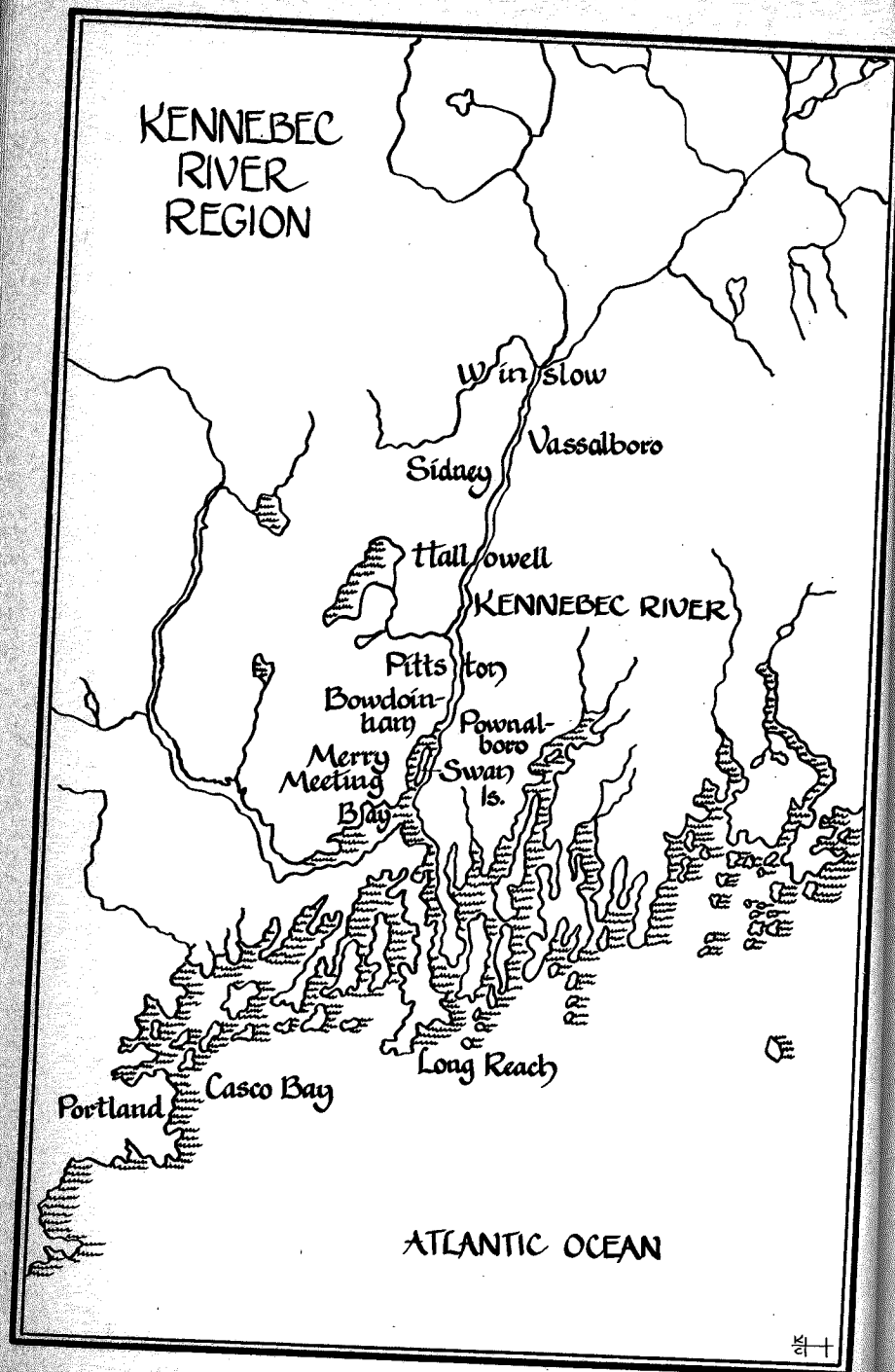
*The Life of Martha Ballard,  
Based on Her Diary,  
1785-1812*



*Laurel Thatcher Ulrich*



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## INTRODUCTION

*"a great sea A going"*

Eight months of the year Hallowell, Maine, was a seaport. From early April to late November, ocean-going vessels sailed up the Kennebec, forty-six miles from the open Atlantic, bringing Pennsylvania flour, West Indian sugar, and English cloth and hardware, returning with shingles, clapboards, hogshead and barrel staves, white ash capstan bars, and pine boards destined for Boston or Bristol or Jamaica.<sup>1</sup> In late autumn, ice blockaded the river, sometimes so suddenly that though a man had been expecting it for weeks, he was caught unprepared. One year, on November 25, after the last ships had sailed from the town, Jonathan Ballard pushed off from his father's sawmill with a raft of boards destined for Long Reach on the coast. He got no farther than Bumberhook Point, three miles below, before the Kennebec closed around him. It didn't open again until April 1.<sup>2</sup>

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



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

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

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

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

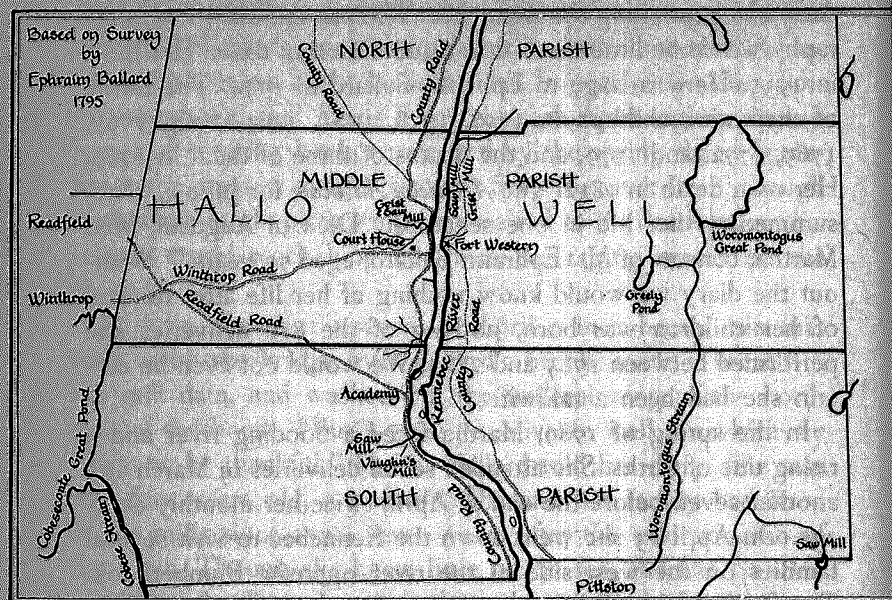
diary she kept along the Kennebec. Without the diary her biography would be little more than a succession of dates. Her birth in 1735. Her marriage to Ephraim Ballard in 1754. The births of their nine children in 1756, 1758, 1761, 1763, 1765, 1767, 1769, 1772, and 1779, and the deaths of three of them in 1769. Her own death in 1812. The *American Advocate* for June 9, 1812, summed up her life in one sentence: "Died in Augusta, Mrs. Martha, consort of Mr. Ephraim Ballard, aged 77 years."<sup>6</sup> Without the diary we would know nothing of her life after the last of her children was born, nothing of the 816 deliveries she performed between 1785 and 1812. We would not even be certain she had been a midwife.

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

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

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





took the rains waded thro & led the horse. Asisted by the same allmighty power I got safe thro & arivd unhurt. Mrs Hewins safe delivd at 10 h Evn of a Daughter.

After great deliverances came small annoyances. In the margin of that day's narrative, she wrote, "My Cloak was burnt while there so that it is not wareable." In all the excitement, someone had apparently allowed the midwife's sodden wrap to hang too near the fire. The story continued:

[April 25] Rainy. I came from Mr Hewins to Mr Pollards. My hors mired & I fell off in the mud but blessed be God I receivd no hurt. Mr Hewins attended me to Mrs Husseys. We arivd at 11 hour morning. Mrs Norcross was in Travill. Her women were immediately Calld & Shee was Safe Delivrd at 5 hour 30 minutes Evening of a fine son. Her Husband & Mrs Delino & her Childn went on board bound for Nantucket Early this morn.

[April 26] A very Cold morn. Snowd. I took my leav of Mrs Hussey & family. Came to Mr Herseys. He & William Howard brot me from fort Western by water. I left my patients Cleverly & found my famely well. It is the greatest freshet in this river that has been this many years.

Reading such a story, we can easily imagine Martha as an archetypal pioneer. Indeed, the rhythms of her story echo the seventeenth-century captivity narratives that gave New England its first frontier heroines. One thinks of Mary Rowlandson crossing the Ware River in Vermont on a makeshift raft in the early spring of 1676 or of Hannah Swarton traveling into Maine "over Steep and hideous Mountains one while, and another while over Swamps and Thickets of Fallen Trees." The religious language in Martha Ballard's diary strengthens the affinity with her Puritan progenitors. Dramatizing the dangers of her journey, she both glorified God and gave meaning and dimension to her own life. Mr. Hewins led her horse and Mr. Hains walked beside her, but Providence rescued her from the violence of the spring freshet.

"A great sea A going"—Martha knew how to suggest an entire landscape, or in this case a riverscape, in a phrase. Her description of the river crossing is part psalm, part tale.<sup>8</sup> She understood instinctively, if not self-consciously, the importance of repetition and the uses of convention. Notice how in the April 24 passage she alternated spare, but vivid, action sentences with formulaic religious phrases:

I Crost the stream on the way on fleeting Loggs & got safe over. *Wonder full is the Goodness of providence.* I then proseeded on my journey. Went beyond Mr Hainses & a Larg tree blew up by the roots before me which Caused my hors to spring back & my life was spared. *Great & marvillous are thy sparing mercies O God.* I was assisted over the fallen tree by Mr Hains. Went on. Soon Came to a stream. The Bridg was gone. Mr Hewin took the rains waded thro & led the horse. *Asisted by the same allmighty power* I got safe thro & arivd unhurt.



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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ated as a midwife for the first time in 1778, but she had probably assisted in dozens of births in Oxford. This was the era of "social childbirth," when female relatives and neighbors, as well as midwives, attended births. Most midwives began as observers, gradually assuming a more active role, until one day, when the old midwife was delayed or willing, they "performed." For Martha, moving to Maine probably accelerated this process. In Oxford, even if she had the ability to practice she may have had little opportunity, since there were many older women in the town. Her own Grandmother Learned was alive until 1777.<sup>18</sup> In Hallowell, by contrast, she was one of the older women in a young and rapidly growing town.

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

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

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

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

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

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

On August 6, 1769, amidst death, she gave birth. The baby was named Hannah, for Mother Ballard. Two years later another baby girl was born. She became Dorothy, or "Dolly," for Grandmother Moore, for her Aunt Dorothy Barton, and for the sister who had died of diphtheria. Perhaps there would have been another Triphene or Martha in 1773, but in that year Ephraim Ballard was in Maine searching out a new home. As a consequence, the last Ballard baby, named Ephraim for his father, was born in Hallowell in 1779.<sup>22</sup>

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

The French and Indian wars first led Oxford men to Maine. Martha's cousin Nathan Moore, a veteran of the invasion of Canada, was settled in Vassalboro on the Kennebec by 1768.<sup>24</sup> Another cousin, Ebenezer Learned, also a veteran, became a proprietor of the new township of Livermore on the Androscoggin River, though he continued to live in Oxford. Ephraim went to Maine for the first time as a surveyor and agent for Cousin Ebenezer, though his interest soon turned from the Androscoggin to the Kennebec.<sup>25</sup> By 1775 his brother Jonathan, his brother-in-law Thomas Towne, Martha's brother Ebenezer Moore, and her brother-in-law Stephen Barton had all settled on lands laid out by the Kennebec Proprietors.<sup>26</sup> Removing to Maine became another way of remaining in Oxford.

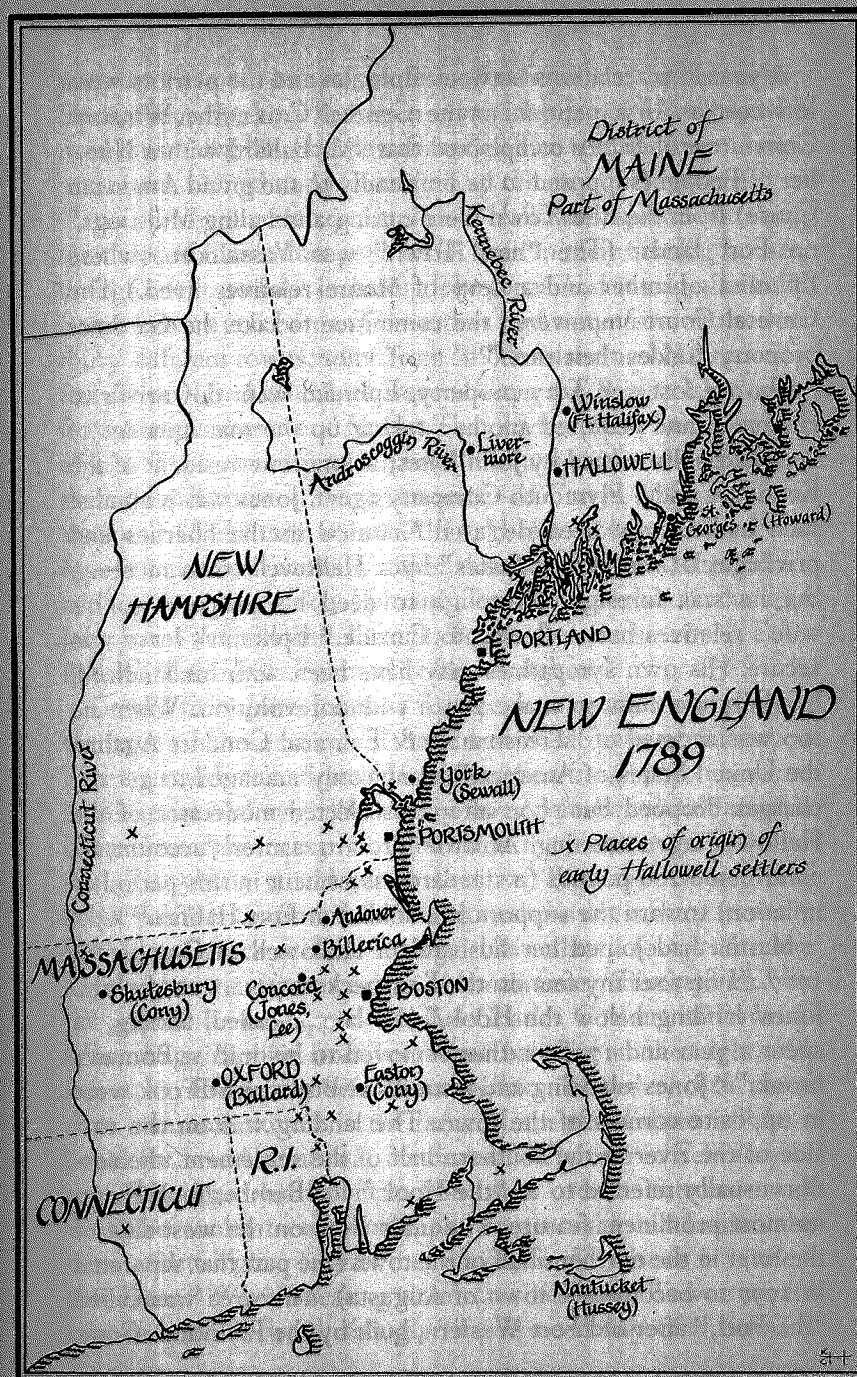
In 1775, there were six incorporated townships along the



Kennebec above Long Reach—Pownalboro, Gardinerstown, Hallowell, Winthrop, Vassalboro, and Winslow—the town names reflecting the family connections and political power of the Kennebec Proprietors, also known as the Plymouth Company because they traced their land claims to seventeenth-century Pilgrim grants. Unlike the pioneer settlements of early Massachusetts, these Maine towns were laid out by merchant speculators, who, having no intention of migrating themselves, gave away some of the land to early settlers, looking for a return on their investment from later land sales and rents and from the proceeds of mills, ships, and stores run by hired agents, who were themselves often paid in land. In 1775 the Kennebec Proprietors owned more than 600,000 acres of wild land, though the exact boundaries of their grants were in dispute. Here indeed was work for a good surveyor, and opportunity perhaps to acquire land and mills.<sup>27</sup>

On April 6, 1775, Ephraim secured a lease from Silvester Gardiner of Boston, one of the wealthiest of the Kennebec Proprietors, to "Fort Halifax and all the land adjoining." The Fort, originally built by the Massachusetts government, stood on a peninsula between the Kennebec and Sebasticook rivers. Surrounded by 400 acres of timber, it was described by one contemporary as "a great Salmon fishery in the summer and a bass fishery in the Winter."<sup>28</sup>

It was an impressive site, but the timing was bad. In April of 1775, as Ephraim was sailing up the Kennebec toward the Fort, Martha was in Oxford watching her cousin Ebenezer Learned muster troops to meet the Lexington and Concord alarm. In June, when Ephraim applied to the Lincoln County Court for a tavern license, the Oxford Minutemen were at Bunker Hill.<sup>29</sup> When an advance party of Benedict Arnold's army reached Fort Halifax in September of 1775, they disdained the accommodations of the Fort, not only because it was in a "ruinous state" but because the proprietor (who was without question Ephraim Ballard) was reputed a "rank tory." Still, they were pleased with the man's willingness to exchange "a barrel of smoke-dried salmon for a barrel of pork, upon honest terms."<sup>30</sup>





A year later, relations between Ephraim and the patriots were less cordial. In a petition to the General Court, the Winslow Committee of Safety complained that "Mr Ballard with a Number of People (supposed to be unfriendly to the grand American Cause) from the next Town were cutting and haling Mill Logs" on Fort lands. (The "next Town" was Vassalboro, where Ephraim's brother and a bevy of Moore relatives lived.) The General Court empowered the committee to take the Gardiner property "under their care."<sup>31</sup>

Having lost one Tory property, Ephraim went downriver to Hallowell and acquired another, taking up the management of land and mills owned by John Jones, a longtime resident of the Kennebec and a Plymouth Company agent. Jones was a loyalist who had already been declared "inimical to the liberties and privileges of the United States" by a Hallowell town meeting, but he was foresighted enough to deed his property to his wife's relatives before fleeing to Canada.<sup>32</sup> Ephraim's lease was secure. His own sympathies may have been with his landlord, but he knew how to make peace with a revolution. When he too was accused of "Treasonable & Enimical Conduct Against the United States of America," he not only managed to get the charges dropped but soon after was elected moderator of the Hallowell town meeting. According to a treasurer's account, he contributed 200 pounds (a standard assessment in this period of inflation) toward the support of a soldier at Fort Halifax.<sup>33</sup>

Martha had joined her husband in Hallowell in October of 1777. "I first set my feet on the Kenebeck shore . . . at Mr John Jones' landing below the Hook," she later recalled, adding, "I spent 1 year and 17 days, then removed to his mill at Boman's brook."<sup>34</sup> Jones's landing and his mills at Bowman's Brook were in opposite corners of the town. The landing was on the east side of the river in the southern half of the settlement, the section usually referred to as "the Hook," for Bumberhook Point, its most prominent feature. The mills were on the west side of the river in the northern half of the town (the part that separated in 1797 to become the town of Augusta). This area was called "the Fort," after old Fort Western, built by the Plymouth Com-

pany in 1754 as part of its line of defense on the Kennebec. Since 1769, the Fort had been owned by James Howard, who used it as a dwelling house and store. (The restored Fort is now a museum owned and maintained by the city of Augusta.)

In 1777 there were 100 families in Hallowell, spread out along ten miles of river. Most people still lived in their first log houses, though a few, perhaps including John Jones, had managed to build frame houses and barns. The settlers had come from more than thirty different towns, some from Rhode Island and Nantucket, a few from New Hampshire, several from the British Isles, most from Massachusetts and Maine. They had come in small clusters of kin. There were two Howard brothers with their progeny, three Sewall cousins, two generations of Conys, strings of Savages and Clarks, and so on. Although most of the Ballard and Moore relatives were in other Kennebec towns, Ephraim's nephew and namesake, Ephraim Towne, was also a tenant of John Jones in Hallowell. In 1778, Towne married his cousin Lucy Ballard, Martha and Ephraim's oldest daughter.<sup>35</sup>

Letters from John Jones to Towne provide the only glimpse we have of these years. "I have had an acompt of what you have met with or had your House serched for me," Jones wrote in the autumn of 1778. "I am very sorry that they should trouble themselves concerning me. I hant dun them no ronge. I sincear wish Everybody would miend their own business." When Kennebec patriots continued to mind Jones's business, he joined the British resistance at Fort George. His military forays into the region gave new point to his old nickname, "Black Jones." In one exploit he kidnapped Colonel Charles Cushing of Pownalboro, dragging him from his house barefoot in the night. His letters to Towne say less about politics, however, than about their common interest in the farm. "I am afraid there will be a famin for bread if the war continues," he wrote in February of 1779. He urged his tenant to "buy sum oxen or furrow cows" while he could, to set out apple trees on the hill behind the barn, and to "git a Salmon net maide, for Provisions is intolerable Dear." When shearing time came he hoped Towne would take care of his wool, though "if you need any of it before I



come you or your father Ballard may use what you stand in need of."<sup>36</sup>

Ten years later, Jones had not yet come. He made an attempt in 1785, the first year Martha kept her diary, but was soon spirited out of town. "A gang went to Samuel Duttuns & took John Jones, brought him to Pollards, tarried till morn when they Set out with him for Wiscasset," Martha wrote.<sup>37</sup> Characteristically, she offered no judgment on the behavior either of Jones or of his attackers. Nor does her diary open in time to record what may have been a last vigilante action against her own family. In 1784 Lucy and Ephraim Towne moved from Hallowell to Winslow, the place where Ephraim Ballard had had his first encounter with the Revolution. According to an oral tradition preserved in the Towne family, the young couple transported their household goods upriver on a flatboat, leaving their furniture on the wharf overnight. "Somebody tied one of the chairs to the top of a birch tree," their great-granddaughter recalled, "and when they went to get the furniture in the morning, here was a chair in the top of a tree."<sup>38</sup> In her mouth the incident is an amusing but inexplicable event. Was tying furniture in trees some species of frontier humor, a folk form of welcome? The political context suggests otherwise. Apparently somebody in Winslow resented Ephraim Towne's association with John Jones, and perhaps, too, with that "rank tory" who had once cut timber at Fort Halifax.

When the diary opened, there were seven Ballards living in John Jones's house on Bowman's Brook—Martha and Ephraim and five unmarried children—Cyrus, Jonathan, Hannah, Dolly, and Ephraim. There were usually one or two hired helpers as well. All these people crowded into an unfinished house that had two rooms on the main floor (Martha called them simply the "east room" and the "west room") and two unfinished chambers above, which were unusable in winter. In addition there were a "seller," a barn, and various "yards," some fenced, some defined only by their proximity to a significant structure or natural barrier, as in "I sowed parsnip & Carrot seed *in the garden by the Barn.*" Or "I howd the Beans & Cucumbers *in the yard by the Brook.*" Or "Houghed

the plants *before the door.*" Or "Cutt Aulders and maid a sort of a fence part round *the yard By the mill Pond.*"<sup>39</sup>

Housework extended from the west room to the yards. Martha Ballard and her daughters bleached newly spun thread on the grass and hung laundry on such fences as they had, though there were risks in such a practice. "Hannah washt Daniels Blankett & our swine tore it into strips," Martha wrote on one fateful day. (No matter, the girls cut up the remnants and made a warm petticoat for one of Lucy's children.) There were no sheep yet, but Ephraim owned a horse and a pair of oxen and Martha milked both a red and a "speckled" cow. Chickens pecked in a dooryard cluttered with wood chips and animal droppings, giving a comforting domesticity to a setting that was still wilderness beyond the clearings for hay and corn. "There was a moose by our garden this afternoon," Martha wrote into the margin of her diary on one April day. In November of 1787, she noted, "Hannah & Dolly were fritened by a Baire between here & Neighbor Savages." In such a setting an errant calf—or a neighbor's child—might wander "up the crik" and disappear.<sup>40</sup>

Yet for all its wildness there was a motion, a life, in Hallowell that had been missing in Oxford. There were ships on the river and a continuous movement of settlers through the town and into the back country. Ephraim's mill was a ram against the wilderness, an engine for transforming woods into towns. On good days the saw kept a steady rhythm, the vertical blade moving up and down 120 times a minute, striking a rapid trochee ("Faaa-sheer, Faaa-sheer") that echoed through the trees as log after log inched along the wooden track. Weather and the changing seasons, as much as the availability of timber, regulated the operation, too much water being as much of a problem as too little. "Our saw mills go Briskly," Martha wrote on one day after a heavy rain, but on another, "The mills have been stopt from going by the freshet."<sup>41</sup>

Ephraim and his sons operated a gristmill as well as a sawmill, both perhaps housed in the same building, the saw or saws in the story above, the grinding mechanism below. There is a fitting symbolism in the division of responsibility for the two. Cyrus, the



quiet older son who into his forties moved in and out of his father's household, never marrying, never achieving full independence, was assigned the grinding. Jonathan, the flamboyant and rebellious younger brother, did the rafting and ripping. One wonders if Cyrus was impaired in some way, though his mother never wrote of it in her diary. His shoulders, at least, were powerful, since it was his job to "pick mill," that is, to work with a mallet and chisel to restore and maintain grooves on the granite millstones. "Son Town" too had a role in the family operation. Having carried away the eldest daughter to Winslow, he returned every week or so, rafting logs to the mill.<sup>42</sup>

When conditions were right the mills went day and night, though mechanical and human failure as well as the weather could bring silence. "The cornmill ceast grinding till finisht repairing," Martha would write, or "Thee sweap of one of the mills got off thee Crank so neither of them were tended this night." Still the sounds of sawing were as much a part of spring on Bowman's Brook as the songs of birds, such an omnipresent part of Martha's world that she usually did not notice them unless they were gone, as one May evening, after the hired hand had gone to bed ill and Jonathan had returned late from two days on the river searching for logs that had gone adrift, when she noted quietly, "The mill Lies still."<sup>43</sup>

Perhaps it was a sense of history or a craving for stability, perhaps only a practical need to keep birth records, that first motivated Martha to keep a diary. "Thee number of childn I have Extracted since I came to Kennebeck I find by written account & other Calculations to be 405," she wrote on December 31, 1791. The demands of a practice that averaged almost forty births a year even in the prediary period may eventually have made a "written account" essential. The diary opens on January 1, 1785, with short, choppy entries nineteen to the page. Gradually the entries become fuller and more regular. (The diary's overall average is six entries per page.) From the beginning she ruled a

margin at the left of her page where she entered the day of the month. Soon she added a second column for the day of the week. By the end of 1787 she had added a right-hand margin where she summarized each day's events. A year or two later she began keeping a running head at the top of each page. Such changes suggest that she too could get lost in a stream of days. One delivery, one April day, could so easily fuse with another.

*April 24, 1785:* "I was Calld at 2 O Clock in the Morn to go to thee hook to Mrs Blake in travil."

*April 18, 1786:* "A rainy day. I was calld to Mr Gillmans at the hook to see his wife in Travil."

*April 22, 1787:* "I Was calld to Mr Welmans at 9 this morn. His wife Safe Delivd at 7 Evn of a son . . . it rained this Evinng."

*April 28, 1788:* "Rain, Snow & Hail & Cold [but this time no deliveries!]"

And then on April 24, 1789, the dramatic encounter with the spring freshet. "A sever Storm of rain. I was Calld at 1 h pm from Mrs Husseys by Ebenzer Hewin. . . ."

Both the difficulty and the value of the diary lie in its astonishing steadiness. Consider again that sequence of entries for April 23 through 26, 1789. The central story—Martha's crossing and recrossing of the Kennebec—is clear enough, but on first reading the reader is unlikely to notice a subplot being played out at the Hussey house while Martha was traveling through the April storm to the Hewins delivery. In fact, it is not even apparent at first that she has left one pregnant woman to attend another. Recall that she initially crossed the river on April 23 "to go to Mr Bullins," that a few hours later as she was about to return home after stopping in at "Capt Coxes & Mr Goodins," she was "Calld in at Mrs Husseys." She "Tarried all night" at the Husseys', leaving about one the next afternoon when Ebenezer Hewins came through the storm to fetch her to his wife's delivery. She did not, however, return home after leaving the Hewins house, which was on the same side of the river as her own, but crossed the Kennebec once again to the Husseys.

In the entry for November 25 we find out why: "Mr Hewins attended me to Mrs Husseys. We arivd at 11 h morn. Mrs Nor-



April 29

7 a heavy rain the river opened and the bridge over this Creek went away the underspinning of the North side gate house fell in but we are yet alive & well for which we ought to be thank fully part of 3 Jan gone also

8 A snow & morn a very raw cold day at home Mr. J. Wiley came here to work Mrs. Williams & Jan Robbins went from here & paid her 1/6

9 A went to hunting his infant sick from there to Esqr. Huggins

10 6 at Dittos my Cox there a pain lot of pain here & he well at home

11 7 at Dittos Capt. Narcross came home from Calto from there by Mr. True from half past 6 past to Philip Narcross at 11 Back again at 3

12 9 my John & John at 9th h morn of a day I went back to Narcross his wife & John at 10 at 10 morn from there to Capt. Porter to Capt. Scott at 12th I was there all night

13 12 at Capt. Porter City & John at a house Jan at 9th h morn I went back to Narcross his wife & John at 10 at 10 morn from there to Capt. Porter to Capt. Scott at 12th I was there all night

Esqr. Huggins attended by Capt. Porter

a head

pain

the

open

I have

at home

at home

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April 29

(13)

3 at my Huggins & Mr. Gooding I went to Esqr. Huggins

4 at my Huggins

5 at Dittos

6 at Dittos

7 Called at 9:30 h. morn to Esqr. Huggins

8 my brother from my Huggins

9 my brother safe here at 12 o'clock the child was 10 h. 9 o'clock at 5

her Huggins & gone to see

10 at my Huggins I wrote to Esqr. Huggins

11 at Dittos then returned all night

12 I came from Dittos find that Mr. Learned has been here & received letters from Hannah & Sister Watson

13 Clear went to see my Huggins

14 her infant is much better - Mr. Learned sleep here

15 Clear & very pleasant I set out to go to Mr. Bulling step out at 10 o'clock I went in 9 miles

16 Clear & very pleasant I set out to go to Mr. Bulling step out at 10 o'clock I went in 9 miles

17 Clear & very pleasant I set out to go to Mr. Bulling step out at 10 o'clock I went in 9 miles

18 Clear & very pleasant I set out to go to Mr. Bulling step out at 10 o'clock I went in 9 miles

19 Clear & very pleasant I set out to go to Mr. Bulling step out at 10 o'clock I went in 9 miles

20 Clear & very pleasant I set out to go to Mr. Bulling step out at 10 o'clock I went in 9 miles

21 Clear & very pleasant I set out to go to Mr. Bulling step out at 10 o'clock I went in 9 miles

22 Clear & very pleasant I set out to go to Mr. Bulling step out at 10 o'clock I went in 9 miles

23 Clear & very pleasant I set out to go to Mr. Bulling step out at 10 o'clock I went in 9 miles

24 Clear & very pleasant I set out to go to Mr. Bulling step out at 10 o'clock I went in 9 miles



cross was in Travill. Her women were immediately Calld & Shee was Safe Delivrd at 5 hours 30 minutes Evening of a fine son." Then she added as a kind of aside: "Her Husband & Mrs Delino & her Childn went on board bound for Nantucket Early this morn." With some attention to context (and a quick search of family records), the characters in this little drama can be straightened out—Mrs. Norcross and Mrs. Delano were Mrs. Hussey's daughters.<sup>44</sup>

Now look at the sequence of events so casually described in the entry. The ship bound for Nantucket left "Early" in the morning; the midwife arrived at eleven; the baby was born at 5:30 that afternoon. What we don't know is whether Mrs. Norcross was already in labor when her husband and sister sailed down the river, having risen early to catch the northwest wind that would make for easy sailing to Long Reach.<sup>45</sup> Probably not. Earlier entries for the month suggest that Mr. Norcross had been waiting in port for almost two weeks anticipating the birth of his child. Martha first went to the Hussey house on April 9 and was still there two days later when "Captain Norcross came home" with the first ships of the season. She left on the eleventh, returned on the thirteenth, left again on the eighteenth, and was back the next day, remaining until April 20. When she was finally "called in" at the Hussey house on April 23, she had already spent a total of nine days waiting for a baby that would not arrive. It is doubtful she would have left Mrs. Norcross again for the Hewins delivery if there had been any sign of labor. That flat entry, "Her Husband & Mrs Delino & her Childn went on board bound for Nantucket Early this morn" was an ironic commentary on a month's frustration. The watched pot would not boil.

Here the more interesting point may not be the departure of the seafaring father (for men the conflict between work and family is an old and continuing one) but the presence of the distant sister. Betsy Delano, whose husband was also a mariner, lived in Nantucket. Did she sail up the river with Philip Norcross on April 11 hoping to attend her sister's delivery? Or had she spent the winter months in Hallowell with her mother while her own husband was at sea?

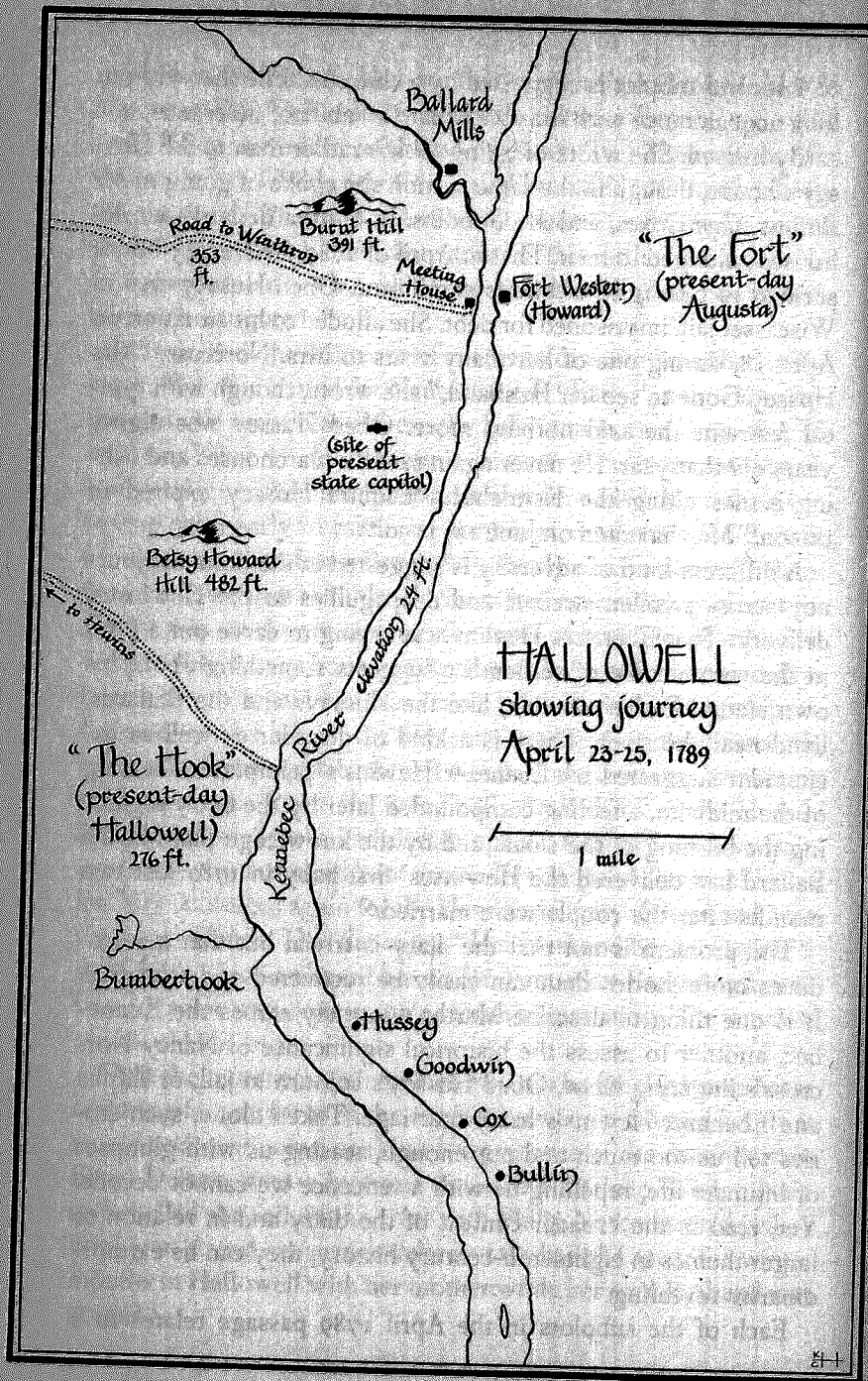
A second subplot is suggested by a clue so subtle that without long acquaintance with Martha Ballard's habits of deference, it is easily missed. She wrote of going to *Mrs* rather than to *Mr* Hussey's house, though in the same section she spoke of going to *Mr* Bullins, *Capt* Coxes, and *Mr* Goodins. In Martha Ballard's world, houses belonged to men. That in April of 1789 the Hussey house seemed to belong to a wife is significant. Obed Hussey was in Wiscasset jail, imprisoned for debt. She alluded to his situation on April 18, during one of her many visits to Mrs. Norcross. "Mrs Hussey Gone to see her Husband," she wrote, though with typical restraint she said nothing more. Obed Hussey was eighty years old that year. He never again saw his warehouses and fishing seines along the Kennebec. "Esquire Hussey expired in prison," Martha noted on June 17, 1790.<sup>46</sup>

A different kind of adversity is suggested in the dramatic journey across swollen streams and deep gullies to the Hewinses' delivery. That Ebenezer Hewins was trying to carve out a farm in the second mile of settlement suggests something about his own status. Earlier arrivals, like the Husseys and the Ballards, lived near the river. There is a kind of disorder as well as excitement suggested by Ebenezer Hewins's precipitous fetching of the midwife, a feeling compounded later by the entry regarding the burning of the cloak, and by the knowledge that Martha Ballard had delivered the Hewinses' first baby in 1787 just two months after the couple were married.<sup>47</sup>

The problem is not that the diary is trivial but that it introduces more stories than can easily be recovered and absorbed. It is one thing to describe Martha's journey across the Kennebec, another to assess the historical significance of Nancy Norcross's lingering labor, Obed Hussey's sojourn in jail, or Zilpha and Ebenezer Hewins's hasty marriage. Taken alone, such stories tell us too much and not enough, teasing us with glimpses of intimate life, repelling us with a reticence we cannot decode. Yet, read in the broader context of the diary and in relation to larger themes in eighteenth-century history, they can be extraordinarily revealing.

Each of the subplots in the April 1789 passage relates to a





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

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

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



year as Martha, and became, in the words of a contemporary, a "faithful labourer in the medical field," and, we might add, an earnest promoter of medical organization. Though he practiced 150 miles into the hinterland, Cony was an early member of the Massachusetts Medical Society centered in Boston, and he continued that membership even after he became president of a new Kennebec Medical Society founded in 1797.<sup>50</sup>

Cony was one of a handful of Maine physicians mentioned in James Thacher's *American Medical Biography*, published in Boston in 1828.<sup>51</sup> He was, by all accounts, a leader in his profession, an associate if not a peer of New England's most progressive physicians, the very group of men who were promoting the new scientific obstetrics. Significantly, his only contribution to the literature of the Massachusetts Medical Society was an obstetrical paper, a one-page account of "a circumstance which I had never before met with" in a delivery he performed in August of 1787.<sup>52</sup> Since this brief paper makes no mention of a midwife, or of any woman other than the patient, it might seem that the obstetrical revolution was complete in Hallowell by that date, that doctors had supplanted midwives.

Martha's diary confirms that Cony delivered at least one woman in August 1787—his own wife—but it reduces his obstetrical career to its proper place in the medical history of the town. Several doctors, including some from neighboring towns, occasionally attended births in Hallowell, but their work was supplementary to that of the midwives. Martha herself attended 60 percent of the births in Hallowell in the year Cony presented his paper to the Massachusetts Medical Society, and she was not the only female practitioner active at the time. Martha and her peers were not only handling most of the deliveries, they were providing much of the medical care as well. In Martha's diary, it is doctors, not midwives, who seem marginal.

William Howard, the man who helped Martha Ballard across the river on April 26 when she was returning from the Hussey house, was the wealthiest man in the town. The son and son-in-law of Hallowell's earliest settlers, he lived and traded at Fort Western in partnership with his brother Samuel, a mariner.<sup>53</sup> A

surviving account book listed under the names of William and Samuel Howard provides rich material for assessing the external economy of the Kennebec in the last decade of the eighteenth century. A standard merchant's ledger with debit and credit entries for each customer listed on opposite pages, it begins in 1788, though it carries some balances forward "from another Book," now lost.<sup>54</sup> Most entries date from 1788 through 1792, though a few go to 1800 or beyond. Almost all, including those for the Ballards, are listed under the name of a male head of household. Male products—lumber, fish, and furs—dominate the credit side of the ledger.

One might conclude from such a record that Kennebec women had no role in economic life beyond their own households. An intriguing page at the very end of the account book lists flaxseed sold by the Kennebec Agricultural Society, yet there is little evidence in the account book itself of any sort of textile production in the town. Martha's diary tells us what happened to the seed. It not only records when Ephraim Ballard planted the flax, but when she and her daughters weeded and harvested it. It not only identifies the male helpers who turned and broke it, but the many female neighbors who assisted her and her daughters with the combing, spinning, reeling, boiling, spooling, warping, quilling, weaving, bucking, and bleaching that transformed the ripe plant into finished cloth.<sup>55</sup> Martha's diary fills in the missing work—and trade—of women.

It also provides additional detail on the day-to-day operation of the male economy. Like most merchants, Howard served as a kind of banker, settling third-party debts with store goods or cash. Ephraim Ballard's accounts are typical, listing salt, rum, molasses, and nails on the debit side, several thousand feet of "clear" and "merchantable" boards among the credits, and on both sides of the ledger "notes" or "orders" on other men. On May 3, 1790, for example, the Howards debited Ephraim's account for "Willard Spoldings order dated 9 of June 1786" and "John Spoldings order dated 1 of July 1786." The diary shows where those orders came from. Early in April of 1786, Martha had noted, "Mr Ballard Been out to purchase Loggs." Twice in



the next few weeks she wrote that "the Spoldings" had brought timber into the "Crik." She made no mention of the Spoldings on June 9 or on July 1, the dates given on the orders brought to William Howard, but she did note that Ephraim had gone to Pownalboro court on one of those days and to Vassalboro to "assist Brother Moore Rais his hous" on the other.<sup>56</sup> Together the account book and the diary tell us how Ephraim Ballard "purchaced" logs for his sawmill. Contracting with men like the Spoldings, he paid in credit at the local stores, settling debts at court days and house-raising, eventually balancing his own accounts with sawn boards.

Martha had a part in all this, as she noted on April 25: "Thee Spoldings brot Loggs. We had 9 men dind beside our own famely." But she did far more than support Ephraim's efforts. During that same week, she noted that a hired hand had performed an errand for her at one of the stores at the Hook, bringing home "6 gain of Rhum, 2 lb Coffee, 5 lb sugar, & some Tobacco & 1 bushl 1/4 of salt from Joseph Williams for me for assisting his wife in travil with her Last Child." A few days later, she reported sending twenty-one skeins of tow yarn to Mrs. Chamberlain to weave.<sup>57</sup> The Howard account book tells us a great deal about the male economy of eighteenth-century Hallowell. Martha's diary shows how women and men worked together to sustain this eighteenth-century town.

The comparisons with Henry Sewall are more direct, since he, too, kept a diary. Like Cony, Sewall was a veteran of the Continental Army. He had come to Hallowell from York, Maine, in 1784, shortly after experiencing an intense religious conversion. Appointed clerk of the U.S. District Court in 1789, he was also for thirty-two years the town clerk of Hallowell and Augusta and for seventeen years the registrar of deeds for Kennebec County.<sup>58</sup> His clear, almost mechanically even handwriting fills the pages of town and county records. The diary he kept from 1776 to 1842 is as remarkable in its own way as Martha's (though less steady).

In April of 1789, while she was fighting the spring freshet in Hallowell, he was far away in New York City attempting to establish himself in business. His diary entry for April 23, the

day she sank in the mire while stepping out of her canoe, marks the distance between her world and his. He wrote:

About 2 o'clock P.M. Genl Washington, the illustrious President of the United States, arrived in this city. He approached in a barge which was built here for his use. On his passing the Battery, a federal salute was fired, which was followed by an instantaneous display of colors from all the shipping in the harbour. On his landing, the federal salute was repeated and all the bells in the city rang peals of joy upon the glad occasion.

For Sewall this was an especially joyous moment, for he had served under Washington. "I took a stand on the roof of Mr. Rob. Hunter's house," he continued, "where I had the satisfaction of seeing once more my quondam General; now advanced to the chief magistracy of the empire, which his valour & magnanimity (under providence) protected and established under the most trying circumstances."<sup>59</sup>

It is not easy to bring together the heroism of Sewall's "quondam General" with the heroism of Martha Ballard as she journeyed back and forth across the Kennebec that same week. The Revolution, the ratification of the Constitution, and the election of Washington certainly affected her life (if only in providing her with grandsons named George, Samuel Adams, and DeLafayette), but the political events that inhabit so much of the foreground in Sewall's diary are only a hazy background, if that, in hers.<sup>60</sup> Yet the converse is also true. In fact, we can learn far more about the world of war and politics from Martha's diary than we can about domestic life from Henry's. Eight times Martha Ballard crossed the river to deliver Tabitha Sewall. Not until the fourth delivery did Henry note her presence, and then only twice after that. Nor did he once mention the fees he paid her, nor the names of the other women present, nor the complications (social and medical) that attended the births. Sewall had little to say about the women of Hallowell, including his own wife. It is Martha's diary, not his, that tells us Tabitha was a bonnet-maker.<sup>61</sup>

Yet it is his diary rather than Martha's that describes the sym-



bolic importance of women in the new republic. On February 22, 1800, he helped organize a parade to commemorate the death of his former commander, General Washington. At the head, following a military escort, were "16 Misses, clad in white, with black hats & cloaks, & white scarfs," representatives of the then sixteen states in the Union. (According to a later account, based on oral tradition, the white scarfs were "fastened on the right shoulder with a black and white rosette; tied under the left arm, with long ends falling to the bottom of the dress.") Led by the young women, the memorial procession passed into the meeting house, the militia companies followed by judges, lawyers, physicians, members of the fire society, and other dignitaries, "the music playing a dead march, & a detachment from Captain Bowman's artillery firing minute guns during the whole."<sup>62</sup> For the young Daughters of Columbia it must have been an impressive occasion, a ritual identification of their own lives with the survival of the new nation.

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

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

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

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

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



Someday the diary may be published. What follows is in no sense a substitute for it; it is an interpretation, a kind of exegesis. Based upon a close reading of the manuscript and of supporting records, it attempts to open out Martha's book for the twentieth-century reader. The diary does not stand alone. A serious reading requires research in a wide range of sources, from Sewall's diary to Ephraim Ballard's maps. Wills, tax lists, deeds, court records, and town-meeting minutes provide additional documentation, as do medical treatises, novels, religious tracts, and the fragmentary papers of Maine physicians. But the diary itself is central. Because few readers will have seen the original, I have transcribed ten long passages, one for each chapter. These unabridged excerpts give a truer reflection of the original than the condensation published in Nash's *History of Augusta*. In each case, the "important" material, the passage or event highlighted in the accompanying discussion, is submerged in the dense dailiness of the complete excerpt. Juxtaposing the raw diary and the interpretive essay in this way, I have hoped to remind readers of the complexity and subjectivity of historical reconstruction, to give them some sense of both the affinity and the distance between history and source.

Martha Ballard rarely used punctuation. Like most eighteenth-century diarists, she capitalized randomly, abbreviated freely, and spelled even proper names as the spirit moved, sometimes giving more than one spelling of a name, including those of her own family, in a single entry. In the transcriptions that follow I have sought to preserve the flavor of the diary without creating undue hardship for the reader, by following these guidelines:

1. I have not attempted to standardize spelling, but I have spelled out many abbreviations, including those expressed as superscripts, as in "Williams" for "Will<sup>ms</sup>" or "afternoon" for "aft<sup>n</sup>." I have also routinely substituted "the" for "ye," "this" for "ys," and "their" for "yr."

2. I have added capitals at the beginning and periods at the end of sentences or what appeared to me to be sentences.

3. I have numbered the diary entries the way she did: in the left-hand margin, with the day of the month followed by the

day of the week. (Note that until 1799 she followed the practice of the old almanacs, assigning a "dominical letter" rather than a number to Sunday and numbering the remaining days of the week from 2 to 7.)

4. I have given all marginal entries in italics, those from the right-hand margin above and those from the left-hand below the regular entry for each day.

Opening a diary for the first time is like walking into a room full of strangers. The reader is advised to enjoy the company without trying to remember every name. It might help to know, however, that there are three familiar characters in the excerpt that opens Chapter One. We have already met the "Doctor Coney" who appeared at Mrs. Shaw's house on August 22. The "Colonel Howard" who offered white rum and sugar to Martha Ballard on August 4 was William Howard, the proprietor of Fort Western. The "Capt Sewall & Lady" who watched until 4:30 a.m. with James Howard on August 10 were Henry the diarist and his wife, Tabitha. Little James, whose illness is such an important part of this section, was not William Howard's son, however, but his half brother, a child of his father's old age. James and his widowed mother, the "Mrs. Howard" who summoned Martha Ballard, lived in one side of Fort Western, William and his family in the other.<sup>63</sup>

Knowing this much, the reader is prepared to open Martha Ballard's book. It is August 1787. The Kennebec flows calm and blue toward the sea.