

Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

July 1998, Issue 99

A Midwife's Tale

The early summer meeting found a baker's dozen – Harriet Rasmussen, Connie Teator, Millie Adriance, Kathie Williams, Toot Vaughn, Betty Vaughn, Claribel Gardiner, Stephanie Ingalls, Dot Blenis, Rosemary Lambert, Phyllis Beechert, Ron Golden, and Don Teator – enjoying a comfortable evening. Of course, the enticements of popcorn, cookies, juice, and soda may have helped.

(A reminder: This is the mid-year reminder to renew your subscription to this newsletter. The number above your name on the label gives the expiration date. The first two digits represent the year, and the last two is the number of the month. Thus, a 9807 means this is the last newsletter. If the number is 9901 or beyond, you're safe until the winter reminder. To renew for a year, send a check of five dollars, made out to Don Teator, and send it to RD#1, Box 147, Freehold, NY.)

Before the program got going, most of us reconnoitered the gallery to study Norman Hasselriis' work, assemblages of all sorts of objects, most of which were framed. We did debate the word 'art' but you must admit that it did get most of our attentions. Those of you who haven't seen it should stop by.

The program was the showing of the video – *A Midwife's Tale* – that I purchased from PBS. The almost-ninety minute video

shows the result of the research done by a Laurel Ulrich who found the diary of a Martha Ballard in a library. The diary starts in 1785 and ends in 1812, is not too unlike the diaries that Harriet (Taylor diary) and I (Ingalls diary) have worked on and have shared with the history group.

Almost all the entries deal with a listing of activities in Martha's life or of events she noticed. To most people, the diary could have been a document that, although interesting, was something that might not have seemed important.

Ulrich describes her finding the diary, documenting the frequency of certain types of activities in Martha's life, getting more interested and wanting to know more details, and ends up figuring out who the diary's people are, what the events are, what kind of life Martha might have lived, and the connections of many different strands. Reading and summarizing of the diary are voiced over mostly silent dramatizations of how Ulrich guessed how Martha's life might have looked.

Despite many similarities to our local diaries, it is the details of each person's life that draws our attention. Martha Ballard was fifty years old when she starts keeping the diary. Her husband is ten years older, and the youngest of her children are old enough to be watched by an older sibling. Thus, Martha is "free" to attend to other duties. And midwifery is one of them, and the

one facet of her life that lends itself to the video's title.

The diary includes the stays overnight with sick patients or pregnant woman, the details of a housewife's work, the work of her husband (farmer, mill owner, surveyor), some details of the village, and ,of course, there's always a comment about the weather.

The growing up of her children, the burning of the mill, conflicts between old and new society, a move to her new house, and the assaults on her husband while he was surveying and the resulting events when he becomes a tax collector, as well as her own aging, affect the major shaping of her life. She endures a son who drinks a bit much and lives alone nearly a year and a half when her husband is jailed for homeowners who didn't pay taxes on time (an odd twist, by our standards).

We were reminded that Martha did not enjoy what we consider modern day conveniences – central heating, air conditioning, retirement and others – that would have made her old age more bearable.

The diary ends abruptly, and we find she has died within a few days of the last entry. Although I sense she has lived a full and useful life, a life in which she earned the respect from many, I am impressed not only with the hard and physical life she lived, but also, after some thought, the way that Ulrich manage to breath life into a diary in a way we could better understand what our ancestors lived through in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

Anyone who wants to see (or re-see) the video, give me a call.

The next meeting, August 10, is a share session. And included in this newsletter is Harriet's summary of the Taylor Diary – 1865.

And one last semi-trivial note. Since this is Issue 99, the next newsletter will hit the century mark. To think that many of you have been subjected to all this local history!

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Don".

R.E. Taylor Diary – 1865
Harriet Rasmussen - transcriber, summarizer

New Year's Day finds R.E. Taylor taking his sister Sarah home after a three week stay. If we recall, Louisa had had a baby girl on December 10th. R.E. had gone for Sarah to care for Louisa and the children. A four year old, two year old, a newborn and the housework have kept her busy, I'm sure. Her brother records that he has paid her but doesn't say how much. It occurred to me that someone must be caring for Sarah's small son and daughter – now 9 and 7 years old. The answer comes on January 22 when R.E. writes, "Went down to Mothers and got my new boots & brought Rosa home with me." It settles the question about where Sarah and the children are making their home. They are on Wright Street with Mother Phebe.

On that same January 1 evening, R.E. writes a letter to William Richards who is now a soldier in the Army of the North. We do not know what news the letter holds but on the following day he prepares a box of notions and takes it to Louisa's brother, Alanson Utter, to send by express. In the back of the diary I discovered this list of items contained in this package:

box to put boots & items in .13 cts

¼ lb. cinnamon .04 cts

2 Hanks thread .16 cts

Paper of needles .06 cts

2 lbs crackers .32 cts

1 pr. boots \$8.25

1 lb. cheese

Dried peaches & blackberries

1 lb tallow bag of sausage & fried cake

I suppose it is typical of what a soldier would receive from home in those trying days.

Much of the month of January is spent in the woods and drawing logs to the mill. I do not know how far away the mill is. Usually he draws three or four logs a day but on January 13 he makes three trips and takes 12 logs. In spite of the fact that a load or two is upset, by the last week of January, he has drawn 80 logs. All of these logs have produced a quantity of bark which he promises to Wellington Peck at \$5.00 per cord. From January 28 to February 4, he draws eight loads of bark to Peck and records that these eight trips have cost a total of eighty cents at the toll gate. Four months later he gets a better deal when he "Paid \$1.00 for Oak Hill gate for one year from July 4th."

Another product generated from his wood lots apparently is cord wood because on February 4, he receives, from Alfred Tripp of Oak Hill, \$25.50 for 6 cords of wood. Last year he had bought two railroad ties in Albany and it was a mystery to me what they were for. Now it appears he may have gotten them to use as sort of a template because, on February 7, he writes, "Hewed railroad ties today." And on February 10, he did the same. The February 11 entry reads, "Very rough & cold – took 20 rail ties to Coxsackie in care of John Backus at .60 cts apiece – amount \$12.00." Over the rest of the month he would deliver 52 more ties to the river and on one day he "Took 10 of them down below Norton Hill over the snow banks."

And there were fence posts to be cut and drawn to the river. Last year's straw he draws to Medusa to sell to J.T. Milton at \$20 per ton. (J.T. Milton operated a paper mill making wrapping paper from straw.) Taylor seems to be drawing something somewhere all month.

On February 26, the snow begins to thaw and run off. On March 2, it storms all day and continues for the next two days. This combination must have caused a spring freshet. On Sunday, March 5, R.E. records, "Started to go to our folks with Louisa & children but could not get across Carter Bridge." And so the visit is put off until the following Sunday.

Spring is coming! Every year it is heralded by the sowing of his oats and the payment on his mortgage. The April 1 entry reads, "Paid Jacob \$185.50 – it being the balance due on bond & mortgage he held against my farm." And on April 5, "Fair – sowed oats & dragged all day." He has done well to have paid up his mortgage to Jacob Hunt in six years.

There are other signs of Spring. The sow has four pigs, three of whom survived. And, on April 11, the lambing begins – ten survive. On April 15, R.E. announces, "Paid .70 cts to Ramsdell for Internal Revenue tax on sheep and hogs."

Brother William is laying up stone wall – a job he had started last fall. Now he adds five days work to the 23½ rods already laid. The going rate of pay is 50 cents per rod.

On the last day of March, R.E. tells us he has his stone boat partly done. And April 18 begins the yearly ritual of prying stone. Presumably these stones are what William uses to lay the walls but they also have another use. On May 12, R.E. writes, "Laid stone on my cellar bottom." Sometimes Taylor pries and draws stone alone but for 10 days

he is helped by Henry Shoewater who has returned from the Army. When Henry goes home sick, friend Almeron More helps. And by May 15, the stones are all drawn and the plowing begins. The corn planting requires more help. The May 27 entry reads, "Wm. furrowed ground for corn today & I got hands and planted down to the swail – E. Ingalls & Charles, Elgreen Craw, B. Sarles & Asa & Curtis Tripp helped ½ day to plant it. Paid E. Ingalls & A. & C. Tripp .50 cts each." By June 21, they are hoeing this corn.

On July 4, there is no celebration. Instead they are working on the rakes and hay rigging. There is not a regular hired man working on the farm so far this year. Brother William helps some with the plowing and planting. When it is haying season, all three of the Taylor brothers are working together in the hot July sun. It is not unexpected when wagon wheels break under the strain of their loads and have to be taken to blacksmith John Hassell. What was not expected was the entry on July 23 which read, "Wm Richards came here today." So now we know that just ten months after being mustered into the United States Army, William Richards has come safely home. He would stay and help with the haying until July 28 when R.E. penned these lines. "Closed my haying. Took Wm Richards as far as Durham. He would not take anything." It appears that Richards wants to repay the favors his old boss has done for him while he has been away. And what better way than to help insure that the 35 loads of hay are put safely in the barn.

His hay all in, Taylor spends four days helping Almeron Moore finish his. On August 26, he writes, "Hot. Finished drawing manure & set fallow. It caught in my woods & Mrs. Hunts & had to watch until 10 o'clock at night." The following day was Sunday and he "Watched fire in the woods all day." Apparently the fire burns itself out because it is not mentioned again.

There have been few times for breaks in the work routine this year. In June, Louisa and R.E. make a visit to her sister Julia and Clark Wetmore at Cornwallville. I don't know where Louisa's older brother Lyman is living but he is introduced into the diaries also in June when he comes to visit his parents. And the Taylors bring him to their house for an overnight and a day of visit. On August 22, we read, "Louisa & I went to the high peak with a party today." Then on September 19, Louisa goes to Wright Street after niece Arvelia. She is taking care of the house and children, I'm sure, because on the following day the entry reads, "Very fair. Louisa,

Celinda & I went to the fair." This is a reference to the annual Cairo Fair.

Last year there were numerous trips to Albany on business for Sylvester Lord's estate. I thought he had finished but I was mistaken. We get a hint when on a Sunday in November, he writes a letter to the Surrogate in Albany. On November 30, he writes, "Went to Albany – staid at G.B. Head overnight." On December 1, he "Made some progress in closing Lord's estate but didn't get quite through – paid \$11.45 for Louisa's dress and \$6.00 for horse blankets." This shopping amused me and I thought how wise he was to have spent more on his wife than on the horses. The following day we learn why he feels he can splurge. The entry reads, "Finished the Lord estate & rec'd from Surrogate for myself and a few creditors \$931.63. It leaves \$3.00 in Surrogate's hands to be sent me when he has received the report. Came home." A few days later we find out that \$441.00 is his brother Charles share of the estate. By the time he pays Dr. Whittlesly and five other creditors he has less than \$400 for himself.

Taylor's last school closed on March 6, 1863 and last year he did not teach at all. But on December 11 he begins a new school term in the Lampman School District. School starts with 13 scholars but each day a few new ones come and by the day after Christmas the attendance is at twenty-seven. It appears that he teaches school by day and on at least two nights he goes to learn. On December 20 we read, "Went to lecture at Norton Hill & paid \$1.00 to learn the Science of Mental Alchemy of Professor Hellog."

This has not been a year of family sickness, losses or trauma. Day-to-day life seems to go along pretty normally for the Taylor family. R.E. Taylor and G. Stone are appointed surety for widow Mary Hunt's children. Celinda Lord starts for the West in October while young Charles Lord comes to stay with his Aunt Louisa and Uncle Edwin for the winter. On July 31, the census enumerator counts and records their household. Louisa's youngest brother and R.E. become partners in a lumber mill run by Addison. It would be known as Ad Utter's mill and supply the people of this area for many years.

There is mention of only three small masonry jobs this fall. Richard Edwin Taylor, this year, has been a farm, school teacher and a mill owner. After all, a man can't be expected to be everywhere.