



Hollis Historical Society

Winter 2021

Wheeler House
20 Main Street, P.O. Box 754
(603) 465-3935
Hollis, New Hampshire 03049

<http://www.hollishistoricalsociety.org> <https://www.facebook.com/hollishistoricalsociety>
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCPVHSOP8tjHeGvkxkb-F8CA/videos>

“The earth provides enough for everyone’s needs, but not everyone’s greed.” Ghandi

Dear Members and Friends,

I hope this finds everyone well. Last year, 2020, was a year we probably don’t want to reflect on, at least a good portion of it. However, 2021 is a new year, and things are starting to look up.

I’m excited to announce that we have two folks who have volunteered to submit articles to this newsletter, Mary Ferguson and Michael Beebe. So without further ado....enjoy!

The Role of Midwifery in Early New England

By Mary Ferguson

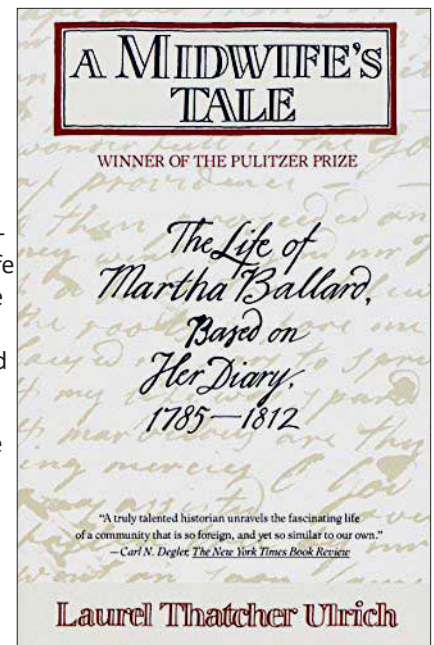
In 18th century rural New England, there were few doctors available and considered a last resort. Doctoring was equated with death and pain, and their methodology suspect. Out of necessity and thrift, the average family was able to care for themselves in times of sickness using plants and prayer. The sphere of women was clearly defined and included the role of caregiver and healer. Some women were more skilled than others, especially in dealing with childbirth; these were the midwives. Midwives were trusted because they lived amongst the people they served, and the remedies they used were known and affordable. A town such as Hollis likely had several women who filled this role and could be called upon to assist day or night.

The typical farm woman grew a kitchen garden that included plants and some fruits and vegetables that were commonly used as medicines. Examples are tansy, mug wort, foxglove, marigolds, rhubarb, and pennyroyal that are still common today. Onions to the feet for headache and scraped horn to dress a wound sounds silly today, but was commonly applied and reported to be effective in those times. Knowledge of brewing was essential, as alcohol was widely used for most maladies as in rubbing brandy or rum on the skin to reduce fever in a child, soothe a bee sting, or to reduce pain and induce sedation. Making decoctions, syrups, poultices, teas, tonics and ointments were employed, such as oil of turpentine and sulfur for piles and currant syrup for whooping cough. (Do not try this at home) Applying heat to the body for comfort, to reduce swelling or to induce perspiration was done with a poultice of camphor perhaps to aching joints or warm bricks to the feet. A strong belief in cleansing the digestive tract was also done universally to rid the body of possible toxins or worms. Yes, worms were a scourge in those days, especially in children. Warm salt water to induce puking (vomiting), senna or rhubarb as a laxative to open the bowels or a clyster (enema) of castor oil to relieve colic were common remedies.

Knowledge of medicinal plants was folklore, handed down from generation to generation and shared amongst the community of women. Heated discussions were held at social gatherings over whose concoctions brought about the best results for man or beast. Unlike life today, farming communities lived close to the earth, raising and harvesting plants and animals in order to survive. Through butchering, they knew far more than we do about anatomy and the basic functioning of the major organs of the body, especially in matters of reproduction and birthing.

Within the community of rural New England, Christian values were observed and upheld by the church very seriously. Sickness and death were believed to be sent by God and should be accepted with grace. The ability to ease suffering and promote healing was also a gift from God. The expectation was not to cure disease but to bring about comfort while God’s work was being done. Most importantly, good Christians helped each other, especially in times of hardships, sickness, and death. Childbirth was a special time: a very social event exclusive for women and would be attended by a house full of relatives, neighbors and friends. The midwife would be sent for only in the case of prolonged and difficult labor, often by the exiled husband.

Midwives were not exclusive to childbirth. They attended to anyone in the community who summoned them in need. They dressed and lanced wounds, attended to burns, toothaches, stomach problems, broken bones, or any condition the family could not manage on their own. She could cut an infant’s tongue-tie and lance a caked breast. She provided the plants that were needed and administered them at no additional cost. She would often spend the night or stay for several days if it was necessary, and assist with household management as needed. Would a doctor do that? She would help prepare the dead for burial and provide comfort to the mourners. If there was a doctor in the village, she may be invited to see an unusual case or attend a dissection (autopsy). Autopsy results were often reported in the local paper. Midwives could be asked to witness the signing of important documents or to testify in the courts. Midwives expected to be paid and for those who could not pay, midwives would accept “in kind” remuneration such as cordwood or meat.



A Midwife's Tale by Laurel Thatcher Ulrich

(continued on page 2)

The Role of Midwifery in Early New England (continued from page 1)

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Hollis Historical Society
20 Main Street
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(603-465-3935)

The Hollis Historical Society is a private, non-profit organization incorporated in the state of New Hampshire.

The mission is to provide an opportunity for all ages to connect with the history and heritage of the Town of Hollis and its residents to gain knowledge and perspective from the past and to find inspiration and purpose for the future. We do this by:

- Acquiring, preserving, and making available to the public, memorabilia and historical materials significant to the Town
- Conduct research and make available historical and genealogical information to interested persons and organizations
- Present educational and informative programs and exhibits for our members and the community
- Maintain the structure and collections of the Ruth Wheeler House and the Always Ready Engine House

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Martha Moore Ballard was a midwife in the colony of Kennebec in Maine from 1756 to 1812. She lived in a small community on the great river that would one day become the town of Hallowell. In her Pulitzer Prize winning book, *The Midwife's Tale, The Life of Martha Ballard*, Based on her Diary, 1785-1812, the historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich has painstakingly transcribed Martha's diary, creating a window into Martha's life as a midwife and farm woman in an intimate way only a diary can provide. It is remarkable that the diary has survived long enough to become the important revelation it is today into women's history, once regarded as "pots and pans history," to the recognized relevant genre it is today. Martha's diary is indeed a buried treasure, as it reveals that although times have changed, humanity has not, and through our reading, we can visualize what it would be like for us to live under such harsh conditions and wonder how we would have fared.

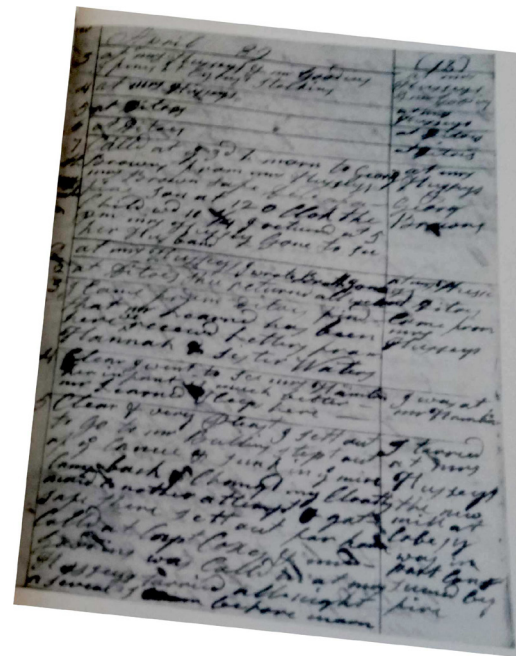
Martha was born in Oxford, Massachusetts, in 1735. She married "Mr. Ballard" when she was 19, and, in 1775, the family relocated to Maine where her husband found work as a surveyor. She had nine children, three of whom died in 1789 of diphtheria within days of each other. Martha came from a family that valued education. Two of her brothers were college educated, which was unusual for the time. Clara Barton, best known as a Civil War nurse, was one of her descendants.

We know nothing of Martha's education. It is likely she was educated at home and learned midwifery from other midwives in Maine after her move there. Her diary begins in 1785 when she was 50, and ends in 1812 when she was 77, shortly before her death. By this time, she had two grown daughters who could run her household when she was called away to tend the sick. In those 27 years, she recorded 812 deliveries and numerous other acts of healing.

The diary entries are very brief and appear to be her way of keeping track of services rendered and payment received, as well as comments about the weather, family events, the tasks she accomplished, the state of her garden, the travels and doings of neighbors, and how she is feeling, both physically and spiritually. Here follows a sample which I have edited slightly for better comprehension by the twenty-first century reader:

April 9 1806

Snowed all day. I have done my housework and knit a mitten for Cyrus. Betsey Wyman brought 6 knots of yarn her marm had spun for me. Meriah here. Says her marm is unwell. Gave her some herbs. Hannah Ballard here for Tansy. Says Samuel is very unwell. He has puked up a worm. Was called by Mr. Caton at 2 o'clock



Sample Diary Page

morning. To go see his wife. Arrived at sunrise to find her delivered of her 11th child but not safe. I performed what was necessary and left her as comfortable as could be expected. Arrived home before 10 and sent her some herbs. Wonderful is the goodness of providence. Received 6 shillings and snuff.

Despite her accomplishments and contributions to the community, when Martha died, her obituary was one line:

died in Augusta, Mrs. Martha, consort of Mr. Ephraim Ballard, age 73 years.

No matter, her great-great granddaughter, Mary Hobart, M.D., knows Martha for what she was: a heroine and skilled practitioner who saved countless lives. Hobart also cared for mainly poor women and children and practiced in a male dominated world. She views the diary as an important record of healing methods in common use in early New England and wanted it to be available for future generations. To keep it safe, she donated it to the Maine State Library in 1930. It is women like Ballard, Hobart, and Ulrich that, through hard work and study, have brought women's work and lives out of the shadows of history and into the light for us all to learn from and wonder.

Mary Ferguson is a resident of Hollis and a new member of the Hollis Historical Society. A former RN, she has a keen interest in medical history, especially in the care of the poor and sick. Contact her via email if you know of any primary resources available concerning medical practitioners in the previous centuries in Hollis: maryferg77@gmail.com.

I'm sure many of you are receiving garden catalogs in the mail and dreaming of the arrival of Spring when you can get outside and tend your garden. Similarly, the Hollis Historical Society has a beautiful garden behind the Wheeler House called the **Lucie Beebe Memorial Garden**. Those of you who are newer residents of Hollis might wonder, *who was Lucie Beebe?* I reached out to Lucie's son, **Michael Beebe** of Lyndeborough, to give us some background information on this incredibly talented, energetic, and amazing woman.

Meine Mutter.....Lucie Born Beebe

By Michael Beebe



Lucie Beebe

While both my parents were unique, and I still use their life models in my daily world, *Meine Mutter* (German for My Mother) was a special combination of heart, brain, and efficient, effective brawn. Her motto was commit, show up, contribute, work hard, perhaps even take charge.... and humbly laugh a lot....with others and at oneself. I was an eyewitness to her enthusiastic, can-do positive energy, and skills of half a dozen

diversely talented people. She was a farmer's wife, ski area pioneer, four seasons nature lover, community-spirited volunteer, and healer of post WWII German-American relations. She could cook food over an outside smoky campfire or hob-nob with Boston society.

Lucie Born, the oldest of three, grew up in Weisbaden, Germany.

Her Dad was a wine merchant; her mother's family were owners of a large travel agency.

When just nineteen years old, alone, in New York City helping

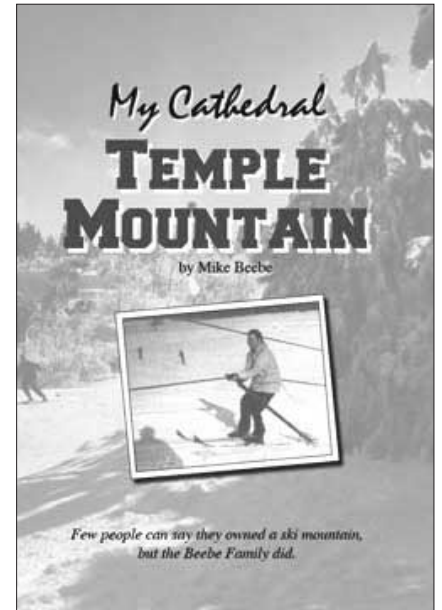
her mother establish a new travel agency, my mother's mother had a sudden, fatal heart attack. Fortunately, a very loving Swiss couple took in *Meine Mutter*, a lesson of great compassion she would repeatedly gift to others. While returning to Europe in 1930 for a family vacation, my mother met my father, Charlie Beebe, aboard a ship. A steamship romance was kindled, followed by a 1932 marriage in Germany, with a honeymoon celebrated skiing in St. Anton, Austria.

In 1936, my parents became ski pioneers when they started Temple Mt. Ski Area in Peterborough, NH, which my family ran for 50 years (see my book, *My Cathedral Temple Mountain*, for details. Besides hard work, we all played a lot, year round.

But life was not all fun and games, especially for *Meine Mutter* during World War II, when her two younger brothers and several uncles were German army officers, fortunately non-Nazis.

Post war, Lucie Beebe became a poster child for healing German-American relationships, with her work with the German consulate in Boston. In my parents' large retirement home on Richardson Road, *Meine Mutter* routinely would prepare her own, fancy meals, of course, served on German porcelain, for two dozen dignitaries. Eventually, Willie Brant, the German Chancellor, awarded *Meine Mutter* the highest of civilian honors for her years of dedicated service.

In her 'spare time,' she was the president of the China Students of Porcelain in Boston, while being very active with the Hollis Garden and Woman's Clubs, along with her work with her beloved Wheeler House.



Beebe Garden

So now you know a few of the highlights of the back story regarding the Lucie Beebe Garden at the Wheeler House. Thank you, Mike, for this write-up about your mother. She was, indeed, a remarkable lady. She worked tirelessly at the Wheeler House, for which we are so very grateful!

And the Beebe family continues their support of the Wheeler House: one of Mike's daughters, **Suki**, is a talented photographer. She has turned some of her beautiful photographs of Hollis into note cards, which she donates to the Hollis Historical Society to support our fund raising efforts. Thank you, Suki! (These note cards are available at the Wheeler House).

Thank You, Joe Harlin!

Due to Covid, we weren't able to hold our Annual Meeting, and because of that, we couldn't honor Joe, in person, for all his many years of volunteer service to the Hollis Historical Society. Yes, Joe retired! If we listed all the different jobs Joe performed at both museums, you probably wouldn't believe us. Painting, cleaning, trash removal, mowing, shoveling, hanging pictures. And with regard to Attic Treasures: pricing items, cleaning articles, supplying many treasures, setting up, taking down, selling, supplying goodies at Attic Treasures sale days, and the list goes on and on and on!

And we can't not mention his incredible sense of humor...a treat for everyone who met Joe. This tiny list of tasks Joe performed for our society highlights just the tip of the iceberg. We did give Joe a gift certificate, but it was absolutely nothing compared to the years and years of hard work Joe performed for the Historical Society.

Sending you sincere and heart-felt best wishes for a happy retirement, Joe!

Hollis Historical Society News

- * The Hollis Historical Society, once again, sponsored the **Front Door Decorating Contest**, as part of Luminaria Night. **Sharon Howe, Nancy Bell, and Erin White** were the judges. And the winner was the **Voruz Family**, of 19 Broad Street in Hollis. Congratulations! They received a gift basket of assorted items pertaining to Hollis history as a prize.
- * As yet we don't know when we'll be re-opening the Wheeler House and the Always Ready Engine House (AREH) with regular hours. However, individuals may make appointments to visit the Wheeler House (**wearing masks**) for research, by calling **Freddi Olson** at **(603) 465-2884**. These **'by appointment only'** visits will apply to the AREH as well, starting in June.
- * We're still accepting donations for **Attic Treasures**. You may leave them on the porch of the Wheeler House and notify Freddi that they are there by calling (603) 465-2884. We'll let everyone know when Attic Treasures sales will resume. And if you're interested in helping with Attic Treasures, please let us know.
- * Lots of changes have been made at the AREH house thanks to **Lynn Schur** and her helpers: **Sharon Howe, Sue Birch, Debbe Shipman, and Freddi Olson**. New displays, new frames and descriptions, a new map of farms from the 1950's, and much more.
- * We will again be donating a copy of **Where the Past Has Been Preserved** to a graduating senior at Hollis Brookline High School.

Members

We'd like to thank everyone who renewed their membership and also those who made donations. It is greatly appreciated! This has been a rough year for non-profits who have not been able to open their doors or conduct their regular fund raising efforts. Your support means the world to us!

New 2020 and 2021 Members

Jonathan & Alison Brackett
Susan (Lates) Brooks
Mary Ferguson
Wendy Hills-Longland
Eric and Cindy Ryherd

Matt & Bernice Stanizzi
Louann Swaney
Alexander & Meredith Therrien
Brian Worcester

Books and Dish Towels

Our books and dish towels are still available. Just call (603) 465-2884 and let us know what you'd like and we can either arrange to meet you at the Wheeler House for pick-up or we can mail the items to you. See the box at the right for some of our available items.

In closing, I send wishes to you all for good health and good cheer. Looking forward to when we can all meet together once again!

Fredricka Olson
Fredricka Olson, Curator

*"Adam and Eve had many advantages,
but the principle one was that they escaped teething." Mark Twain*



Flour Sack Towels
\$8.00 per towel
(plus postage & handling for mailed items)
All proceeds support the Hollis Historical Society
100% cotton, Generous 28"x28" size
Choice of 7 different designs representing Hollis's rich agricultural history

Available at Hollis farm stands:
Brookdale, Lull, and Kimball Farms
or through our Contact Us
page on hollishistoricalsociety.org.
You can also call (603)465-2884 to
arrange pick-up at your convenience
or to make shipping arrangements!

