

*The Ward Family and Their 'Helps':
Domestic Work, Workers, and Relationships
on a New England Farm, 1787-1866*

HOLLY V. IZARD

*When one's time is filled with duty and usefulness
the mind is always contented.*

Elizabeth Denny Ward

BY THE MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY, nostalgic portraits of domestic service and servants in pre-industrial New England began appearing in reminiscences and autobiographies. For example, Connecticut-born Samuel Goodrich recalled in 1856: 'Our servants, during all my early life, were of the neighborhood, generally the daughters of respectable farmers and mechanics, and respecting others were themselves respected and cherished.' Drawing from long-ago childhood memories he added: 'they were devoted to the interests of the family, and were always relied upon and treated as friends.'¹ A decade later Horace Greeley

The research for this essay was supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to Old Sturbridge Village, 'Tradition and Transformation: Rural Economic Life in Central New England, 1790-1850.' The author would like to thank Richard Bushman, Marilyn Halter, Jack Larkin, Nancy Grey Osterud, Alan Taylor, and Laurel Thatcher Ulrich for their helpful comments on this essay.

1. Samuel G. Goodrich, *Recollections of a Lifetime*, 2 vols. (New York & Auburn: Miller, Orton & Mulligan, 1856), 1: 84. It is important to note that Goodrich and others who penned reminiscences were giving their childhood view of household relationships, outside of adult negotiations and concerns.

HOLLY V. IZARD is a research historian at Old Sturbridge Village.

Copyright © 1993 American Antiquarian Society

remembered that in the New Hampshire home of his youth his parents treated a domestic helper 'precisely as if she had been a daughter of the house.'² Ellen Rollins, writing in the 1880s, recalled a past before her time when servants were 'daughters of respectable farmers' in the community who 'had simply transferred themselves into more prosperous homes than their own' where they served with 'no degradation.'³ In her 1890s autobiography, *A New England Girlhood*, Lucy Larcom remembered from early childhood years spent in Beverly, Massachusetts, that 'a girl came into the family as one of the home-group' while her neighbor-employer, 'if her nature was at all generous, could not feel that money alone was an equivalent for a heart's service; she added to it her friendship, her gratitude and esteem.' Larcom's context for this description of what she called 'the rendering and receiving of womanly service in the old-fashioned New England household,' was the neighborhood—'people who lived side by side,' who often exchanged services 'without waiting to be asked.'⁴ All agreed that there had been a change during their lifetimes: domestic servants and their service had become a 'problem,' fraught by class divisiveness; cultural differences, and distrust.⁵

This transformation in relationships between female hired help and their employees as outlined by these and other writers was perceived as a symptom of broader change: by midcentury, industrialization, urbanization, and immigration had fundamentally altered life for most New Englanders. Like everything else, domestic service was affected; in a way it became a metaphor for what had been lost. Within this context nineteenth-century writers ef-

2. Horace Greeley, *Reflections of a Busy Life* (New York: J. B. Ford & Co., 1868), p. 52.

3. Ellen H. Rollins, *New England Bygones* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1883), p. 18. This past existed in the younger days of her grandparents who had farmed in southern Maine, close to the New Hampshire border town where she grew up.

4. Lucy Larcom, *A New England Girlhood* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1891), pp. 199, 191.

5. As the essential first step in remediating the domestic problem, Lucy Larcom called upon women to recognize the common gender identity of mistresses and maids, the bonds of universal womanhood. Goodrich believed relations were good when helps 'were not Irish.' Ellen Rollins pointed out that hired girls when her grandparents kept house were 'help,' not 'servants.'

fectively created a tradition about pre-industrial domestic service that came to be accepted as true.⁶

In recent years historians Carol Lasser and Faye Dudden have explored household service within the context of the social, economic, and cultural changes that occurred in the nineteenth century. Both began their studies with images of a 'traditional' past as portrayed in the nineteenth-century literature—a world of informal service relationships in which culturally similar young women moved casually in and out of neighboring farm houses, assisting and at the same time learning the skills of housewifery in mutually beneficial relationships that only secondarily involved pay.⁷ Lasser has argued that by the 1830s domestic service, at least in Boston, had firmly been pulled into the nexus of the marketplace; women now worked for externally set wages in strangers' houses under conditions that did not presume reciprocity.⁸ On the much broader scale of the entire nation, Dudden has depicted a shift in household service from 'hired girls' helping in the rural households of small producers to 'domestics' working in emerging urban middle-class households. The former persisted in frontier communities, while the latter staffed homes in the urbanizing northeast.⁹ Particularly as increasing numbers of Irish immigrant

6. The idealization of the rural past of their youth in the nostalgic recollections of later nineteenth-century writers is explored by Jane Nylander, *Our Own Snug Fireside: Images of the New England Home 1760-1860* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993).

7. While she accepted the general image, Faye Dudden did point out that reminiscences could not wholly be trusted; 'perfectly good understanding and good feeling' between masters and servants that Samuel Goodrich believed existed in his childhood, when he was on the periphery of household management, was surely imaginative. Faye Dudden, *Serving Women: Household Service in Nineteenth-Century America* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1983), introduction and ch. 1.

8. Carol S. Lasser, 'Mistress, Maid, and Market: The Transformation of Domestic Service in New England, 1790-1870' (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1982), and 'The Domestic Balance of Power: Relations Between Mistress and Maid in Nineteenth-Century New England,' *Labor History* 28 (Winter 1987), 5-22. Lasser argued that working women benefitted from this shift, as earlier notions of benevolent maternalism allowed employers too much control.

9. 'The move from country to city was perhaps the most striking change associated with the transition from help to domestics,' Dudden explained. 'Urbanization itself was not the only cause of the change, but it permitted and encouraged the full realization and free operation of the labor market for service.' The transition was an economic and ideological change which accompanied the development in nineteenth-century America of an industrial capital economy. Dudden, *Serving Women*, pp. 12, 93.

women entered their ranks, domestic servants came to be perceived and treated as a separate class.¹⁰

Both Lasser and Dudden, like their nineteenth-century predecessors, have portrayed the transformation of domestic service as part of the transition from country-to-city, or rural-to-urban values. In the agricultural countryside neighbors casually assisted one another for short terms in reciprocal and egalitarian work relationships, while in the city or heterogeneous fast-urbanizing places, women hired culturally dissimilar strangers who accepted demanding and demeaning long-term employment as servants in households.

This essay will explore domestic work, workers, and work relationships in the New England countryside, where the preponderance of the region's population lived through the 1860s. There, women's daily reality aligned more closely with that of their mothers and grandmothers than with the experiences of their urban middle-class peers. Male and female work spaces remained integrated, economic and social ties continued to overlap, and family members continued to fully participate in work routines. Yet farm and household production changed in response to the developing industrial economy, and rural customs and values shifted in response to economic rationalization and middle-class ideology. Were women in these households similarly affected by structural and ethnic shifts in urban domestic service? Were domestic work relationships and work organization significantly altered over time? Did the tradition created by nineteenth-century writers ever in fact exist?

10. Hasia R. Diner has argued that Irish immigrant women actually wanted to work as domestics; it had a continuity with their pasts and provided the attractive security of shelter. *Erin's Daughters in America: Irish Immigrant Women in the Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983). While Carol Lasser took a similar position in her work, Faye Dudden posited the 'distinctly harsh formative experience' of domestic work motivated Irish women, when they became mothers, to keep their daughters out of service. (p. 194) At the same time, as Jeanne Boydston has observed, for most urban middle-class families the ideal of mistresses supervising maids was beyond reach; generally they were co-workers, hiring cooks and washerwomen, but doing a great deal of the work themselves. *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), ch. 4.

The rich collection of papers left by the Ward family of Shrewsbury, Massachusetts, provide a way to explore these issues. They farmed in that community from its settlement in 1717 through the end of the nineteenth century, and left abundant documentation of their personal and economic lives. The Wards were somewhat out of the ordinary. They were, as the Reverend Timothy Dwight noted, 'a very respectable family'; members of the rural elite, highly visible and influential in the politics and society of their east-central Worcester County town.¹¹ The Wards were also the largest-scale farmers in Shrewsbury, with an agricultural operation that generally included from 300 to 500 acres.¹² On the 1798 Federal Direct Tax—a valuation based on overall dimensions, number of windows, and apparent external condition—their large two-family homestead, which still stands along the Old Post Road, was valued at \$2,000, more than six times the value of the average dwelling.¹³ The family always relied on hired male laborers to assist with farm work and frequently on hired girls and women to share domestic

11. Timothy Dwight, *Travels in New England and New York*, 4 vols. (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969; first published 1821), 4: 269. Lawyer/land speculator Nahum Ward, who ranked among the original proprietors, served as the town's first selectman and representative to the General Court. His son Major General Artemas Ward served in the Continental and first two United States Congresses, was first to command Continental troops, held long terms as selectman and representative, and was Chief Justice of the Court of Common Pleas. His son Thomas Walter Ward, Sr., who next took over the property, served the town as moderator and treasurer, was a Justice of the court of Common Pleas, and for nearly twenty years Worcester County Sheriff. His son Thomas Walter Ward, Jr., held numerous local offices and was president of the Anti-Slavery Society. In 1875 the local newspaper's account of Thomas Ward Jr.'s, fiftieth wedding anniversary included: 'The history of the Ward family is so well-known, it having been intimately connected with the history of our country and town, that attempt to narrate it in full in the compass of an article like this would be in vain.' *Shrewsbury News*, April 12, 1875.

12. The farm operation extended into the neighboring town of Northborough and to Phillipston in northern Worcester County. In most years the Ward farm was three-to-four times larger than the average farm in Shrewsbury.

13. The dwelling in 1798 was two-stories, two-rooms deep, with accommodations for two separate households. It measured 54 x 28 feet, plus a back ell workspace. The average dwelling was valued at \$312; 18 were hovels worth \$100 or less, only 7 of the town's 138 houses were valued at or above \$1000, and only one shared the top rank with the Wards. Originally built as a 'salt-box' in the 1720s or 1730s, it was doubled in 1785 and expanded again in 1830. For analysis of housing stock in Worcester County at this time see Michael Steinitz, 'Landmark and Shelter: Domestic Architecture in the Cultural Landscape of the Central Uplands of Massachusetts in the Eighteenth Century' (Ph.D. diss., Clark University, 1988). The Ward homestead is now a museum.

tasks. While the Wards were unusual in stature and scale, the family's agricultural and domestic work routines reflect the common experiences of rural families, and those hired to assist were representative of the rural labor force.¹⁴

The Ward records on domestic help shift in quantity and quality over time. They are scantiest in the early decades, when recording was less systematic, and richest in the 1820s and 1830s when letters to absent family members and work diary entries overlay the strictly economic information that predominates. The names of 143 women and girls who assisted the family are recorded in the farm diaries, receipted bills, account books, cash books, and correspondence between 1787 and 1866.¹⁵ As far as possible they have been linked through family reconstruction to male heads of households, then traced through census indices and manuscript schedules, genealogies and local histories, tax valuations, property deeds, probate records, and Ward family account books. While certainly the number of women workers identified through the Ward family papers underrepresents the total,¹⁶ it is sufficient to provide a portrait of the domestic labor force over time.

The recovered details on these individuals, overlaid with infor-

14. In 1850, when manuscript census schedules for the first time list occupations, 27 of Shrewsbury's 285 households included female help (12 also included male laborers, another 31 included only male laborers). In 1860 hired girls were listed in 23 of 308 households (8 included male help as well; another 24 listed only hired males).

15. Sources include Receipted Bills 1725-1885, Account Books 1786-1890, Minute Books of Cash Paid Out 1813-1815, 1832-1835, and Cash Books 1840-1890, Family Correspondence 1783-1878, Farm Journals and Diaries kept from 1812-1820 and from 1829-1835, all Ward Family Papers, Manuscript Collection, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts (hereafter WFP). Some work receipts were also found in the Artemas Ward Papers, Manuscript Collection, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts (hereafter AWP). Unlike records for farm laborers, records on working women are intermittent and uneven. It often took multiple references to link a first name with last, or to place a worker in a time frame with specific wages paid; in a number of cases, particularly in the early years, information remains fragmentary. In 1840 Thomas Ward, Jr., and his wife Harriet both opened cash books, which provided far more detail on women than earlier sources yielded. (The cut-off for this study, 1866, is the close of Harriet's volume.) Of the total number recovered, 63 worked before 1840 while 80 new names were found 1840 to 1866 (a few worked during both periods). Biographies are on file at Old Sturbridge Village.

16. For example, in October 1823 Henry Dana Ward, son of Thomas and Elizabeth, mentioned in a travel journal that there were six women working in the family; I could recover only one. Octavo Vol. 12, WFP.

mation on the family itself, suggest a far more complicated scenario than that portrayed in nineteenth-century reminiscences and recent scholarship. Neighbors' daughters did *not* casually move in and out of the Ward household in work relationships centered in mutuality during the early years; nor were they replaced by strangers in calculated non-reciprocal wage-based service relationships later on. Rather, the study of domestic work, workers, and work relationships from the late-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries reveals that the preponderance of hired girls throughout the entire time span were from artisanal and laboring families outside of the local face-to-face community.¹⁷ These women often worked for fairly long terms for set wages in relationships that, while congenial, reflected an inequality of status. The actual structure of work organization, more than workers or work relations, shifted over time in response to economic and social change. What remained constant was the presence of affective ties, an emotional reciprocity between the Wards and their helps—among people who shared what Jane Nylander has eloquently described as 'the patterns and rituals of everyday life and work.'¹⁸

The records will be considered from two temporal perspectives: one following the life and family cycle, changes which explain shifting help needs; and another centered in a generational transition in farm management. The records first allow us 'in' in 1787, at which time the farm was managed by twenty-nine-year-old Thomas Ward, Sr., and the dwelling occupied by two families. Thomas resided with his wife, Elizabeth Denny, and three children in the old or east part; in the west end were Major General Artemas Ward (1727–1800) with his wife Sarah Trowbridge (1724–88) and four grown children. The only daughter at home assumed house-keeping between her mother's death and her marriage four years

17. While most help were recruited from a radius of roughly twenty miles, in the face-to-face world of daily social and economic interaction that distance was substantial—well out of the bounds of local small community. The difference over time was that distance in early years did not undermine the cultural homogeneity, something eroded in later years.

18. Nylander, *Our Town Snug Fireside*, p. 52; see pp. 41–53 for her discussion of help in New England households.

later, at which point the elderly Artemas Ward became part of his son's family.¹⁹ (See Appendices A and B.) Elizabeth's burdens increased only intermittently, for her father-in-law was a representative to the United States Congress and spent much of his time in Philadelphia. However when he retired to Shrewsbury in 1797, his son's family included seven children and two more were born before his death in 1800; and in 1802 when the last child was born, there were in all six sons and four daughters.²⁰

With a growing family about her, receipts for payment for work indicate that Elizabeth Ward relied on a steady stream of live-in help and at least ninety percent of these women came from outside the one-mile radius of their neighborhood. Though they may have been recruited through acquaintance with the Wards, they were not otherwise part of their community. The majority could not be linked to propertied heads-of-household, and while a few of the documented helps during these early years worked for short terms, most stayed in the family for terms of seven months to several years. For some there is evidence that they worked out of economic need.²¹ For example, in the summer of 1790 Sarah Howe journeyed from her Boylston residence to the Wards in Shrewsbury where she remained for more than four years. When Sarah departed to marry, in January 1795, she received a portion of her forty-cents-per-week wages as a dower of household furniture.²² Persis Cut-

19. Ward Family Reminiscences, General Artemas Ward Memorial Fund Museum, Shrewsbury, Massachusetts, owned and maintained by Harvard University.

20. On the occasion of his father's death, Thomas Ward penned to a sister: 'I frequently slipped away from the noise and bustle of my own family to sit and chat' with their father in his private 'little room'—a sequestered space located off the rear of the main house. Ward Family Reminiscences.

21. Carol Lasser argued that help 'did not represent a long-term commitment to, nor a serious dependence upon, wage work.' 'Domestic Balance,' p. 7. Dudden also deemphasized economic motivation among helps. Jane Nylander, on the other hand, makes the point that women expected to be paid for their services, and that long-term service was the ideal arrangement as it afforded a continuity of work routines.

22. While no birth record could be found, in August 1790, a Ward trading partner was credited for loaning Sarah a horse to ride home to Boylston for a visit, and her marriage was published there. On January 18, 1795, Sarah married Joseph Raymond at Sterling. Two days later she signed a receipt: 'Received of Thomas Walter Ward 27 pounds in full for four years and three months labor.' (Time was figured from the day help entered the family, lost time subtracted.) In the business files a note bearing the same date reads: 'I promise to pay Sarah Howe six dollars in cabinet work to be delivered at Daniel Holden's shop in

ting, one of nine children in another Boylston family, assumed Sarah's place in the Ward household. Persis stayed until her marriage three years later, at which time she was paid at the same rate as her predecessor.²³ Lydia Albertson, daughter of an itinerant and somewhat marginal shoemaker, worked for an unspecified time before marrying in 1804.²⁴ Mehatibal Wait, a self-supporting Sutton woman Elizabeth Ward's own age, came into the family in 1808 and worked for more than three years at seven shillings (\$1.16) per week.²⁵

Closely spaced births meant that from the late 1780s until 1807 Elizabeth always was watching at least three or four children below the age of five, as well as several more under ten. In the decades when she was surrounded by babies and young children, hired help handled most of the female work on the farm. Market-oriented activities such as butter and cheese making, as well as such purely domestic concerns as making beds, were included in general household tasks—the latter activity revealed through the family story that in the 1790s a Ward baby was shut up in his mother's turn-up bedstead.²⁶ Laundry seems to have been given to women in the

Shrewsbury in one month from the above date with interest paid.' The cabinetmaker's bill indicates that Sarah received a bedstead, bureau, some tables and chairs. Received Bills 1725-1810, Box 28 and Box 25, Folder 1, WFP; Reel 3, AWP.

23. Persis married Thomas Wilder Warner on February 20, 1798, in Templeton. He was not of that town and they did not remain there. Because Donald Sutherland insists on seeing domestic help as a unified whole, his book *Americans and Their Servants: Domestic Servants in the United States, 1800 to 1920* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1981) does not work. However, his idea that wages were fixed by local custom before the industrial marketplace economy developed makes sense, and plays out in the Ward records. Wages rose from 40 cents per week in the 1790s, to 50 cents in 1800, to \$1.00 a week by 1807. From that point through the 1830s, help generally received between \$1.00 and \$1.25.

24. The family was in Plymouth in 1790, Harvard in 1800, and Shrewsbury in 1810; by 1820 her father was no longer listed in Massachusetts as a head of a household.

25. Perhaps because of her age—close to his own—or because at middle-age service was her occupation, Mehatibal Wait was entered in Thomas Ward's account book. Account Book 1796-1818, Folio 5, WFP. Of the 697 recorded trading partners in the Ward books, which span from 1786 to 1890, twenty-nine were women. All but six were widows or single women whose husbands, fathers, or brothers had previously-established accounts; only three were helps. The census schedule for 1810 lists, in addition to family members and Mehatibal, another help between the ages of twenty-six and forty-five, and five farm laborers.

26. Box 38, Folder 3, WFP.

community. Numerous accounts for spinning and weaving attest that the household's textile production was also handled by outworkers, though according to local tradition they actually performed their tasks at a weaving house on the Ward property. Among others, there was an eccentric spinster Mary Garfield known as 'Old Moll the Witch' for her herbal remedies, as well as the wife of a farm laborer, the young friend of a Ward daughter, and three economically marginal widows. The fact that domestic textile production was handled as outwork goes against conventional thinking that hired help in the economy of small producers engaged in market-oriented tasks.²⁷

For much of the 1810s it appears the Ward daughters shared the primary burden of responsibility for dairy processing and other female work with their mother.²⁸ At the opening of the decade Harriet was twenty-three and Eliza seventeen; by the time of their marriages in 1817, Sarah was seventeen and Caroline fifteen.²⁹ Throughout, poor widow-neighbor Rebeckah Bruce Pease provided a steady supply of day's service for laundry and outworkers continued to spin and weave.³⁰ The only recorded live-in help was

27. See Dudden, *Serving Women*, ch. 1. Martha Ballard's experience does fit that convention. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, 'Martha Ballard and Her Girls,' in Stephen Innes, ed., *Work and Labor in Early America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), pp. 70-105. Though there is no documentation to support the idea, it is quite possible that the Ward daughters, like Martha Ballard's, worked at textile production alongside help.

28. Ross Beales has documented a similar pattern in the household of the Reverend Ebenezer Parkman, also rural elite. While help was a normal part of their lives, at times in the family cycle they were not needed. Ross W. Beales, Jr., "Slavish" and Other Female Work in the Parkman Household, Westborough, Massachusetts, 1724-1782,' in *House and Home: The Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife Annual Proceedings 1988*, ed., Peter Benes, (Boston: Boston University Press, 1990), pp. 48-57.

29. As for the sons, Andrew married in 1809 after graduating from Harvard and settled eventually in Boston where he kept store. Nahum headed to Ohio in 1811 after trying his hand at storekeeping in town, Henry Dana was sent to Harvard in 1814 and upon graduation he, too, went to Ohio—the first in a series of destinations. Thomas, Jr., was on the farm, at least intermittently, until 1822, when he took up storekeeping first in Boston and then in Pomfret, Connecticut. Artemas died in 1816, and Joseph in 1821.

30. Widow Rebeckah Bruce Pease rented a small dwelling from the Wards for a time. She kept accounts with the family for more than thirty years, working in exchange for foodstuffs and firewood. When Thomas Ward, Jr., settled his father's affairs he closed Rebeckah's account with "Never to be paid." Account Books 1815-1835, 1832-1860, Folios 6, 7, WFP. Cally Cummings, a married woman, bound shoes for the family 1814-1815. Received Bills 1811-1819, Box 29, WFP.

for the April-to-November agricultural season in 1819 when the two younger daughters were away at finishing school and Mary Newton assisted Elizabeth Ward with the care of a dying son plus five live-in laborers. Although she was the daughter of a neighboring farmer (the only instance of a neighbor working in the family), Mary in no way conformed to the conventional image of hired help in nineteenth-century literature. She was thirty-two years old and, as the oldest of nine children, well-practiced in domestic skills. Mary contracted with Thomas Ward for her services at the relatively high rate of \$1.25 per week—one of three service agreements entered into the pages of his account book. At the close of service Mary married Shapley Caswell, one of the laborers, and departed town.

In the 1820s Elizabeth Ward, now in her sixties, returned to steady reliance on live-in help to attend to the myriad of farm and domestic tasks. By this time only the youngest daughter remained at home. Sarah had removed first to an uncle's household in Oakham for further schooling and then to her brother Nahum's home in Marietta, Ohio, where she assisted in the family during his prolonged travels in Ireland. Records exist for five women who worked in the decade including twenty-two-year-old Ann Carter, a farmer's daughter from Berlin who with her brother Lewis lived in for the agricultural season in 1820, and the sixteen-year-old daughter of a local farm laborer who worked the fall of 1821, both at \$1.00 per week.³¹ In April 1823 Mary Newton's twenty-two-year-old cousin Nancy, of Westborough or Northborough, contracted with Thomas Ward for a year of service at \$1.00 per week in season, four shillings (\$.66) per week for the balance of time. Armenia (last name unknown), who was recruited by Thomas Ward, Jr., from a Holden household, lived with the family for three and a half years beginning in April 1824. Elizabeth's twenty-seven-year-old niece Maria Denny came to 'pass the winter' that year as well. Widow

31. The 1820 census of the household included, in addition to family members and the Carters, two farm laborers in their twenties, and two free blacks—a young boy named Sam and a man over 45.

Pease continued to do laundry by the day, traveling seamstress Almira Force periodically visited and sewed for the family, and neighbors continued spinning and weaving.

The majority of live-ins were again from outside of the local community, from even a geographically broader range of towns than in the early years, and most served for a year or more. Need continued to be a motivation for service. Lydia Stone, the seventeen-year-old daughter of a Ward tenant, worked to offset her father's indebtedness. Nancy Newton was the oldest of twelve in an unrooted, economically marginal family. Armenia and Sally Bond moved from household to household in service; possibly their circumstances were similar to Hannah Haven's who served after her twice-widowed mother broke up housekeeping.

In the absence of women's diaries it is impossible to know the precise rhythms and divisions of female tasks within the household that Laurel Thatcher Ulrich has been able to document for Martha Ballard;³² however, letters shed some light on the subject. In 1820 when Ann Carter was in the family, Elizabeth Ward variously reported in letters that 'Ann made tea,' 'Ann helps me knit on the stockings,' 'Ann is making cheese this morning,' [Miss Bragg] and Ann are helping Caroline off to Worcester.'³³ In November 1824 Caroline wrote to Sarah in Ohio: 'Our father is at the barn among, perhaps, thirty huskers. Our mother is in the kitchen viewing Armenia's table laid with fifteen pies . . . that she has made since noon.'³⁴ The day before 'four of us' — presumably Caroline herself, hired helps Armenia and Maria, and one other — 'were all day engaged in preparing geese for market.' The following evening Caroline added, probably referring to Armenia and herself,³⁵ 'we

32. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary 1785-1812* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990).

33. Elizabeth Denny Ward to Sarah Henshaw Ward, September 22, October 5, and October (undated), 1820, Box 1, Folder 5, WFP.

34. Caroline Ward to Sarah Henshaw Ward, November 1824, Box 4, Folder 4, WFP.

35. Once in the family, Armenia told Caroline that when Thomas, Jr., recruited her he 'made me believe he had the care of the dairy and help,' indicating that her work included dairy responsibilities. Caroline Ward to Thomas Walter Ward, Jr., June 1827, Box 4, Folder 4, WFP.

have removed our cheese upstairs and the milk down cellar.' Caroline then underscored 'I have ironed,' suggesting this task was not usually within her realm of responsibilities. In letters to his sister Henry Dana identified Maria Denny as 'mistress of the kitchen' while in the family during the winter of 1824-1825.³⁶ In 1827 Caroline wrote to a brother, likely referring to Armenia and herself, 'we have just completed whitewashing from the garret to the cellar,' then lamented, 'Armenia leaves us in July and then I must be servant again'—intimating some household work was ordinarily handled by help rather than family members.³⁷

A significant change in work organization occurred in the 1820s when dairy processing was removed from the realm of general domestic tasks—possibly because of an increasing unwillingness on the part of help to do it. It is certain that Elizabeth Ward and her daughters labored in the cheese room which initially extended off the back of the old kitchen, and then was moved sometime after 1822 to a brick-floored whitewashed cellar space. It was understood that Armenia, like earlier helps, was expected to do dairying as part of her work in the family when she was hired in 1824. But beginning in 1826 Thomas Ward set off the dairy operation, which was of increasing commercial importance, to his newly created tenant farm—an adjoining complete farmstead. The first year he paid the tenant farmer's sister Mary Williams \$28.00 for 'making my butter and cheese at the Henshaw House so-called, the present year.'³⁸ When that family departed unexpectedly early the following spring, Thomas Ward wrote to his son in Connecticut: 'What I shall do with our milk this summer I can't tell unless I give it to the hogs. *I have no help that will undertake it.* I wish you would look me up a good hand to come in June and stay three or four months. I will give her good wages [and] our new milk so that it will not be so hard for the cheesemaker.' They dispatched a young woman, Sally Bond, who in November was paid \$23.00 for her work 'last

36. Henry Dana Ward to Sarah Henshaw Ward, January 19 and March 18, 1825, Box 4, Folder 4, WFP and Reel 5, AWP.

37. Caroline Ward to Thomas Walter Ward, Jr., June 1827.

38. Bills Receipted, 1820-1829, Box 30, WFP.

season and to this time.³⁹ After that, male tenants signed leases which stipulated they would 'account to said Ward for one half the butter and cheese from the dairy' as part of their responsibilities; no further wages were paid for dairying.⁴⁰

Elizabeth Ward's comments about help and household affairs in the 1820s—the first point at which relevant sources exist—indicate that to her mind good work relationships required competence and a deferential, yet pleasant demeanor on the part of workers, and general caring and concern from both parties. When Ann Carter was in the household in 1820, assisting with a wide variety of largely family-oriented domestic tasks, Elizabeth frequently described her as 'a good girl,' useful, pleasant, and 'contented' in the family. Through her employer, Ann routinely sent affectionate greetings to a daughter absent from the home.⁴¹ References to their twenty-six-year-old dairy girl Sally Bond, hired to undertake specifically market-oriented dairy processing, provide further illustration. In June 1827, Elizabeth reported to her son and daughter-in-law, who had sent the young woman from their own employ, 'Sally has made seven nice cheeses. She wishes me to say to Mrs. Ward that she likes her place very well. . . . I think her a charming girl.' Near the end she added, 'Sally comes in and says "I forgot to ask you to give my love to Mrs. Ward and [son] Samuel," so of course you will accept it.'⁴²

It is apparent from later correspondence that genial deference and common concern remained crucial to good work relationships

39. Thomas Walter Ward, Sr., to Thomas Walter Ward, Jr., March 31, 1827, Box 1, Folder 4, WFP. Emphasis added. Receipted Bills 1820–1829, Box 30, WFP. The women were paid \$1.00 per week, the prevailing rate for domestic service.

40. Leases filed in Box 26, Folder 3 and Box 37, Folder 3, WFP. Annual dairy yields—which were substantial, generally well over \$200, were formally recorded in 'Memorandum on Dairy,' Box 24, Folder 4. Years after his brother held the tenant farm, Charles Nelson acidly wrote to Thomas Ward that he remembered 'the generous present you made my mother for her unceasing care of the dairy when David carried on your farm of a cap ribband worth four cents per yard.' Box 23, Folder 3.

41. Elizabeth Denny Ward to Sarah Henshaw Ward, September 22, 1820 and October 1820, Box 1, Folder 4, WFP. When Thomas Ward reckoned with her brother Lewis in January 1821, he settled with Ann 'by a bonnet, \$7.00 and [24.17] cash to balance.' Receipted Bills 1820–1829.

42. Elizabeth Denny Ward to Harriet Grosvenor and Thomas Walter Ward, Jr., October 9, 1827, Box 1, Folder 4, WFP.

in the Ward household. Hired girls were incorporated into the 'home-group,' as Lucy Larcom and other nineteenth-century writers remembered, but not precisely as daughters of equal stature to the family. Help socialized and attended church with the Wards, were nursed in sickness, and transported home for visits. They also agreed upon wage rates and settled work accounts; they were hired help and they had their 'place.'⁴³

In 1830 Thomas and Elizabeth Ward, in their seventies, turned management of the farming operation over to their youngest son and his wife Harriet Grosvenor. On March 22, 1830, Thomas Ward, Jr., wrote in his farm journal: 'Father and Mother moved into the West part of the house and we to the East. We take the help and have care of the place etc. under Father as head. Pleasant.'⁴⁴

After this point hired help in the senior Ward family were involved solely with maintenance. In contrast to the women and girls who served in the agricultural households, many of whom had no known ties to the family or community, the vast majority of those who assisted the elder Wards were well-known to the family. They included Lois Bragg, an old friend of daughter Sarah who sometimes paid social calls and at other times worked, three young women from town, a Ward niece from Phillipston and two Denny nieces from Leicester, as well as two widows—one from the local community who may have brought her thirteen-year old daughter into the household with her, the other Elizabeth Ward's sister-in-law. The high incidence of kin perhaps reflects the bonds of family obligation.⁴⁵

Only twice, at times of acute need, did relatives assist in the farming households. When the burden of care for the three young

43. Ross Beales reached the same conclusion in his study of the Parkman household; Jane Nylander makes this point in words and period imagery in *Our Own Snug Fireside*, p. 47.

44. Farm Journal, 1830-1832, Folio 14, WFP. In 1830 the west end included the senior couple, single daughter Caroline and widowed daughter Sarah Putnam; in the east were the junior couple with three young sons, a twelve-year-old nephew, two farm laborers in their twenties, two teenaged helps and a girl under ten.

45. Obligation to kin operated within the Ward family as well. Single daughters in both generations moved into families of married brothers and sisters, and in one case an uncle, to assist when babies and young children were present. Ross Beales saw a similar pattern in the Parkman family.

sons of a deceased daughter fell to Elizabeth Ward in 1824, Leicester niece Maria Denny came to assist. Caroline Denny, another niece from Elizabeth Ward's hometown, moved from her aunt's west part of the house to her cousin's east end in November 1832 'to help Walter's wife' through her last months of pregnancy and the birth of a fourth child.⁴⁶

The change in farm management coincided with a critical transition in attitudes towards domestic service. Just as the occupation of farm laborer was increasingly avoided by native-born men, who preferred more remunerative work in the burgeoning industrial and commercial enterprises, domestic service fell into disfavor among rural women.⁴⁷ As Christopher Clark has concluded in his recent study of rural capitalism, by 1830 'work in a farm household had become measurable against a variety of new standards,' and for many it compared unfavorably.⁴⁸ A contributor to the *New England Farmer*, an authoritative voice in agricultural communities, spelled out this fact when he noted in 1833 that so many women in western Massachusetts were engaged in the outwork of sewing buttons for manufactories, 'housework is going out of fashion, except where mothers have the strength to do it.'⁴⁹ Women were responding not only to alternative occupations in the more diversified rural economy, but also to changes in cultural values: urban middle-class emphasis on privacy and sanctity of home also helped to reshape rural perceptions and sensibilities.

The *New England Farmer* became a forum for debate on the role of farmers' daughters in the changed rural economy and society of the 1830s. The opening commentator bemoaned the fact that farmers' daughters had become 'unproductive' members of society

46. Thomas Ward, Sr., Minute Book of Cash Paid Out 1832-1835, Box 37, Folder 5, WFP.

47. The trend among farm laborers is analyzed in Jack Larkin, "Labor is the Great Thing in Farming": The Farm Laborers of the Ward Family of Shrewsbury, Massachusetts, 1787-1860, *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 99 (1989): 189-226.

48. Christopher Clark, *The Roots of Rural Capitalism: Western Massachusetts, 1780-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 279.

49. *New England Farmer*, October 16, 1833.

now that textile production had been removed from the home and service was considered a 'degradation.'⁵⁰ In response a contributor vehemently stated, 'I would sooner, infinitely sooner, follow my daughters to the grave than see them "go out to service."' But, he argued, daughters who were brought up in 'industrious habits' contributed much to the happiness of their families and society living 'under their parents' roofs.' The next essayist believed serving was important training for young women's calling in life: 'The great end in the education of every female should be to fit them to become good wives and prudent housekeepers,' and therefore, women employed in domestic service were 'every day better qualified for good wives.' The paper's editor, who supported agricultural innovation but resisted social and cultural change, closed the debate: 'If farmers' daughters are willing to become farmers' wives, let them not hesitate when occasion requires, to go into the service of other respectable farmers.' But, he added, 'if they can find any proper useful occupations at home, so be it.'⁵¹ Perhaps in recognition of a passing way of life, the author of an 1842 article shifted wholly away from the appropriateness of serving and instead argued that training through taking in work would make a woman 'an excellent companion, an industrious, useful wife, and a kind and devoted friend.'⁵²

Changing attitudes towards service among native-born women became painfully evident to Thomas and Harriet during their first several years on the farm. Like the generation before, they came to the homestead with young children and their family continued to grow. But unlike the earlier generation, this couple were not able to secure long-term help and frequently they were forced to go without any assistance for interim months. Between April 1830 and September 1832 they engaged seven young women, most of

50. *New England Farmer*, July 20, 1831. The author further argued 'this non-producing is by no means a non-consuming class'; their tastes pressed a 'distressing burden of pecuniary obligation' for their fathers. Clark has argued, alternatively, that freedom from domestic textile production afforded the opportunity—which many women took advantage of—to take in outwork. *Roots of Rural Capitalism*, pp. 146, 179.

51. *New England Farmer*, August 3, 10, and 24, 1831.

52. *New England Farmer*, July 27, 1842.

them in their twenties. Three were 'looked up' in the adjacent town of Northborough, and the others were found in the northern Worcester County town of Harvard. While seventeen-year-old Mary Whitney assisted for nine months, following the birth of Harriet's third child, most stayed for terms measured in weeks, and for the first time in the Ward records, help quit in late spring 1831—the day company arrived for a prolonged visit.

The balance of the decade showed more signs of change. In 1833 the Wards for the first time hired Irish domestic help, a pattern already in place for farm laborers. Barnard Culligan moved into the Ward family with his twenty-two-year-old wife Mary in December and stayed for the winter season. On April 10 Thomas Ward settled accounts with both of them—Barnard at \$11.00 per month and Mary at \$1.00 per week—and they 'left home' to settle on a rented farm in town. In October 1834 Michael Dalton brought his wife and child to live in the family. Bridget Dalton worked the winter months for \$1.00 per week, after which time they, too, settled on their own in town.

Hired help for the remainder of the decade was provided by native-born women from nearby towns who tended to be younger and perhaps needier than help in earlier years. Maria Brigham, the fourteen-year-old motherless and homeless daughter of a shiftless Northborough laborer, came into the family in March of 1835.⁵³ A Grafton woman in her twenties who had also lost her mother came to the household for the winter in 1839, after her father broke up housekeeping. Lydia Walker, a twelve-year-old from a large Marlborough family whose father was terminally ill, stayed with the Wards for nearly two years beginning in December 1836.⁵⁴

Caroline Denny's personal transition reflected the changed sentiment towards household service outlined in the *New England*

53. Initially she worked in exchange for board, then for fifty cents per week, in the elder Ward household. When she moved into the younger household the family included a toddler and four other children all under the age of ten.

54. While away from Shrewsbury in 1837, Elizabeth Ward wrote to her grandson Samuel 'I bear in mind Lydia, and [young laborers] Stanton, and George with feelings of interest for their welfare and happiness.' Box 1, Folder 5, WFP.

Farmer and evident in the Ward household in the 1830s. She first came from her Leicester home to 'help her aunt' in 1832 at the age of thirty-one, and assisted on-and-off for sixteen years.⁵⁵ In June 1843 she left the Ward household to visit kin in Vermont 'for the season' but then returned to care for her elderly and infirm Aunt Elizabeth until her death in 1846.⁵⁶ Afterwards, Caroline moved to service in the family of a cousin in Shrewsbury. However, she now wished to break out of serving. 'I had an application to take another boarder for the winter,' a niece wrote to Sarah Ward in 1851, 'Miss Caroline Denny wishes to board — will give me \$2.00 per week. She thinks to get sewing to do. [Her aunt] Mrs. Miles wishes her to take their sitting room and keep house, Caroline prefers to board.'⁵⁷

Foreshadowed by the growing reluctance of native-born women to be live-in help, work arrangements shifted dramatically in 1840: domestic chores were splintered into discrete categories of work and handled by women who resided in separate households in the community. For nearly four years, and intermittently for the rest of her life, Harriet Ward had to cope with this 'piecework' system, which paralleled the putting-out system employed by textile factories, shoemaking enterprises, and local merchants.

While surely it was easier for a domestic employer to rely on the steady help of someone under her own roof, the shifting balance in how women participated in work routines indicates the new arrangement held greater appeal to them. Prior to 1840 about forty percent (twenty-six of sixty-three) of the recorded female work

55. Minute Book 1832-1835.

56. In April 1846, Elizabeth wrote to her son Henry Dana: 'We are not strong enough to do much for ourselves, but cousin Caroline Denny is our housekeeper. The principle part of our business, all meals go through her hands—good, bad, or indifferent.' Box 1, Folder 5, WFP.

57. Catharine Maria Baldwin Lyon to Sarah Henshaw Ward Putnam, November 11, 1851, Box 5, Folder 5, WFP. Maria also confided 'I think the Miles's will dissuade her from it, and keep her there.' A marginal note informs us this was correct: 'Helen Clifford [the Miles's hired girl] has just brought me a note from Caroline Denny saying that she has changed her mind about boarding.' (Widow Mary Miles and her daughter resided as a separate household in the dwelling house with the cousin—Mary's son—in whose family Caroline lived.)

force were outworkers; after that date they comprised eighty percent (sixty of eighty). Young single women, presumably unwilling to live-in another's household in the manner of their contemporaries in earlier times, sewed, knitted, or made hats in their own homes.⁵⁸ Married women took washing and ironing, cut and stitched dresses, and occasionally cleaned house by the day. More middling local women participated in wage-earning employment than in previous work arrangements; in profile they showed greater economic diversity and community stability than earlier outworkers. (See Appendix C.) Ironically, they more closely matched nineteenth-century writers' images of help than the women who lived-in.

The physical reorganization of domestic tasks coincided with a transition in record keeping and in the economics of domestic service. Harriet Ward opened a cash book of household expenses in which she somewhat unsystematically recorded money paid to female help.⁵⁹ Her husband also began keeping cash books that year, pointing to the growing inadequacy of older bookkeeping methods. In the earlier overwhelmingly local agricultural economy, commodities were the primary means of exchange, recorded in book accounts that were generally balanced once a year at the opening of the agricultural season or New Year's Day. By 1840, when businesses and manufactories flourished in Shrewsbury's center village and the town was inextricably woven into a larger national economy, cash had become the primary means of exchange.⁶⁰ Annual balancing of accounts gave way to regular pay-

58. Lucy Larcom's observations of her fellow Lowell workers would hold for out-workers as well: 'the feeling that at this new work the few hours they had of every-day leisure were entirely their own was a satisfaction to them. They preferred it to going out as "hired help."' *A New England Girlhood*, p. 199.

59. Though there is no way to know whether Harriet had read it, William Alcott advised that a wife should keep accounts of expenses 'for her own and her husband's amusement and instruction, and ultimate profit.' *The Young Housekeeper* (Boston: George W. Light, 1842; first published 1838), p. 74.

60. When the federal direct tax was taken in 1798, Shrewsbury was a community of scattered farmers, mostly descended from original settlers. While a small portion of the population engaged in trades, 120 of the 168 households (seventy-one percent) owned at least some of the accoutrements of farming; seventeen percent owned no property. By 1850 less than half the residents were born in town. Only 146 of the 365 heads of households

ments for goods or services rendered.⁶¹ Working women were drawn into this rationalized economy like everyone else. Whereas in earlier years live-in helps were compensated at some point after the close of service, often in a mix of commodities and cash, and outworkers accumulated credit, all workers were now paid regularly in cash.

Though diminished in overall representation, live-in helps did not disappear. In February 1843, several months before the birth of Thomas and Harriet's seventh—and last—child, a young working-class woman from a large Groton family, Jane Reed, came to live with the family. She was sent by Thomas Ward's sister Caroline who wrote: 'My good girl Jane Reed will come and live with you at one dollar per week. I like her very much. Her work is done without noise and she is kind, loves children and is watchful of others' feelings and grateful. She is seventeen—large and strong.'⁶² Jane stayed for nearly two years, during which time she received regular wages and occasional presents. Sixteen others lived in the family intermittently between 1840 and 1866.

In some ways live-in help in this later period resembled that of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Most were women in their late teens or twenties from outside the local community who stayed in the family for terms of seven months or several years. Proportionately more were from non-propertied households, and virtually all worked out of economic need. What dra-

(forty percent) were farmers, and another 22 (six percent) farm laborers. Forty percent of the population worked at artisanal trades or in the shoemaking industry; twenty-six percent of the 365 households owned no property.

61. Eventually account books were eclipsed by cash books. The effect of this shift in the Ward family is outlined in Andrew H. Baker and Holly V. Izard, 'New England Farmers and the Marketplace, 1780-1865: A Case Study,' *Agricultural History* 65 (Summer 1991): 29-52.

62. Caroline Ward Dix to Thomas Walter Ward, Jr., February 1843, Box 4, Folder 4. The Groton Vital Records identify Janes's father as a laborer. Caroline had paid her five shillings (eighty-three cents) per week; the Wards ended up paying \$1.25 per week. Caroline's needs for help fluctuated with the number of Groton Academy students boarding in her family. She sent Jane to her brother when she needed to cut down from two hired girls to one.

matically differed was their ethnicity: all who lived in after Jane Reed were Irish.⁶³ (See Appendix D.)

At least initially, Irish help was secured in a new way that related to the industrializing economy: through Boston or Worcester Intelligence Offices—employment agencies that in urban places had become the primary marketplace for supplying domestic workers.⁶⁴ Harriet later engaged young women from Shrewsbury's growing immigrant community, often sisters or daughters of men already enmeshed in the Ward economic network. In 1850 the town's population of 1,593 included 50 Irish and 20 French-Canadians. By 1860 the Irish population had more than doubled, and the numbers of French-Canadians quadrupled while the population as a whole had slightly declined. Eventually the immigrant families that had become long-term members of the community provided a minority of live-in and the majority of day help.⁶⁵

Work within the household seems to have been somewhat reorganized after 1840, perhaps in response to the steady participation of outworkers in domestic tasks. While most of Harriet's entries read: 'paid for housework,' 'paid her wages,' or simply 'paid,' in a few cases she noted payments to live-in help for ironing or washing. This could mean that those tasks were normally handled out of the house, a pattern consistent with earlier work arrangements. Also, by 1865 Harriet specified that help was hired to do 'general housework,' or to work as a 'cook' or 'chambermaid'—terms which suggest a splintering in the structure of domestic chores within the household. The specialization of function may imply an unwillingness on the part of individual women to undertake certain

63. A similar shift had occurred a decade earlier for the Ward's farm laborers. See Larkin, "Labor is the Great Thing in Farming."

64. Harriet Ward recorded three instances in her cash book: Eliza Nugent was hired at a Boston intelligence office in 1848, in the spring of 1851 she went to Boston 'hunting help,' and in 1855 Ellen Larey was hired at a Worcester agency. Octavo vol. 21, WFP. For a discussion of Intelligence Offices, see Dudden, *Serving Women*, pp. 79–87.

65. In 1850, the family included Thomas and Harriet, five children, two Canadian laborers, and Eliza Nugent. In 1860 the family included two daughters and a nephew's son as well as Patrick and Mary Laughlin—probably brother and sister. Laughlin families had settled in Shrewsbury in the 1850s. Margaret Laughlin, like Mary, worked as live-in and community help and Mrs. Joanna Laughlin was an outworker.

tasks or may simply reflect urban sensibilities of divisions within the household.⁶⁶

But strikingly, a pattern from the past reasserted itself. Dairy processing, which had been removed from the Ward household to the tenant farm in 1826, was brought back to the homefarm in 1844. Economic rationalization of the dairy industry in response to market opportunities, prompted Thomas Ward to assume direct supervision of the operation as well as the full control of profits. Records indicate this large-scale commercial activity was handled exclusively by Harriet Ward, who at least initially still had two children under five to look after. The reality of a very elite farm woman's life—and undoubtedly the lives of a great many rural women—sharply contrasted with the increasingly pervasive rhetoric of urban middle class ideology.⁶⁷ Though exhortations on the value of women's active participation in work routines predominated, by 1835 even the *New England Farmer* instructed the farm wife on the 'management of domestic concerns' and advised that 'the comfort and improvement of her family must be her principal object.'⁶⁸

Available family evidence indicates that changes in the structure of domestic service and ethnicity of their help were not accompanied by changed attitudes about good work relationships—competence, genial deference, and mutual concern. An Irish woman came into the senior Ward house shortly before Thomas' death

66. For example, Catharine Beecher described at length the discrete spaces in a house and provided specific rules for the care of each in *A Treatise on Domestic Economy* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1856; first published 1842).

67. In June 1847, Thomas Ward boasted to his sister Sarah that his wife made eighty pounds of butter a week. A comment in a May 3 letter to Sarah indicated the centrality of Harriet's place in the farm household. 'A trip to Newton [to visit a brother] Saturday last would have been a relief to the body, but Mrs. Ward did not succeed in getting anyone to stop here while she might be absent.' Box 4, Folder 5, WFP. See Baker and Izard, 'New England Farmers and the Marketplace,' pp. 46–48 for shifts in the Ward dairy operation.

68. *New England Farmer*, December 2, 1835; an article on domestic habits decried the fact that 'domestic occupations do not hold the high rank to which they are justly entitled.' Mothers were urged to train daughters in the useful arts: 'to paint is well; to play the piano is well; to embroider is well; but to be able to make a pudding is better than all.' *New England Farmer*, January 6, 1836. Thomas Ward, Jr., was clear in his position on this subject: domestic skills were 'the solids' at a meal, refinement 'the pie and the cake.' June 14, 1847, Box 4, Folder 5, WFP.

in 1835 and stayed for several years. Two years later, in 1837, when Elizabeth was away for the winter Bridget assisted in the younger family. In one letter to her mother-in-law Harriet wrote: 'Bridget desires me to send her respects with her thanks for your kindnesses. The poor girl cried for a moment when she found you was not coming home to see how nice everything looked in your rooms. . . . It was a great disappointment to lose the expected looks and words of approbation.' The letter concluded with Harriet's note that 'Bridget is a great help.'⁶⁹ In her next letter Elizabeth responded: 'I am pleased that Bridget gives satisfaction,' and as her formal employer she also worried: 'I hope she will be supplied by someone for all that she needs—if necessary I would be willing for the Female Charitable Society to supply her, and I will account to them for it when I return.'⁷⁰ In 1846 when daughter Sarah wanted to visit Boston relatives, an Irish woman came to live with now elderly and frail Elizabeth Ward. In a letter Elizabeth related a conversation she had with Mary Ann, over whom she kept close watch. "You will remember when you came, what I said to you—that I should take care of you. . . . I shall take care of you and if you do well I shall do well by you."⁷¹ She closed with: 'Mary Ann is a good girl. No one could be more obedient or careful.'⁷¹

Though letters about household affairs do not exist for later years, the pages of Harriet's cash book hint at continuing concern and kindnesses for good employees. During Eliza Nugent's seven-year service in the family, she received regular wages at the rate of \$1.25 per week and frequent presents including trinkets, dress fabric, a writing book, an occasional holiday bonus, and lastly her final travel fare. When laundress Catherine Howard fell onto hard times, Harriet contributed to a fund for her relief.

The language used by the Wards to describe domestic workers

69. Harriet Grosvenor Ward to Elizabeth Denny Ward, September 18, 1837, Box 5, Folder 5, WFP.

70. Elizabeth to Harriet, December 1 1837, Box 1, Folder 5, WFP. November 3, 1837. Thomas Ward Jr., charged his mother on account: 'paid Miss Shaw [a dressmaker], work for Bridget—\$1.40.' Account Book 1833–1860.

71. Elizabeth Denny Ward to Sarah Henshaw Ward Putnam, September 28, 1846, Box 1, Folder 5, WFP.

also reflects long-term continuity in attitude. Both Carol Lasser and Faye Dudden, like a number of later nineteenth-century writers, have used ascribed titles as a way of distinguishing one kind of help from another. Families engaged socially and culturally similar 'help' or 'hired girls' in the preindustrial economy and socially inferior, culturally alien 'domestics' or 'servants' in the industrial, capitalist economy. The Wards and others in agricultural communities seem to have avoided the negatively charged terms.⁷² As late as 1870 rural census takers recorded female live-in helpers as 'housemaids.' Thomas and Elizabeth Ward used no occupational titles at all—only proper names. Thomas, Jr., and Harriet called them 'help' or 'hired girls.'

The 'domestic problem' portrayed by nineteenth-century writers and carried forward by some twentieth-century scholars was in part a reaction to the industrialization and immigration that had dramatically altered New England society and economy by 1850. When Samuel Goodrich commenced his recollections in 1856, he professed his intent to present the 'country life' of his youth which, he was confident, contained 'little that is off of the beaten track of common experience.' For him it was a simpler, more comprehensible New England: people shared similar backgrounds, they engaged in agriculture or an ancillary trade, 'every family lived as much as possible within itself,' and exchanged with neighbors for the balance; 'there was not a factory of any kind in the place.' In his memory, like many others, a community harmony accompanied this cultural and economic homogeneity—something irrevocably lost by mid-century.⁷³

The 'domestic problem' was also a response to the prevailing urban ideology of domesticity, which both presumed a divergence of interests and upbringing between mistresses and maids and narrowed the definition of women's proper place, and to the broad-

72. By mid-century one proscriptive writer defined domestics or servants as 'the humbler and more neglected children of our Heavenly Father, whom He has sent to claim our sympathy and aid.' Beecher, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy*, p. 213.

73. Goodrich, *Recollections*, pp. 13, 60, 65.

ening of work opportunities. Until the 1820s domestic service was essentially the only occupation open to women. With factory and outwork employment now available, service became one of a number of options. Combined with the increasing emphasis on privacy, service compared unfavorably in the eyes of many young women.

However, culture, as folklore scholar Henry Glassie has eloquently demonstrated in his study of an Ulster border town, is both conserving and adapting; it is human nature to continue to behave in ways that work, while constantly assessing what is around us and extending to accommodate change.⁷⁴ This is evident in the experiences of the Ward families and their helps. The Wards adapted to structural and demographic shifts in domestic service that were beyond their control but as long as possible maintained a constancy in the texture of work relationships. It is a story of impressive continuity within the larger context of economic and social transformation.

74. Henry Glassie, *Passing the Time in Ballymenone* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), pp. 621-56.

APPENDIX A

THE FAMILIES OF THOMAS W. WARD
AND THOMAS W. WARD, JR.

THOMAS W. WARD b. Aug. 10, 1758
 m. Nov. 28, 1782 Elizabeth Denny
 of Leicester, Mass.
 b. Mar. 1, 1760
 d. Nov. 18, 1846

 d. Aug. 20, 1835

CHILDREN

<i>Name</i>	<i>Birth</i>	<i>Marriage</i>	<i>Death</i>
Andrew Henshaw	May 26, 1784	1809	Feb. 18, 1864
Nahum	Oct. 28, 1785	Oct. 21, 1817	April 6, 1860
Harriet	Oct. 6, 1787	May 13, 1817	Nov. 13, 1824
Joseph	Aug. 18, 1789		Oct. 2, 1821
Artemas	Mar. 21, 1791		Dec. 31, 1816
Elizabeth Denny	Sept. 25, 1793	May 26, 1817	Mar. 14, 1887
Henry Dana	Jan. 13, 1797	Dec. 23, 1837	
		May 26, 1842	Feb. 29, 1884
Thomas Walter	Nov. 27, 1798	Apr. 6, 1825	July 2, 1890
Sarah Henshaw	Nov. 3, 1800	Oct. 3, 1824	1894
Caroline	Jan. 28, 1802	Dec. 30, 1830	Nov. 9, 1869

THOMAS W. WARD, JR. b. Nov. 27, 1798
 m. April 6, 1825 Harriet P. Grosvenor
 of Pomfret, Conn.
 d. March 25, 1876

 d. July 2, 1890

CHILDREN

<i>Name</i>	<i>Birth</i>	<i>Marriage</i>	<i>Death</i>
Samuel Denny	Apr. 3, 1826	May 26, 1853	Nov. 19, 1908
Artemas	July 16, 1828		Oct. 29, 1833
Charles Grosvenor	Dec. 30, 1829		May 16, 1864

<i>Name</i>	<i>Birth</i>	<i>Marriage</i>	<i>Death</i>
Ellen Grosvenor	Jan. 18, 1832	Oct. 19, 1854	Dec. 31, 1916
Thomas Walter	July 6, 1834	Feb. 4, 1864	post-1900
Elizabeth	Dec. 8, 1840		Apr. 12, 1900
Harriet	June 27, 1843		July 28, 1909

APPENDIX B

WARD DWELLINGHOUSE CHRONOLOGY

- 1785-1788 Occupied by two households: the east part by the family of Thomas and Elizabeth Denny Ward, and the west by the family of Artemas and Sarah Trowbridge Ward.
- 1788-1798 Occupied by two households: the east part the same, the west by Artemas Ward and daughter Sarah, who kept house for her widowed father.
- 1792-1829 Occupied as a single dwelling by Thomas and Elizabeth Ward and family, which included his father Artemas until his death in 1800.
- 1829 Occupied as a single dwelling by the families of Thomas Ward, Sr., and Thomas Ward, Jr., while an addition was being built.
- 1830-1846 Occupied by two households: the elder Ward family in the west part, the younger family in the east part. (Thomas, Sr., died in 1835; Elizabeth died in 1846.)
- 1847 The west part was unoccupied except for the south room, converted to a dairy room, and kitchen; as late as 1850 the west parlour remained entirely empty.
- ?-1890 Occupied as a single household by Thomas Ward, Jr. and his family.

APPENDIX C

WORKING WOMEN FROM THE COMMUNITY

	<i>1787-1839</i>		<i>1840-1866</i>	
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
MARITAL STATUS				
married	6	23.1	28	43.8
single	11	42.3	21	32.8
widowed	7	26.9	11	17.2
unknown	2	7.7	4	6.2
RESIDENTIAL STATUS				
father's	5	19.2	15	23.4
husband's	6	23.1	26	40.6
kin	3	11.5	8	12.5
own	3	11.5	4	6.3
boarding	4	15.4	6	9.4
unknown	5	19.2	5	7.8
HOUSEHOLD STRUCTURE				
intact family	10	38.5	44	68.8
broken by death	12	46.1	15	23.4
unknown	4	15.4	5	7.8
STATUS OF HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD				
propertied	6	23.1	26	40.6
no property	16	61.5	35	54.7
unknown	4	15.4	3	4.7
OCCUPATION OF HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD				
male laborer	7	26.9	19	30.0
female laborer	3	11.5	6	9.4
artisan/businessman	3	11.5	14	21.9
farmer	4	15.4	11	17.2
unknown	9	34.6	14	21.9

APPENDIX D

PLACE OF BIRTH AND TYPE OF HOUSEHOLD,
LIVE-IN HELPS

	<i>1787-1839</i>		<i>1840-1866</i>		<i>1830-1846</i>	
	<i>agricultural</i>		<i>agricultural</i>		<i>maintenance</i>	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
SHREWSBURY	3	12	0	0	0	0
OTHER MASS.	21	80	2	12	8	80
IRELAND	2	8	15	88	2	20
TOTAL	26	100	17	100	10	100

PLACE OF BIRTH, COMMUNITY OUTWORKERS
FROM AGRICULTURAL HOUSEHOLDS

	<i>1787-1839</i>		<i>1840-1866</i>	
	#	%	#	%
SHREWSBURY	10	38	25	39
OTHER MASS.	13	50	23	36
OTHER NEW ENGLAND	1	4	2	3
CANADA	0	0	3	5
IRELAND	0	0	10	16
UNKNOWN	2	8	1	1
TOTAL	26	100	64	100

Copyright of Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society is the property of American Antiquarian Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.