

The Life or Biography of Silas Felton
*Written by Himself**

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AT THE AGE of eighteen Silas Felton, the son of a farming family in Marlborough, Massachusetts, read Benjamin Franklin's autobiography and other works, and this was to have a profound influence on the course of his life. In studying his account, it is apparent that Silas Felton consciously or unconsciously sought to imitate the man he admired, even to the extent of setting down the details of his life for his "amusement" as well as a means of re-examining his past conduct. Before analyzing this interesting and revealing autobiography of the early nineteenth century, it would be useful to present a brief sketch of the Felton family.

The family is an old one in Massachusetts history, dating back to Nathaniel, who came to Salem in 1633. He went back to England but returned to the Bay Colony in 1635 and settled in what became Danvers and is present-day Peabody.¹ There he became a freeholder, a member of the church, and a town official, and he lived to the grand age of ninety.² Some of his descendants continued to reside in Danvers; others moved to various parts of the rapidly developing colony. One branch of the family went to Marblehead in the early eighteenth century, and a descendant of that line was Cornelius Conway Felton (1807-1862), who

*The autobiography is in the Manuscript Division of the New York Public Library.

¹Nathaniel Felton married Mary Skelton, daughter of the Rev. Samuel Skelton, who was the first minister in Salem. Cyrus Felton, *A Genealogical History of the Felton Family* (Marlborough, 1886), pp. 4-5.

²*Ibid.*, pp. 4-6.

was Professor of Greek at Harvard and later President.³ Jacob Felton (1713-1789), Silas' grandfather, moved into the interior and settled in 1738 in Marlborough, where he acquired land and followed his trade as a cordwainer.⁴

The Feltons of Marlborough were a farming people who were active participants in village life. Both Silas' grandfather and father served as town officers and as members of the school committee.⁵ Silas turned from farming to teaching and trade ("Nature never formed me to follow an Agricultural Life," he wrote), but he followed the family tradition in his service to the community. He was a prominent and popular figure in his town until his death on August 16, 1828. At nineteen, he became one of the local schoolmasters; at the young age of twenty-three, he was selected as tax assessor, a position which he held until his death with the exception of five years. He was also town clerk for twelve years, a selectman for eleven, a justice of the peace, and a representative to the General Court for three terms.⁶ The area he served so well and helped develop honored him by re-naming the little settlement known as the "Mills," where Felton and his partner located their store, Feltonville.⁷

The autobiography, which he began in the winter of 1801, ends the following year, perhaps because the writer had become too involved with his expanding business, his family, and his civic duties to carry on the story of his life.⁸ The

³ His brother, Samuel Morse Felton (1809-1889), Harvard class of 1834, was a well-known figure in the business world as President of the Fitchburg Railroad, later of the Philadelphia, Wilmington, and Baltimore Railroad, and of the Pennsylvania Steel Company. *Ibid.*, pp. 218-223.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26, 48.

⁶ Charles Hudson, *History of the Town of Marlborough* (Boston, 1862), pp. 280-284, 363.

⁷ A grist and perhaps a saw-mill existed here as early as 1700, thus the name "Mills." In the nineteenth century shoe manufacturing developed in the area. *Ibid.*, pp. 230, 266, 363.

⁸ In 1801 a son was born but died within six weeks. Two daughters, Harriet, born in 1802, and Charlotte, two years later, lived to adulthood. Felton, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

account is brief, only fifty pages, but it is a revealing document of the man himself and his times. The influence of Benjamin Franklin's ideas is evident throughout the sketch: in style of writing, in philosophy expounded, and in the conduct of his life. Though Felton explains that he is writing for his amusement, one would deduce from the inclusion of details and the full description of his views, attitudes, and actions that he was writing for posterity as well. "The Life or Biography of Silas Felton" is not a polished work. The erasures, insertion of words, and other corrections would indicate that he went over his manuscript; however, basically the account is as he originally composed it. It lacks coherence and unity; it is discursive and disjointed. But his simple and straightforward style makes the piece a readable document, if not a work of art. Some of the errors in spelling and grammar and the overuse of punctuation marks and capital letters can be excused if one considers the nature of the work and the era in which he lived. Consistency in spelling and punctuation was not widespread in the first years of the nineteenth century.

Silas Felton was an ordinary American growing up in the early national period in a small town in central Massachusetts. Outside Marlborough, he was an unknown figure. The man who emerges from the autobiography, however, is a remarkable individual. Here is a self-educated man with varied interests and abilities. And in tracing his growth and development, we have an excellent picture of the impact of the Enlightenment on the mind of a young man living in a rural community: his drive for self-education, his acceptance of a natural religion, and his carefully reasoned approach to solving life's problems. Benjamin Franklin was Felton's principal teacher, and one concludes from reading the autobiography that he was an apt pupil. His formal training was meager, only a limited common

school education which he received rather sporadically; yet because he wished to excel in learning, he read widely and voraciously, as his list of titles attests. He applied his knowledge to the world around him, and his conclusions are in their simple form the creed of a deist and a rationalist. Again and again one sees the reasonable man in action in everyday life: in his organization of his free time between improving his mind and seeking more worldly pleasures, in his determination to succeed as a teacher, in his careful record of expenditures, and in his touching courtship of Miss Lucretia Fay.

Felton paints a clear picture of his intellectual growth, but perhaps the personal memoir is more significant for the reader today because it presents so many facets of life in a rural society in the early national period. It is a warm and human account filled with a great variety of interesting and often homely details. He writes about the social life of a young man in those days; he mentions a severe storm in the winter of 1802 that left thirty-two inches of snow; he discusses the development of his new business; and he gives an idea about the cost of living. His references to the subscription library in Marlborough, the availability of books and newspapers, and his own reading habits tell something about the cultural life in the town. He hints at the growing separation between city and country in his remarks about the young schoolmaster from Boston who was ignorant of "the manners of the Country people."

In his description of the schools and of the status and role of the schoolmaster, Silas Felton has left an invaluable account for reconstructing the educational situation in an era which is often overlooked for lack of information. The fact that the selectmen invited Felton, who had only a minimum of formal training, to teach at one of the town schools indicates that there was an acute shortage of quali-

fied teachers at that time. Felton gives a good account of the moving school system which was a well-established practice in Marlborough.⁹ It meant holding sessions, usually seven and one-half weeks in length, for different groups at various parts of the township. In five years of teaching, he had a total of 778 scholars.

The town's choice of Silas Felton as a schoolmaster was a good one. He was a conscientious and diligent teacher who took his duties seriously, and he learned with his students, some of whom probably were not much younger than he. Recognizing his lack of formal training, he sought to improve his knowledge by attending Leicester Academy for several months. His age, the same as that of the English master there, did not hinder his progress or his relationships at the school.

His discussion of his teaching career, which he continued even after he established a store with Joel Cranston, reveals both his apprehensions and his enthusiasm. What beginning teacher has not undergone the experience Felton describes when he entered the schoolhouse for the first time: "My heart almost leap't into my mouth for fear that I was not sufficient for the undertaking and consequently should not give satisfaction." His detailed account of teaching the art of oratory and of holding exhibitions to display his scholars' abilities tells a great deal about the man and his methods of instruction. And how well he expresses his feelings when, after a particularly drawn-out controversy with a parent over a discipline matter, he states: "Every day when I went to the Schoolhouse did I count the days I

⁹ In 1762 six school houses were constructed; one was near the Felton farm, and Silas mentions teaching there. In 1803 he was among those who submitted a report calling for a Latin and Greek master and for English masters for the seven schools, each of which was to commence in mid-November and continue for at least thirteen or as long as eighteen weeks. There was also to be a schoolmistress for seven and one-half weeks in the summer. Hudson, *op. cit.*, pp. 212-218.

had to keep till the happy day arrived on which I dismissed the School." In fact the discipline case was practically a *cause célèbre* in the community, with a minister, an attorney, and a prominent townsman all intervening to settle the affair. Though Felton was informed that "the law was very favorable to the Schoolmaster," he had to face parental wrath and the disapproval of many of the people of Marlborough. In reflecting upon the case in his autobiography, Felton takes comfort in the fact that the next master "had another affray with the same boy and man."

Silas Felton left for posterity an informative and valuable record of his thoughts and reminiscences, and one wishes he had continued his life's story and had gone into greater detail about the manners and customs of the people. In 1797, for example, his natural curiosity took him into western Massachusetts and into the Mohawk and Susquehannah Valleys of New York, but his account of the trip is sketchy. He merely whets the reader's appetite. Nonetheless, his autobiography is a document of the spirit of the times; it reflects in style and content the conscious efforts of a man to apply a reasoned philosophy to his life.

The editing of the manuscript has been kept to a minimum and was mainly in punctuation and capitalization (removing superfluous commas and occasionally inserting marks and beginning every new sentence with a capital letter) in order to make reading easier and the account more intelligible. The dollar sign and decimal point were used instead of the abbreviations of D. and C., and here and there words were inserted in brackets to add to the sense of a statement. Basically, however, the work is as Silas Felton wrote it; the spelling and internal capitalization are his. These as well as his rambling sentences and incomplete phrases and clauses, which express a fleeting thought usually, add to the flavor of the autobiography.

The Life or Biography of Silas Felton
Written by Himself

To retain the Casualties of Life,
Is the happiness of contented Man.

Marlborough, Massachusetts¹⁰
Preface

Not knowing whose hands accident or negligence may cause these hasty and inaccurate lines to fall into, I therefore write a few lines by way of preface, and assert that they were not penned with an intention of ever being shewn to any individual, whatever, but merely for my own amuse[me]nt

Having frequently contemplated upon my past conduct, and wishing to call to mind every important change of my past life, and knowing that as we advance in years we often by slow and imperceptible degrees become forgetful, therefore not knowing whether this may be my unfortunate lot or no, I think it the most sure and know it to be the most agreeable way to me, that I can retain, or call to mind each transaction of my life.

Considering the foregoing observation, I sometime during the winter of 1801 began, in my leisure hours, to think, and then to write, to the best of my remembrance, the transactions, which have occurred in my past life. I have occasionally continued it to the present time. Much of it I am sensible is not pointed right, more is not grammatical, and all in a great degree very ineligmantly composed. I have occasionally thrown in some of my observations upon different subjects, but have intended to make them as few and short as possible: but think it is full enough interspersed with such things, for the more concise and plain any thing of the kind is, the higher I esteem it.

¹⁰ Silas Felton uses the old spelling of Marlboro almost consistently throughout the autobiography.

BIOGRAPHY OF SILAS FELTON
 WRITTEN BY HIMSELF

Jacob Felton, a cordwainer by trade, came from Danvers, in early Life, to Marlborough, Middlesex County, Massachusetts State, and settled down for life; here he was twice married; by the last wife, viz. Hezediah How, he had four Sons and two Daughters, viz. Sarah, Stephen, Silas, Matthias, Joel and Lucy. He followed his occupation more or less until the infirmities of age brought him unfit for labour. In Autumn he was seized with the gravel,¹¹ and died Nov. 20th 1789 aged about 77 years, having acquired a handsome Estate, which his Children chearfully and peaceably divided among themselves after his death.

Stephen, his second Child by his last wife, married Levinah Stow, eldest Daughter of David Stow of Grafton, by whom he had six sons and two Daughters, viz. Silas (myself), Elijah, who died at the age of a few months, Sally, who died about two years old, William, Lydia, Aaron, Jacob and Stephen. Stephen (my father) settled down at home with his father, and followed farming and brought his Children up to it, giving them common school Education.

I was born on the 24th Feb. 1776 and named Silas after my uncle of that name, who died about 20 years old. In my infancy, I am told, I was generally unwell, but as I advanced in years I became more healthy. When arrived to an age sufficient for Labour I followed working with my father upon the farm, except such times as we had a School kept near us, which I generally attended. Our Schools at that time were short only 7½ weeks kept in one house yearly, although I used to attend, sometime, more than one in a year. Being more fond of School than of work I generally had more praises bestowed upon me at school than at home. When at home I was call'd rather lazy, but at School I almost always was at the head of the Class of which I belonged. At the age of 9 or 10 I was very fond of reading entertaining stories, and borrowed all the boy books within my reach. These I perused evenings and Stormy Days. Becoming more fond of

¹¹ He is undoubtedly referring to kidney stones.

books, I used at every convenient opportunity to take my book and step ought of sight; by often repeating this and being out of the way when wanted caused the people often to bestow the name of Lazy upon me, which I acknowledge was not altogether misplaced.

Experience has since taught me that people do not pay attention enough to the Inclinations of their children, but commonly put them to the same kind of business, which they themselves follow, and when they find them not attentive to those particular occupations, accuse them of being idle, (although diligently employed in forming something, which their different fancies or inclinations lead them.) Being chastised for such things, if often damps their spirits, which renders them careless of what they do, and sometimes leads to looseness of manners; whereas if the leading inclinations of the children were sought after, and when found, permitted to follow them, [it] might often prove highly advantageous to themselves, their parents and Society.

But to return about 1790 a law passed doubling our schooling.¹² My father having considerable business to transact, I was kept at work, so that I had only a common chance like the other boys in the neighborhood. Strictly following my old practice of reading, I used generally to have some book or newspaper every evening and Stormy Day, except when I was roving about on the evenings, which is generally the case with boys from 10 to 21 years old.

From fourteen to nineteen I followed the schools only a part of the time they kept, but practised carrying my book home on the evenings, to study, because I was generally ambitious to excel in learning. When at School I was pleased with the business, but when at work at home the hours seem'd to glide slowly along. I frequently met with some accidents such as cutting my finger and once broke my left leg by a Wheel falling on it and which caused me often to say that Nature never formed me to follow an

¹² This is the act of June 25, 1789, which required towns of 200 families (which Marlborough had at this time) to keep a grammar master and an English master, each for twelve months of the year. Apparently there was no grammar master, but the town in 1790 ordered that each of seven schools was to be kept for seven and one-half weeks. *Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 1789-1807*, I (Boston 1807), pp. 469-470; Hudson, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

Agricultural Life, for my mind was never content when about it; but learning was my greatest delight; accordingly when arrived to the age of 19, I had cyphered through the principal part of Pike's large Arithmetick, could write a middling hand, and could read as well as most boys of that age.

In the year 1792, a number of the Inhabitants of Marlboro' formed themselves into a Society, by the name of The Marlboro' Library. It consisted of about 60 proprietors, who put in at first two Dollars and fifty Cents and agreed to pay 25 Cents annually on the 1st Monday of Oct. This sum purchased books sufficient to be call'd a handsome Library.

I, by frequent Solicitations, caused my father to join as one of the first proprietors, and he not being fond of reading, I had the books to myself; this gave me an excellent opportunity of improving my mind. But at this age the inclination for or the love of company generally keeps the mind disturbed and roving. Sensible that it is best for young people to associate together to partake of the pleasures, annex'd to the prime of Life; and possessing a strong desire to [partake] of the fountain of youthful pleasures, like the rest of my companions, which was commonly done by visiting each other in the evening—by practising these, I soon found they interfered with each other, which lessened my chance for reading. I sometimes thought of giving up one of them, but my desire for each being so great, I could not think of parting with either. Contemplating upon them, methought, I would go out on evenings as much together as I could make it convenient; then after I had slept one night, I was tolerably bright for reading the next. This I soon found helped me in a considerable Degree, for the remainder of the evenings and Sundays gave me a very good Chance to gratify my inclination for reading.

Some of the books, which fell into my hands, appeared to me to contain dark and mysterious passages, which my reason (though small at that time) caused me to doubt very much, especially some passages of the Scriptures. About this time the Age of Reason, written by Thomas Paine appeared; I perused it very attentively; although many advised me not to read it. A number

of Answers were immediately written with an Intention of confuting the sentiments advanced by Paine. These I as readily read with close attention, compared passages together, and these with the texts referred to in the Bible. These had a contrary effect with me, than what the authors intended. The ministers also appeared zealously engaged in preaching against the Deists, or as they stiled them, Infidels. Almost every one, which I heard, carried their points to such a pitch that I think I may safely say that they advanced many large strides beyond the truth. Their being so zealous for the Clergy's Interest and so regardless of the truth, as many times to say in the Pulpit that there was not a Deist to be found who is an honest man, caused me to have a paltry opinion of these, and had I judg'd of the Christian Religion by them I should [have] utterly rejected it, as being an Imposition upon the people; but having set reason at helm, and by that and conscience, I say these caused me to consider of my ways. And in contemplating, I thought it right to judge by the Doctrine itself, not by the pretended actors.

Seeing so many different sentiments, each embraced by a number of followers proclaiming that their own tenents were orthodox, all others heterodox; some carry their points so far as to alledge that belief is optional. Viewing each attentively, without prejudice (as much as possible) I stood halting between two opinions. At length reason assumed her seat and insinuated that they who assert they can believe as they please either act through Ignorance or an Obstinate will.

At this time (viz. about 18) Doct. Franklins life and writings fell into my hands. I perused them attentively, and found many very valuable precepts, which I endeavoured to treasure up and follow. And I believe I may safely say they kept me from many Errors, for from that time I determined to *adhere strictly to Reason, Industry, and good Economy, to Always examine both sides, to keep my mind free from prejudice of any kind whatever, always to practice reason and truth*, believing it is better to follow the dictates of Reason and Conscience, than to run heedlessly on after some headstrong fanatic, who blinded by his own prejudice, sees only one

side, and is ready to extirpate from the face of the Earth every person, who does not think like him and all under the pretence of doing God's service.

Situated in a land of Liberty, books being plenty and Newspapers circulating freely, I not only confined myself to Morality and Religion, but made Politics no small part of my study. Many volumes fell into my hands that contained true genuine Republicanism. By a perusal of these with the newspapers of the time, I formed a steady uniform resolution to adhere to reason and truth, and in so doing to add my mite towards supporting a republican government, which I believe is not only good, but the best form, where the people possess knowledge sufficient to maintain it with Wisdom and firmness.

My being so much attached to books and sometimes [my] venturing [to] speak my religious opinions caused me to be the subject of some conversation, especially among those, who had never ventured to think of themselves, but had taken the opinions of their fathers as handed down to them, without enquiring why they Did so. This class of people, urg'd on by the priests, are always ready to condemn any person, whom they find of a different Religion from their own. To see one thus early engaged in the study of religion, morality and politics, we might suppose sufficient to employ his mind; but I assure you that the Desire for pleasure and amusement, also that still stronger one for the fair sex, implanted in man will not permit him to sit silently at home studying into the knowledge of futurity, especially me—who, although fond [of] reading, yet was fond of other recreations, and did as opportunities presented partake of the youthful joys, like other young people. Among the number of Misses to whom I paid my address was one Lucretia Fay. In October 1794 (being about 18) I began to court her and for some time, not with any intention of Marrying her, but merely to spend a few evenings in a social and agreeable way.

About the last of March 1795 the Selectmen of Marlboro' applied to me to teach the town school at the easterly part of the Town. This was entirely unexpected to me, and I have great

reason to acknowledge myself very much indebted to Capt. Aaron Brigham (who was the one that applied to me personally) and shall ever after respect him for it, believing it was through his recommendations that I was applied to, and that this was the mainspring of the prosperity which followed.

When I considered that I was but a few days past 19, that I was almost ignorant of the English grammar, I almost came to a determination to answer them in the negative, notwithstanding it had been my fixed determination for a considerable time to follow the business, as soon as I thought myself sufficiently informed. My father said I might do as I pleased; others informed me that it was probable I should meet with no difficulty in teaching that School. Upon this information I consented, and immediately applied to the Rev. Assa Packard for to be examined. After questioning me upon the rules of reading etc., he gave me Certificate, certifying that I was in his opinion capable of the business, both in point of Learning and moral character.¹³

On the 31st of March 1795 I sat out from my fathers and arrived at the school-house about 9 o'clock (it being only 4½ miles). When I entered the school-house, my heart almost leap't into my mouth for fear that I was not sufficient for the undertaking and consequently should not give satisfaction; but recollecting my former determination to be faithful in what I undertook, I roused my resolution and exerted my abilities to the utmost, both by attending diligently to the order and regulation of the School, likewise on the evenings and mornings by looking over every sum or lesson, which I set, with an intention they should not say I set them sums or lessons, which I did not understand myself. By these means they always found me ready to answer any question proposed, and thought me much more learned than I really was; also by practising in this way, I soon found I advanced in knowledge faster than any of my pupils. Although

¹³ The system of certification by a minister was a traditional one in Massachusetts; though with the growing secularization, the schoolmaster's religious beliefs were not examined. The act of June 25, 1789, required the town's selectmen and minister to pass on a candidate's ability to teach reading and writing and on his personal character. The fine for teaching without a certificate was set at twenty shillings. *Laws of the Commonwealth of Mass., op. cit.*, pp. 469-470.

I thought when I began the School I understood almost all the rules of Arithmetic, but I soon found my mistake; although I had cyphered through those rules a number of times, I had never been informed into the nature of them; but knowing now that I had to teach them, I sought after the very Elements of them and found myself well rewarded. After persevering $7\frac{1}{2}$ weeks in this way I had the pleasing satisfaction to find I had pleased the Scholars and gained the approbation of all their parents.

When I began, many, who wished me well, feared lest I should not give satisfaction; these acknowledged they were happily disappointed, while others silently hoped I should not, and would sneerin[g]ly say they didn't know I was better qualified than many others; but to my inexpressible Satisfaction did I find these inwardly disappointed; thus did I find myself thribly [*sic*] paid and more too, for adhering to truth and reason, for I received my wages, satisfied my employers, discomfited my enemies.

Immediately the Selectmen Engaged [me] to teach another School at the North part of the Town and raised my wages to 9 Dollars a month, which before was 8 Dollars 33 Cents. I continued the same practice as before and found myself well rewarded.

Ending the school about the first of July, my father wanted me at home. Accordingly I went home and followed farming untill the middle of October.

Intending to take another School as soon as convenient, and knowing that my knowledge of Grammar was very small, I solicited my father, and at length gained his consent to attend an Academy a few months. From October 1794 to the present time, viz. October 1795, it being one year I had visited Miss Lucretia Fay. Considering my circumstances and knowing that I was not in any condition to marry, that if I attended school it was necessary to have my mind fix'd there, that if I followed the same course much longer it would be difficult to part with each other. Considering all these I finally drew up a resolution in my own mind to bid her farewell. Accordingly I visited her one evening and told her my determination; we then parted, never expecting to keep each others company again; the next day I proceeded to

Leicester Academy, and there continued six weeks.¹⁴ It being thanksgiving, the most of the Scholars left the Academy to keep thanksgiving with their friends. I did as the others; but as fortune would have it on thanksgiving evening most of my Companions were going to Miss Fays to spend the Evening. I accompanied them. After spending the evening they returned home. I thought I would chat with Miss L. a little while, tarried behind. Time, when we are in such company, passes swiftly on, and in the Morning I found myself where a few days I could almost have sworn I should not have been, but now I summoned all my resolution and resolved once more to bid her farewell. This I did though not without many silent thoughts on both sides I dare affirm.

I now sat out for Leicester. On arriving there I found the scholars who remained very much disturbed with the Assistant. Mr. Adams,¹⁵ the preceptor, being absent; Mr. Dehon, the Assistant,¹⁶ [was] a young man just graduated from Harvard University, a native of Boston and a bankers son; being a good scholar, and feeling himself quite important, also ignorant of human nature or the manners of the Country people, thought he could display his importance, but he found his mistake, for some left the school, others grin and bore, while one composed or caused

¹⁴ Leicester Academy, in the town of that name, was established in 1784 in order to meet the demands of the residents in the central part of the state. Emory Washburn, *Brief Sketch of the History of Leicester Academy*, Pt. I (Boston, 1855), pp. 6-20.

¹⁵ The principal preceptor was Ebenezer Adams, who remained at the Academy until 1806. He then became Professor of Languages at Dartmouth, and from 1809 to 1833 he served as Professor of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy. *Ibid.*, p. 136.

¹⁶ Mr. Dehon, "a good scholar," was Theodore Dehon, who ranked first in the class of 1795 at Harvard. Born in Boston in 1776 of Huguenot stock, he was the same age as Silas Felton, one of his scholars. As was common in that period, Dehon taught while still a student at Harvard, receiving a leave of absence of three weeks in addition to his regular winter vacation in his last two years at the college. After getting his A.B., he took charge of the English Department at Leicester Academy where he remained one year. He left to study theology and was ordained a priest in the Protestant Episcopal Church in 1800. He first served as the rector at Newport, Rhode Island, and in 1809 he left to become the minister of St. Michael's Church at Charlestown, South Carolina. Three years later he was appointed the Bishop of the diocese of South Carolina. He died in 1817 of yellow fever. *Harvard University Quinquennial Catalogue of the Officers and Graduates, 1636-1930* (Cambridge, 1930), p. 250; Harvard University Archives Folder on Theodore Dehon; Records of the College Faculty, VI (1788-1797), pp. 208, 266; Washburn, *op. cit.*, p. 130, 143.

to be a piece, setting forth the powers he [Dehon] wished to display over those, who were under his tuition, which was spoken before him at one of the private Exhibitions. This he appeared not to notice. But for my part, though I often saw his great importance shewed to others, for the most part he treated me well, so that at the expiration of 10 weeks, I had acquired a considerable knowledge of the English grammar, had Studied with his help the hardest sums in Pike's Arithmetic, also a small portion of geography. He told me my Lessons shewed my Industry and progress in learning, that I was, in his opinion, well qualified to teach an English School. I now returned to my father and worked upon the farm one week; and then engaged in keeping the Town School again at ten Dollars a month and continued it till the next July, they raising my wages to 10½ Dollars a month after the first three expired. In July I went home and helped my father hay 6 weeks.

During this time I visited, now and then, some of the young Misses, but as for Miss Lucretia I was in company with her at Election, and as before I tarried 'till morning, and that sufficed until July; being then at my father's, a small distance from there, I waited but three days before I visited her again, and so to do for some time.

Immediately after haying was over, I engaged in teaching school again at 12 Dollars a month, and continued constantly employed both summer an[d] winter going round the town at 7½ weeks in a house 'till the last of August 1797. In the mean time I thought my wages very good, being 144 Dollars a year and boarded, but at the years end my money fell short of what I expected. Upon this I resolved to know what my expences were even to every particular, and what every particular cost. Accordingly on the first day of October 1796 I prepared me a book and kept an exact account of my wages and expences intending to reckon and settle with myself at the expiration of every year.

Having had for some time past a desire to take a journey to the westward, I agreed with one Wm. Ward to accompany me on the last of August, but he failed me. I then resolved to set out

alone; accordingly I provided myself a good horse, and on the last of August 1797 I set out from my father's and proceeded to Leicester, thence to Northampton, Albany and up the Mohawk river to a place call'd Norway on the Royal Grants so call'd. After riding 6 days without seeing any person I knew or [there] even being any of [on?] the way after I pass'd Leicester, I arrived at one Theophilus Hardy's, who married an aunt of mine viz. Lucy Felton, here I tarried three days; thence proceeded to the little falls on the Mohawk river, thence 3 miles up the river, then turned to the South and traveled through Anders town and Warren to the head of Lake Otsaga [Otsego], thence down the side of the Lake through Cooperstown 20 miles down the Susquehannah river to John Feltons' in a Town call'd Suffrage; he was the child my grandfather had by his first wife; here I tarried 4 or 5 days; but not altogether pleased, for here I expected to find a friend, a cousin with whom I was well acquainted, but he had mov'd 150 miles farther down the river. This was a disappointment; but having travelled sufficient to form to myself an idea of the Soil, of the manners of the Inhabitants etc., I sat out for home accompanied by my uncle a few miles. I took my route through Cherry valley to the Mohawk river, crossed at the same place as before, and came all the way on the opposite side that I went before, crossed the Hudson river at or just below Albany, came down the turnpike through Pittsfield, Northampton etc. and in 4 weeks from the time I sat out, arrived home in good health and spirits.

Immediately I engaged in the school again and continued to go round the town as before, also had my pay raised to 13 Dollars a month. I continued in this business until the 23d of May 1799 except 9 days that I learnt the art of Surveying of Mr. Joel Cranston, which art I practised, when occasion required.

On the first of October 1797 (being in my 22d year) it being one year since I began an account of my expences, I examined them and found that Books, paper, quills, Watches etc. amounted to \$14.90. Expences on the journey before mentioned 12 Dollars 46 Cents; horse hire for it, 9 Dollars; Cloathes \$46.92; other

expences immediately confirmed, such as Dances etc., 14 Dollars 30 Cents; total 97 Dollars and 58 Cents. My wages this year amounted to 127 Dollars, which leaves a balance in my favour of 29 Dollars 42 Cents. For the particulars see page first of my expenditure.

From July 1797 to July 1798 I continued my addresses to Miss Fay. And here it will [be] necessary to inform my reader who she is. Miss Lucretia Fay was about two years younger than myself, being born March 3d 1778. She was the 2d Daughter of Levi Fay of Marlboro', who was a good farmer, but had always lived by hiring farms, until 1798 when he purchased a tract of new land at Lunenburg, Vermont, and mov'd his family there in the Month of February 1799. By this practice of hiring farms, although he had one farm for 18 years successively, he had only acquired property sufficient to purchase his land and move his family there etc. Consequently he was not able to help his Children very much, but could only afford them a decent setting out (as it is generally call'd).

I now began seriously to consider what I could do with a family, that if I did not intend to marry it was time our courtship was ended. My fortune was small and my prospects of gaining it, to any considerable amount, was also gloomy; so that to me it appeared best to end our Courtship by mutual agreement; and often when going in the evening to visit her, did I form to myself a determination that this should be the last, but after spending the night agreeably and the morning appearing, I as often thought I would come once more; and thus did I continue 'till July 1798, when we mutually agreed to part with each other, after a considerable conversation; but not without many silent thoughts on each part and perhaps I might add something more, but I forbear.

Miss L. at this time lived in Northboro'. Returning home in the morning I expatiated largely on the result of the night past; also on the course I meant to pursue. Now, methinks I can live without troubling myself about the means of providing for a family at present. That I will enjoy myself as easy as possible, visit some of the Misses now and then; but declared to myself

that I would not court any one steadily, thus did I continue a month or two, but long absence from Miss Fay and thinking she was not entirely easy, made me wish to converse with her a few moments, not that I wished to court her again, but only to talk with her a few moments, and then did I resolve I would not. To shake off these thoughts, I found it necessary to quit reading (which you may judge was not very easy to accomplish, for I generally read upon an average from 20 to 30 pages daily) and follow visiting the neighbors and Ladies after School. In this way I did continue till I became quite unsteady in my mind. In the mean time a number of Misses were striving to excite my attention, but they succeeded no farther than the pleasure of my Company a night or so.

In this serious dilemma did I meditate on my pillow hour after hour, what step to take; if I went back I must marry, for her father was about to move to [*illeg.*] the ensuing Winter, and what to do with a wife I did not know; if I kept away from her, I was persuaded she was not altogether easy, for I had reason to believe her mind was not more calm than my own. And I seriously confess that I believe it very hard for any young Couple to part with each other after a Courtship of 3 or four years, and that without ever having the least difference; I acknowledge that after this length of time spent together we had each a kind feeling for the other. Meditating night after night on my pillow I at length resolved to send her a few lines, and to write them in as forcible a manner as possible, thinking if she withstood them and gave me a denial, it would ease my mind entirely, and I should feel myself completely justified in not visiting her again; but if she did not and answered them in the affirmative I would see her again and consult what would be for the best. By viewing other people and contemplating on their Lives, I had formed the Idea that a couple equally yoked and well disposed are the most happy; and those hasty marriages for Money, honor or lust are most unhappy. Consequently that Marriage is the most important step of Life; and ought to be entered upon as such. After seriously thinking, and thinking the foregoing over and over again I wrote the following Lines.

* * * * *

Marlboro' Sept 25th 1798

Miss Lucretia

Having a few moments of serious reflection—I have ventured to resume my pen, to write a few lines to you—but what shall I write? Shall I write to you as a friend, or as a foe? I will write what has been the theme of my thoughts for some time past, though it is imposible to unfold the whole, for my mind has traversed the globe around but no relief has found. In vain have I endeavoured to penetrate into the foreknowledge of hidden mysteries in search of something, which may be productive of mutual advantage to our temporal concerns. Every project, which could be devised, either by the idle delusive dreams of fancy, or by the more serious and deliberate consideration, has not escaped the strict scrutiny of my mind. I have ransacked and ransacked the different occupations, which are followed in the world untill I have almost distracted my brain; yet, I know not what to do. But what signifies all this? Is it not better to make some final determination and abide by it, than to remain as I am? This I believe is best, and this I thought I had done, and more than once too, as you very well know! Yet, I hope you will believe me when I tell you that there is something implanted in my breast, which seems to say that your company is of much more satisfaction to me than your absence and had it not been for what was said, when we parted, I should have had a short talk with you if nothing more. But, perhaps you have heard of some reports, which have been circulated since I left you, and will say that I left you with a determination of paying my addresses to somebody else. But this I affirm and solemnly declare before God and man that it was with no such intention; but it was with a full conviction (as I thought) that it was best for both of us, and a sincere desire that we both might become more happy, as I believe you think, or any body else would, if they knew my reasons as well as you. But fearing that I shall weary your patience I will close by only observing that I should be highly gratified with a short conversation if agreeable to you and hope that you remain so much of my friend, yet, as to return me an answer, whither it is or not, as soon as a convenient opportunity admits.

By so doing I remain your
 ever loving and
 affectionate friend
 S. Felton

Miss F.

* * * * *

In anxious suspense did I wait for an answer; but was soon relieved by receiving one in the affirmative and as chance would have it, we soon had a convenient meeting, which meetings we continued as we had formerly done, until the Seventeenth of January 1799, when the Parson (the Rev. Asa Packard) ratified the treaty of marriage.

In the February following I kept the School near my fathers and boarded with him. In the course of this Month I moved my wife to my fathers, where we lived until the 12th of June following.

Here I shall go back a little, in order first to give my expenditure from October 1797 to '99, also some of my modes in school, and some incidents, which befel me while teaching school.

From the 1st of Oct. '97 to '98 my expences were for Books, paper, quills etc. \$1.37, pocket money \$14.57, cloathes \$45.65, Taxes \$2.08, learning the art of surveying, and purchasing tools for the same \$25.33. Total 89 Dollars. My wages were \$141.33, which leaves a balance 52 Dollars 33 Cents gains this year.

From the 1st of Oct. '98 to the 20th of June '99 (being the time I began my trade) my expences were for books, paper and quills \$3.94, expences immediately consumed \$8.05, Cloathes \$32.96, furniture \$13.08, Taxes \$2.59. Total \$60.62. My wages were 124 Dollars, which leaves a balance in my favour of 63 Dollars 38 Cents. Thus I find that in two years 8 months I have gained by teaching school 145 Dollars and 13 Cents. In reality it will amount to considerable more, for out of the above expences, I included my surveying tools, and was better cloathed than when I began.

I find my cloathes, upon an average for 2 years 8 months, cost me nearly 4 Dollars a month. For the particulars of the above see 2d and 3d page of my expenditure.

I shall now begin my expenditure in June.

Adhering strictly to the principle I laid down when I first engaged in school, I constantly studied what would be advantageous to the scholars. Among the many schemes I tried, was that of teaching the scholars the art of oratory, although I was never taught it myself, yet I thought I would make an attempt. Ac-

Accordingly in Novr '96 at the school house near my father's, I gave a number of pieces to about 30 of my best scholars to learn, so that they could say them, without the assistance of any book or prom[p]ter; these pieces I first carefully perused and then studied to suit them as well as possible to the tempers and dispositions of the scholars. The pieces being a considerable part of them of the funny kind, and the undertaking entirely new, caused them soon to have each of their parts by heart; but when they began to speak, it was very awkwardly, indeed, for although I had seen one or two exhibitions, I did not understand the mode of teaching, only as the sense of the different subjects taught me, and the scholars were entirely unacquainted with the very meaning of what they were to perform. Accordingly many at the performances were some [soon?] discouraged; but as soon as I began to dress them to suit their respective parts, it raised their ambition to such a pitch that their greatest thought was, who would perform the best. Accordingly when out of school hours they were learning their pieces (for I made them learn their pieces at home or in the evening, and met at the schoolhouse in the evenings also to hear them speak, so that it was done in the time when they would [have] been at play except 4 half afternoons which I devoted to that purpose.)

As soon as I thought they were sufficiently advanced and their minds fortified with courage, I allowed those persons, who wished to see them, to come to the schoolhouse, and had more or less spectators every evening, which [while] they performed.

On the last of February '97 my school drawing near a close at this place, I appointed an evening for Exhibition, which happened to be a very warm muddy time, but notwithstanding the badness of the going the schoolhouse was crowded with people, which acknowledged they were much gratified with the performance. When I ended the school I sincerely believe that the scholars, in general, were farther advanced in reading, writing and cyphering, than they would have been, had the Exhibition been omitted, and I had the pleasing satisfaction to have the parents of the children of my opinion and pleased with my instruction, although it was in the same school that I had formerly

been instructed and some of the scholars my mates—excepting a few superstitious bigots, who pretended they thought it was the works of the Devil.

In the winter of 1798 and '99 I kept the term of 15 weeks near Samuel Witt's. Here I mentioned to the scholars to have an Exhibition, which so pleased them, that they immediately purchased Stearns's dialogues, by my recommending them, which greatly eased my task (for before I selected the pieces as I found them in different places). I proceeded as before and had the satisfaction to find them advance very fast not only in that branch, but in every other.

At the close of the School the selectmen and Minister for the first time visited my school. After hearing them read, recite their lesson in grammar, viewing their writing and cyphering, we proceed to Deacon Josiah How's to perform the evening exercise, where we were crowded with spectators, notwithstanding we left the schoolhouse for the sake of having a larger place.

After the performance was over the selectmen highly applauded the Scholars and said that they performed in every branch beyond their expectations, and the parents frequently told me their children never learnt so much in one school before.

In the winter of 1800 I again had another Exhibition at the north part of the town, which proved equally successful as before. Many of the Selectmen asserted they performed much better than they expected. These Exhibitions pleased the greater part of the people, and many, who were strong opposers in the beginning, had honesty at heart [and] afterwards informed me that they had their information from the enemies of it, and that their information was false, but that after seeing the effects it produced was highly in favor of it. A few superstitious and bigoted persons, who preached against, could not be prevailed upon to come see them, for fear, I conclude, that they should find nothing against it, consequently that they must acknowledge they were wrong or produce arguments that it was a bad practice. But for myself after experiencing teaching schools for nearly four years I affirm that I can learn a school more in the same time in this way than any other I know of.

I don't intend to relate every little incident, but will just stop to inform my readers one or two, which happened in school. After having kept a number of Schools in different parts of the town, before that near my father's, here I had some, who were some[what] younger than myself and being acquainted with me they thought not to mind me, one of which was my brother Aaron. After frequently calling them up and informing them the Consequences, I, one day, caught three of them deeply engaged in play, Aaron and two others; these I flogged stoutly; and two behaved well for the future; but Aaron said he wasn't going to mind Silas, [brother?]; him I whipt once or twice more and he afterwards behaved well.

On the second time of my keeping [school] at the Meeting house, namely, on the 16th of April 1798, I thought I would exert my talents to the utmost, but unfortunately for me, some of them thought themselves much better than their poorer neighbors—consequently these wished to be indulged in play very much; but I determined to treat all alike and shew favors to none. This caused these well feeling misses to dislike me in school. Having kept about half the term, viz. about 4 weeks, I one day caught George How, son of Lovewell How, a boy about 10 or 12 years old, in a lie. I examined the Witnesses carefully, which were some of these well feeling misses, who affirmed point blank, that he absolutely had done something to them, which he denied; after examining a considerable number of witnesses, who all told one story, I took my ruler, it was a large round ruler, made of Cherry tree Wood, this I applied to his hand, quite moderately at first, but he insisted he was innocent, and they as stron[g]ly that he was guilty; I repeated the operation of the ruler again to his hand till I made him confess the crime, and say he was sorry. I then let him go to his seat, and dismissed the school as usual; the next morning I could hear from one and another how George's hand was hurt, that when he got home it was turned black and was swelled so big as two hands.

I confess I took a wrong way to punish him, although it was a common way, and that I used some severity for he was stubborn and I then believed and still retain the same belief that he was guilty; but I expected when I began that he would quickly knuckle

to me and I thought I would persevere in the same way I began. His hand was rather tender for he had been sick some months before, and was then weakly and rogueish and from the best I could obtain his hand swelled some and was sore a day or two, although I am positive it would not [have] made a common boy's hand sore for I am certain I had a number of times punished other boys more in the same way and never heard any complaint.

But as I was afterwards informed those well feeling misses went home and told his and their parents how severely I had punished him, that they never saw a boy punished so before, that they were sure he did not deserve it; and he also denied being guilty to his parents. All these caused his father to be very angry. He was of little stature, quick tempered, and when affronted very hard to be cooled down again, and withal very ignorant, possessed of a quarrelsome disposition. The next day in the forenoon Mr. How goes to Mr. Phelps's shop, which was about ten rods from the schoolhouse, to enquire of them if they heard the blows I gave George who told him they did not; he then came to the school house as much exasperated as possible for human nature to be, so mad was he when he called me to the Door that his Voice trembled so that it was with much difficulty I could understand what he said; he accused me of flogging the boy unmercifully, that the scholars told him they could hear the blows a good many rods, that one boy forty rods from the schoolhouse said he distinctly heard the blows, that his hand was black and swelled as large as three hands, in short that he was shamefully abused and that I should make him immediate satisfaction. I told him it was false and then related the truth to him as near as possible. He would not hear a word of it but said I lyed, that his boy was shamefully abused and I should pay for it. Accordinly I left him, went to the house, heard the scholars through. At noon I questioned a few of the largest boys about what I had done. They said they did not think I punished him any more than he deserved, nor that I hurt [his] hand any more than to make it smart a little, but I could hear reports from almost every quarter how I had abused the boy; all this I assure you made me feel very disagreeably, hearing so much about it. I accordingly spoke with Mr.

Brigham, the attorney, about it; he informed me Mr. How had been to him about it, that he should not engage upon either side but that I had better settle the matter. Upon this I went to Mr. How's, told him the circumstances again, but he was so red hot with madness that I could do nothing with him, and I cannot blame him so much for those well feeling misses told him a thousand what I call whopping lies, which enraged him and continued to keep him so.

Upon this I applied to Col. Barnes for Information what to do. I told him the circumstances as near as possible. He told me the law was very favorable to Schoolmasters, and if I had related the truth I need not fear. Returning back I saw the Rev. Mr. Packard, whom I had previously acquainted of the affair. He told me he had talked with Mr. How and that he seemed to be more calm, and he thought probable if I took some person with me and went and informed him of the circumstances and made some slight acknowledgement, that I might settle it, for he said he had been talking with a number of persons, who thought I was rather too severe, however, he did not doubt I should stand a good chance in the Law, but that would cost considerable and I should gain but little. Therefore he advised me to take some person with me and go and talk with Mr. How. Accordingly I invited Mr. Packard to walk down there with me, which he did; he soon introduced the subject to Mr. How who through fear of Mr. Packard seemed quite mild. Mr. Packard stated the subject in as fair a light as possible, and asked Mr. How what would settle; he said he meant to have satisfaction, but if I would acknowledge I was sorry and give him some trifle he would quit. I told him that I readily acknowledged if I had done wrong I was sorry, that I believed in the present state of the boys health the hand might as far as I knew appear a little injured though I had often punished scholars much more, that it was not my intention to abuse any scholar, but I meant to maintain the orders of the school; he then asked me the second time if I was sorry. I replied as before; he then asked me what I should do if he sent the boy to school to me again. I replied if he behaved well I should treat him accordingly, if he was rogueish I should punish him, but would

take some other way. "Now," says Mr. Packard, "your [*sic*] are satisfied, Mr. How, I suppose." He replied, "Yes, if he treats him well in the future."¹⁷ Thus was the affair settled, which has caused no little talk over the town, for every person I saw almost told how they had heard I punished George How. Some said his hand hurt so much it was to rot off; others said they heard he could not go for a number of days, Others that his father had gotten a warrant for me and it would cost me dearly; in short every person had a different story to tell about it; and those that took their rise from those well feeling young misses, when they had gone through a number of hands and gotten to some distance were frigh[t]ful indeed such as would cause persons, who were not acquainted with me to think I was a monster. And I seriously believe had I not been well established in school keeping before this affray, the Selectmen would not have dared to employ me again. But having my character well established before and people, who well knew the circumstances, told the story in my favour, so that those awful lies soon vanished in a cloud of smoke, which had arisen altogether from the lies of George and those well feeling young misses, whom I hope will be forgiven for they did not consider the consequences attending such conduct although I had repeatedly told them the badness of such conduct.

Although a principle [*sic*] part of the scholars were in my favor yet knowing I had a few who disliked me made me feel very disagreeably. Every day when I went to the Schoolhouse did I count the days I had to keep till the happy day arrived on which I dismissed the School, never to take that again while the present set of Scholars attended the School; thus did I end a school, which I took the most pains to learn that ever I took. This was the only affray of the kind that ever I experienced and God grant that it may be the last, for my mind was perplexed night and day about that tittering's boy and his lies; but I forbear and will only say that the next master who succeeded me had another affray with the same boy and man.

To gratify my curiosity I will relate the times I began, and in

¹⁷ Capitalization and punctuation of the direct quotations are the editor's.

what places I kept the different Schools in town. Having made it a constant rule to put each Scholars name in a book kept for that purpose, I can now assert (and am able to produce each name) that I had 778 Scholars.

* * * * *

TABLE

At the Schoolhouse near	Months	Days ¹⁸	Years	Term kept in each place
Samuel Witt's	March	31	1795	7½ weeks
Amos Ray's	May	20	do	do
Saml Witt's	Jan'y	11	1796	do
Jacob Barn's	March	5	do	do
Amos Ray's	April	25	do	do
Benjm How's	Sept.	19	do	do
Samuel Browns	Novr.	10	do	15 weeks
Meeting house	Febr.	23	1797	7½ weeks
John Stow's	April	18	do	do
Benjm How's	June	12	do	do
Jacob Barn's	August	7	do	do
Saml Witt's	Oct.	31	do	do
Isaac Brown's	Dec.	25	do	do
Saml Brown's	Feb.	21	1798	do
Meeting House	April	16	do	do
Jacob Barn's	June	27	do	15 weeks
Samuel Witts'	Oct.	15	do	do
Samuel Brown's	Feb.	4	1799	do finished 23d May
Jacob Barns	July	25	kept 2 months and 2 days ended Sept. 28th	
Samuel Witts	Oct.	23	4 weeks 4 days ended Dec. 7th	
Isaac Brown's	Dec.	23	30 weeks end August 25th, 1800	
Isaac Brown's	Jan.	about 20	1800 kept 25 weeks ended about June 13th	
Saml Brown's	Jan.	9	1800 kept 14½ weeks ended May 3d	

¹⁸ The "Days" column refers to the day on which the school began, i.e. March 31, 1795, May 20, 1795, etc.

* * * * *

Finding that by calculations I had made, that in about 3 years my property amounted to only about 200 Dollars, and that I now should have a family to provide for, I therefore thought it necessary to follow some other occupation. Accordingly I agreed with Joel Cranston¹⁹ to open a store of goods in partnership at the north part of Marlborough near Barnard's mills so called.

My property at this time amounting to 200 Dollars in cash besides my Watch, Cloathes etc. My father also lent me 300 more for which I gave my note. Mr. Cranston also signing with me. This made my Capital 500 Dollars in Cash. His amounted to about 100 more, but was in book accounts etc., so that we agreed to share equally of the loss or gain. Our bargain being mutually agreed to on both sides—I accordingly hired a house of Mr. Daniel Stevens, which I moved into on the 12 Day of June 1799.

We then went to Boston together, purchased a quantity of goods and opened our Store on the last of June 1799.

Our Capital being small and our business new, consequently our line of dealing at first must be small. In August I again engaged in the school and in the first two years of our trading I kept occasio[nal]ly about fifty eight weeks; dismissing the school when either of us went to Boston to purchase goods. One being engaged in school, the other in the Store kept us both very busy—for in the mean time I collected the taxes for one quarter of the town being paid 5d on the pound for it. Cranston also served as one of the Constables for 1799.

In the year 1798 I gave my invoice in to the Assessors, which would by no means make me a voter in town affairs. But they seeing cause I suppose rated me very high for Income—so high that it caused me to be a Voter in town affairs. At March meeting 1799 I to my great surprise was chosen one of the Assessors for the town of Marlborough being only 23 years of age. This office I was about to decline accepting, thinking myself too young and not sufficiently qualified for the business. But

¹⁹ Joel Cranston, who had earlier taught him surveying, was a prominent figure in Marlborough. In addition to the store, he also kept a public house and later entered into various industries in the area. Like Felton he was active in town affairs, serving as a justice of the peace and as a representative to the General Court. Hudson, *op. cit.*, p. 353.

through the influence of my friends I excepted the office, and was selected in 1800 and 1801. In 1801 the General Court ordered a Valuation to be taken throughout the Commonwealth of Massachusetts; this I assisted in doing.

Our business in trading gradually increased the first year, for our determination was to sell very cheap for Cash in hand.

On the first of June 1800 I examined my expenditure, it being the first year of my keeping house. During this year my family consisted of myself and wife also of 2 men which I boarded 6 months who worked for us in the Smithing business.

Upon examination I found that Board or expences for victuals etc. amounted to \$166.70. Cloathes \$60.22. Furniture \$14.01. Wood \$28.46. Books, paper etc. \$1.32. Right in the Library \$4. Horse keeping \$26.90. Black Smith work \$6.41. Interest paid my father \$18. Rent paid for house hire \$24. Total \$350.02. Credit given for some of the above articles sold again \$12.94, which leaves \$337.08. Add to this \$7.40 for taxes which makes \$344.48, which makes my expences to be daily 94 Cents, 4 mills. nearly. For the particulars see pages 7. 8. 9. 10. and 11 of my expenditure. *Expences of the Store not included.*

Then taking an Inventory of the goods in the Store at the first Cost, I find we have gained 58 Dollars in the Store and \$100 in the School, which makes \$158, half of which is mine, that is \$79. Add to this making taxes \$15, Collecting \$13, which makes my gain this year 107 Dollars besides any expences.

Having contemplated some time past of writing a short sketch of my life, not with an intention of ever promulgating it to any person, whatever; but Solely for my own amusement. This I accordingly began during the Winter 1801, and continued it during my leisure hours. I have written it in a hasty broken manner. But so that it will afford me satisfaction in perusing my former conduct.

On the 14th of February 1801 Mrs. Felton was brought to bed with a fine son, whom I named Alonso. On the last of March 1801 it was taken sick and expired on the 1st of April 1801 aged one month and 15 days.

During this year I taught the School some at the north part of the town. Also a Mr. Watson, a stranger to this town, taught considerable in other parts of the Town. He was of a middling size, round shouldered and stout built. Possessed of middling learning though not great (as others informed me) very important in School and out of it, though I believe he kept a good school, very much conceited in favour of his own abilities and constantly extolling them, imprudent in his conversation, and without professing to be very religious, strongly attached to the Calvinistical Doctrine. I say thus qualified. He wished to establish himself by my downfall (I judge him by his actions). He often said in the presence of the parents of the scholars and of the scholars themselves that I was an ignorant fellow not qualified to teach a school. In short that I could not read, write nor any thing else fit to teach a school. Some of them told him I could do either better than himself. Others informed me what he said. The next time I spoke with him (it being the 3d time I ever spoke with him) I informed him what I had heard. He stood confounded for some moments but at last denied the whole. I told him he need not deny it for I had sufficient proof of it. He then denied a part; called another part spoken in jest, and a third he was obliged to acknowledge; he then confessed he did wrong and asked forgiveness, which I readily granted and told him if he was sorry for his errors, I was satisfied, and here the matter ended for that time.

In the Spring of 1801 I finished my school with a determination not to engage in that business at present again.

During this year we continued to encrease our stock of goods by keeping a more general assortment and our business encreased as fast in proportion and extended to a greater distance.

From the 1st of June 1800 to 1801 my family consisted of only myself and wife except some others occasionally. On examining my expenditure for the before mentioned time I find that board or things immediately consumed amounted to \$152.65. Cloathes \$76.46. Furniture and tools \$22.62. Horse keeping and blacksmithing \$29.89. Books and paper \$2.03. Doctrine \$5.54. House rent \$28. Wood \$23.03. Cow keeping \$10.42. Interest paid my father 18 Dollars. Total \$368.64. Of the above articles I sold to

the amount of \$37.21, which leaves a balance of \$331.43, my taxes not included with the board which is \$7.93. This makes it \$339.16. This averages 93 Cents daily or nearly.

After Inventorying every article in the Store at the prime cost—and reckoning with myself this year, I find I have cleared about two hundred Dollars, viz. 50 Dollars in Keeping School, 8 Dollars in making taxes and 142 Dollars in the Store. This is my half of the gain. The whole gain 400 or thereabouts.

For the particulars of each and every article see the 12. 13. 14. 15. 16 and 17 pages of my expenditure.

We having previously hired the Store, in which we traded, and having of late made considerable additions to our Stock, which the Store being small, made it very inconvenient for us to continue in it, therefore in the Spring 1801 we built a store 30 feet long 28 feet wide and 2 stories high. We let the work out all by the job. The building and Materials for the Store, upon examining our accounts, Cost us about 555 Dollars. We moved our goods into it on the 15th of August 1801. During this year our trading business gradually encreased.

In the Spring of 1801 I was so unwell that I did not attend the School for a fortnight but I went out every Day. From my infancy to this time I have enjoyed good health, one week excepted. I often met with some accidents while I followed farming when about 9 or 10 years old. I had my left leg broken by a wheel falling off of the axletree, and have since cut my feet, legs and hands a number of times considerably.

On the 20th day of February 1802 Mrs. Felton was delivered of her second Child, a daughter, whom I named Harriet.²⁰

Having now brought the minutes of my Life up to the time I am now writing, so that I can keep a more particular account of things than I have hither to done—therefore I shall add a succinct Diary of the weather.

I will go back as far as the Spring of 1801, which was very wet and continued so till the first of August—and as the old proverb says “after a storm comes a Calm,” so after a wet spring and

²⁰ In 1821 Harriet married George E. Manson, who became a merchant with his father-in-law. Felton, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

Summer we had a very Dry Autumn which continued to hold 'till the first of January 1802, before most of the people had water in their Wells. During December, January and 'till the 22d of February 1802, we had'n't snow enough to make scarcely any sledding, or Sleighing. A few days in January a small snow fell, which caused a few people to stir with sleds and sleighs, but it tarried but a few days before it joined the watry Elements. Sunday the 21st of Feb. 1802 was a most beautiful and pleasant day; but before day light on the Monday succeeding a most violent snow Storm commenced, which continued thro' the day attended with high winds, which left the snow in piles. On Tuesday the winds resumed their activity and heaped it still more. Wednesday ushered to us a calm and delightful day. The people turned out to break paths, for the snow was generally judged to 18 Inches depth on a level. Thursday the snow storm again commenced with its former speed, coming quite heavy, and lying more still. Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, the Snow and rain fell alternately, blocking the roads so that they were almost impassible notwithstanding the persevering industry of the people breaking paths through the Snow, which was judged to be 32 Inches in depth, had lain level and very heavy or solid. On Monday March the 1st, there was a crust upon the snow sufficient to bear a person any where, upon the snow and over fences. This day being our Annual March meeting, we walked upon the crust over the fences in the most direct route to the meeting house where I was again elected assessor for the year 1802. From this time, the weather being moderate, and a warm pleasant sun gradually decreased the snow, so that by the 20 of March, it mostly belonged to the watry element, without doing any damage to the mills, or bridges.

Having before hinted my inclination for reading and the perseverance I continued it. I will now, for my own gratification, and also as a tablet of memory, insert the Titles of the books, which I have read previous to the 1st of April 1802, arranged under the different professions or arts to which they belong. But it is with sorrow, I here must remark: that had I studied particular authors more and read fewer pages daily, and upon those pages I

did read examined and re-examined I believe I should now have been more, and better informed.

But it is now too late to remedy the past, and must attend more to the future; for in my opinion it is good to mend when we see our errors. But on the other hand, what great and useful advantages, not only so, but what pleasure I now derive, by looking back, and contemplating upon the time I have spent in studying, while others were roving, gaming, employed in what was not only spending their time heedlessly, but to their very great damage as I can fully demonstrate. For many of my age, of equal advantages with myself, have often been to me to transact their business for them: such as writing notes, casting Interest and many other things too numerous to insert here. But to return and relate the Titles of those books.

* * * * *

AUTHORS, I HAVE READ²¹

1. Religion or Morality

Christian Bible, Mahometan Bible or Alcoran, Christianity as Old as the Creation, Fletcher's Reconciliation, Vol. 5, Seneca's Morals, Addison's Evidences of the Christian Religion, Blair's Sermons, Paley's Moral Philosophy, Jenyns' Origin of Evil,²² Evidences of the Christian Religion by Mendon Association of Ministers, Masson on Self Knowledge,²³ Nelson's Letters, Hezekiah Packard's Chatechism, Winchester's Universal Restoration,²⁴ Walker's Sermons, Milton's Paradise Lost, Gentleman's Religion, Watson's and Wakefield's Answers to Thomas Paine's Age of Reason, Paine's Age of Reason 1 and 2d Part, Volney's Ruins, Johnson's Letters, Voltaire's Philosophical Dictionary, besides a great numbers of that I do not recollect.

2. Heathern Gods

Took's Pantheon.

3. Laws and Constitutions

Burlemaqui on Law, Beccaria on Crimes and Punishment, Masonic Constitution, Constitution of the United States and of each of the 16 States. Besides a great many Laws.

²¹ In the following list of books, the editor has inserted punctuation and has capitalized titles in order to make it more readable. Felton's spelling has not been altered.

²² Probably Soame Jenyns (1704-1787).

²³ This reference may be to John Mason (1751-1763).

²⁴ Elhanan Winchester (1751-1797).

4. History

Herodotus' of Greece etc., Robertson's of South America, Hume's of England with Smollet's Continuation, 13 Volumes, Sullivan's of the District of Maine, Williams's of Vermont, Millot's Elements of History, Extracts from the Encyclopedia about America, Hannah Adams' View of Religions, Priestly's Corruptions of Christianity, Stackhouse's H[istory] of the Bible, Gibbon's of Rome abridged in 2 Vol., Hutchinson's of Massachusetts and Minot's Continuation, Ramsay's of the American War, Whitney's of Worcester County.

5. Geography

Salmon's Geography, Morse's Do. Guthrie's Do.

6. Travels

Brydon's Tour,²⁵ Nieber's [?] Travels into Africa, Park's into the Interior of Africa,²⁶ Moore's Travels, Cook's Voyages round the World, Carver's into America.

7. Lives

Baron Trenck, Burrough's Memoirs, Franklin's Life, Lee's Memoirs.

8. Letters

Bennet's Letters, Washington's Epistles, Comple[at ?] Letter Writer.

9. Novels

Tristram Shandy 1st vol., Algerine Captive, Emma Corbett, Romance of the Forest, Prince of Abyssinia, Tom Jones, Fool of Quality, Telemachus, Robertson Crusoe, Sentimental Journey, Boyle's Voyages, Coquette, Don. Quixotte, Chrytal or Adventures of a Guinea, Gulliver's Travels, Rural Socrates, Female Review, Bellisarius, Constantin and Pulchera, Mysteries of Udolpho, Vicar of Wakefield.

10. Miscellaneous, or Authors before [not] Included

Common Sense, Rights of Man, Spectator, Knox's Essays, McFingal, Jefferson's Notes on Virginia, Poor Man's Guide, Lock on Education, Baker's poem upon the Universe, Smith's Wealth of Nations, Stearn's Road to Liberty, Lavater's Physiognomy abrig'd, Beaties [Beauties] of History, [illeg.] Islands, Stearn's Dialogues, Ferguson on Civil Society and Astronomy, Smellie's Philosophy, Goldsmith Animated Nature, Blair's Lectures, Elegant Extracts in prose and verse, Forrester's John Bull, Father's Legacy to his Daughters, [torn section, probably eight or ten titles] Three or four years, besides pamphlets to numerous to mention.

²⁵ Perhaps this is Patrick Brydone (1743-1818).

²⁶ Mungo Parks (1771-1806).

I will here remark that I made me a book, and kept it for the purpose of extracting any thing remarkable, or any thing, which very much pleased or displeased my fancy. This I entitled Extracts from different authors by Silas Felton.

After teaching arithmetic for a considerable time I carefully extracted from my old Cyphering books all I thought valuable, and from other authors, and some of my own forming, to this I added the rules of Surveying. This book consisting of 4 quoir of paper well bound with leather I call Silas Felton's cyphering book.

The months of March, April, May and June 1802 were cold. April and the first part of May was very dry and the remainder of May and June Wet and Cold; so that the people did not plant their Corn until the last of May. The cold and wet causes English grass to be quite backward but promising.

[*Torn*] annual time of reckoning with myself being arrived. I find upon examin[ing] that my family consisted of myself, wife and a girl who lives with me together with some more occasionally; and my expences be namely, Work hired and provisions \$237.29; House rent forty five Dollars; Claotnes \$98.61; Furniture \$21.95; Wood \$22.06; Doctrine \$8.75; Taxes \$10.23; Books \$2.67; total \$446.56. Deduct 48 Dollars for some of the above things sold, and add 18 Dollars for Interest money paid my father; which leaves the sum of \$416.56. I find by dividing this by 313 Days makes my daily expence amount, nearly \$1.33 and 1 m. daily.

House keeping and Shoeing and expences to Boston I have not reckoned because I consider them belonging to the Shop.

After reckoning and deducting my expences I find I have gained this year 350 Dollars or thereabouts, \$50 of which is doubtful whether it can be collected.

For the particulars of which, see my expenditure pages 18. 19. 20. 21. 22. 23.

From the June 1, 1800, to 1801 we purchased goods to the amount of 9,000 Dollars, and from the 11 of June 1801 to 1802 to the amount of 14,000 Dollars, estimated by the purchasing bills.



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