

# Diary reveals never-ending work days

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By June W. Kennedy

**T**he following running accounts gleaned from the diaries of J. Warren Day (1837-1900) and Emma Day (1842-1920) are evidence that the average person of this period was, of necessity, a do-it-yourselfer and a jack-of-all-trades.

The couple made their home in the farmhouse on the corner of Graniteville and Cold Spring roads in Westford.

From Warren Day's 1869 diary:

Carried 1 bu Rye to mill. Breaking roads in forenoon 11 hours \$2.20. Loaded Hoopoles. Went to Meeting. Hauled 8 load of wood. Built stairs in back entry. Father and I went to town...I bought me a pair of thick Boots at J.B. Fletcher's for \$5.00. Went to Prayer Meeting in Meeting House. Got shoes fixed. cut wood. Hauled logs to the mill. Brought home a load of shavings.

Bought a pr. of Oxen of Luke Fletcher gave \$11.80. Went to a funeral. Sawing & splitting wood.

Been to Meeting all day.

A.M. went down to Chamberlain's and got Horse shod. Hauled boards out of mill. Worked for G. Howarth plowing, harrowing, Furrowing and hauling out manure. Topped up wall. Plowed and sowed oats for Curly O'Brien with Oxen & horse. Mended old fence round pasture.

Planted corn, potatoes, Beans, Cucumbers, Squash, Beets, set out tomatoes. Finished planting — June 5.

Worked for J.E. Wright shingleing on Mrs. Joseph Hildreth's barn. Oiled harness. Shelled Corn and took Oxen to Town and had shoes taken off. Cultivated Hoed Corn, Beans and Beets, Pop Corn and Potatoes.

Got in Hay back of house. Mowed brush round corn field. Cleaned mowing Machine. Repaired B. Wagon. Mowed grass for Mrs. Whitney. Finished raking and tumbling our hay. I cradled Rye just a little at night. Painted buggy wagon.



The diary of J. Warren Day reflects the plain living of the average man in 1869. Day and his wife Emma lived in the farmhouse at the junction of Graniteville and Cold Spring roads.

(Courtesy "Westford Recollections")

Mother & I went to Lowell. Brought 2 English ladies home that missed the cars. Sarah & I went to Nashua and spent the day at Mr. Rand's...carried our wool.

Went to town and got Irons fixed for back to B. Wagon seat. Finished striping Buggy Wagon. Cleaned out well front of house.

Varnished the Buggy Wagon.

Went to Cambridge Cattle Market by Fitchburg R. Road. Threshed Rye. Hauled dirt into Barn Cellar. First rate hayday.

And such were the everyday affairs of plain living which J. Warren Day found worthy of recording back in 1869 here in Westford.

As a young 17-year-old bride, Emma Day came to live at her husband's family home. Faithfully she penned in her diary the homely day-to-day events which so typically portray rural Westford life in the 1860's and 70's.

The following is an excerpt showing what was all in a week's work for this typical Westford wife. Ada and Quincy, whose names appear, are the children of Emma and Warren:

Sun. May 21, 1871: Fair. I helped do up the work, washed me all over. Mrs. Sherman came up with Lizzie. Warren and Mother and Ada and Lizzie went to church A.M. I went in the afternoon instead of Warren. Mr. Nichols preached. I was very tired indeed, laid all I could.

Mon. May 22, 1871: Fair. Mother got breakfast and done up the work. Warren churned. I washed got done at noon. Had a heaping crowded basket full. Did up all the dishes. Got potatoes to boil for pigs and washed three sheeves (milk), made both beds and fixed up the room. Worked on Quincy's stockings, done and cut Ada out a pair.

Tues. May 23, 1871: Fair. I helped do up the work. Warren and Mother went over to Uncle Amos's. I did my large ironing, fed pigs and geeses, chickens 24, 2 hens. Warren and Mother got home about six, I got Quincy's stockings done and cut Ada out a pair.

Wed. May 24, 1871: I scum milk, washed all dishes and pans, fed chickens and swept

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## Diary reveals life's drudgery

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and moved things in back chamber and did all but wash the floor. I helped get dinner, wiped dishes. Mother made soap. I got several pails of water. Mrs. Cummings called. Uncle Amos helped Warren plough and was here to dinner.

Thurs. May 25, 1871: I did not get up till breakfast was ready. I went to bed as soon as I got the children to bed. I never went to sleep till eleven and then did not sleep much till after two. I helped do up the work and mended two pairs of stockings. Warren went to Lowell. I fed the hogs and pigs and sewed little. Nancy and Harriet and Mrs. Abbot and Sam Smith's wife called at the door. Mother went to prayer meeting.

Fri. May 26, 1871: Mother and I did up the work and then took out the things under the chamber stairs and washed it. I cleaned and washed lamp and lantern. Helped get dinner. Uncle Ell worked here today. Ann Snow called before I got the things back in closet. Daniel Hayden came after more potatoes. I finished a pair of stockings for Ada, washed the children's feet and legs and 3 pair of stockings. I cleaned out all the ashes I could get in house and carried out most two bushels to barn cellar.

Sat. May 27, 1871: Fair. I helped get breakfast. scum milk, washed pans, fed chickens, give hogs a lunch, sifted 25 lbs. of flour 4 times. mixed hasfords powder with it, then sifted 31 lbs. We made gingerbread and pies and cut potatoes, picked over apples. Eldridge went home little after five and I went out



Dressed in her Sunday best, Emma Day appears in a photo as the young wife of Warren Day during the latter part of the nineteenth century. Her care in recording everyday life has left the following poignant excerpt from her diary, dated New Year's Eve, Dec. 31, 1868 (when, at 26 years old, she had been married nine years): 'Good bye old year and may my next year find me at its close far better than this year. May I live nearer my God.'

(Courtesy June Kennedy's "Westford Recollections")

and dropped corn so Warren could finish the piece below the well, wont I tired. Fed chickens and pigs a lunch, mended Q's apron, washed both children and mended till most eleven,

and did I ache, and washed two pair of stockings.

June Kennedy, a Westford resident, is the author of "Westford Recollections", a series of vignettes and collected photos of the town's past.