

Westford Recollections

by June W. Kennedy
EMMA M. DAY--HER DIARY
1871 -- (Excerpts)

If the winter of 1877 seems long, bleak and cold to Westford townspeople, consider the plain accounts of everyday living of Emma M. Day, young wife and mother at the Cold Spring and Graniteville crossroads farmhouse during that February of 106 years ago. Excerpts from her Diary of 1871 remind us that serious sickness was necessarily confined to the house. Albeit the good Dr. "staid" for meals and overnite, he oftentimes had to be summoned by letter; medicine and cures were most primitive. Little time was had for fun; religious commitment was total. Do note that a new hairdo and new black buttons for the best dress were spirit-lifters and worthy of recording. And too, take into account that neighborliness and concern made life bearable.

In her book "New England Girlhood", Lucy Larcom states: "To be a good 'watcher' was considered one of the most important womenly attainments. People who lived side by side exchanged such services without waiting to be asked and they seemed to be happiest of whom such kindnesses were most expected". Also Lucy Larcom writes: "A young woman would have been considered a very inefficient being who could not make and mend and wash and iron her own clothing, and get three regular meals and clear them away everyday, besides keeping the house tidy, and doing any other needed neighborly service--". On these last counts Emma M. Day fared well. Now, her Diary...

Feb. 1: Mother is better. Ada slept upstairs but coughed some. Quincy did not sleep well at all. I have Ada physic and Q took some and we have lived on gruel. Warren went over Graniteville and then went down to see Mrs. Hammond but she cannot come to wash this week. I made a pair of pillow cases and two pair of sleeves for Quincy's aprons, green ones. They are better down to Mrs. Shermans.

Feb. 3: Cloudy. Warren went to Depot and sent for Sarah and came home through town and got a stove at Mrs. Hodgman's and put in parlor and put up a bed and mother went in there. Ada seems little better but Quincy don't. I put some onions on his feet. Mr. Hodgman rode as far as here and just went in to see mother. Dr. Smith called. He gave mother and the children some hedricin. Dr. McCollester came down and staid all night.

Feb. 4: Fair cold and windy. The Dr. left about nine o'clock. Sarah made the pies. I had all I could do to take care of the children and Warren helped me. P.M. Cousin Josiah and Laura and Clifford came up here. W. brought them up to take the cars for N.H. Sarah made me a cushion for me to do my hair up on and she did it up.

Sun., Feb. 5: Very cold. The coldest night. The children are better. Warren and Sarah went to church. P.M. Mr. Nichols preached. Mr. Cummings called tonight.

Feb. 6: --I done up my hair alone like Sarah's with large cushion. Warren and Mother went up to see Aunt P. She is sick. Mother - (Lamb) - had a very bad spell this eveing, just after the Dr. went away. He is most sick himself with cold.

Feb. 8: Cloudy. Mother Day woke me up little before one for mother was dreadful sick. Warren went after Dr. Webster. Got him in a few minutes. He gave her chloraform. But that soon passed off and then he gave a morphine injection in her arm. W. carried him home and went after Dr. Mc. Dr. had us put on a spice poultice made of rye meal and all kinds of spice. Put on for sickness at stomach and hop bags on side. Dr. McCollester and wife came down. Mr. Nichols called.

Feb. 9: Cloudy and snowed little and the sun shines some. Dr. McCollester came down A.M. Has not been to see any sick ones except Mother since Monday night. Uncle Eldrige and wife came over to see how we did. Mrs. Sherman came in this morning and is coming to watch tonight. I have mended 5 stockings. Aunt Betsy came down to see how mother did and brought a cup of jell. Sarah made six pies. I wrote to Cora.

Feb. 10: --W. went over to Graniteville after some Oysters. Got them at Mrs. Sam Hitchens. I have mended 3 stockings and run in Q. apron sleeves and put tape on sleeves and neck to my night dress and buttons and basted the hems to one sheet and finished my bow S. gave me. Warren has drawn wood for Mrs. Osgood today.

Feb. 11: Fair: Mrs. Sherman watched last night. The Dr. came down in the cars and staid till noon. My head and lungs feel real bad and pains me. Warren went to Lowell, was not gone but little while. S and mother - (Day) - have made 8 cr. pies and two loaves of cake and

doughnuts and they had 3 loaves of white bread and 3 of brown and I made 3 of white and M. got 2 of Baker's bread. I basted the hem one side to shift and stitched in a pair of sleeves.

Feb. 12: Snows and blowes and cold. Mother is no better. I put hot water cloths and turpentine and chloraform. Mother Day took care of her. Dr. came down and was most froze ice all over his face. I gave mother sena and salts. Mr. Luce called. Dr. staid to supper.

Feb. 13: Fair--David called to see how the folks did. Uncle Eldrige came over to see how we did and help W. if he needed. --I fixed the skirt to my black dress and Sarah stitched it. I cut sleeve lining and run on facing first time and hemmed a sheet and basted one hem one side.

Feb. 17: Beautiful--Uncle Amos and Lizzie came over twice, the last time to bring over some cream. Mr. Graves - (the mutton man) - has been here. He don't think he shall come again this winter. I have mended my calico dress, the one that had a stripe on side. --W. worked for Sevge on Ice A.M. Aunt B. has her party P.M. and eve. She asked W. Yesterday.

Feb. 18: Rained very hard and wind blew hard. I mended my stocking and Warren's and Ada's. --My tooth ached real bad the first part of the night. Dr. came about eleven o'clock. He went up to see Father. --Mrs. Cummings came over to see how we did. David called. Mother had a letter from Mr. Fletcher with the ten dollars he owed her. I began to mend my other calico dress but did not do much.

Sun., Feb. 19: Beautiful--Sarah walked up A.M. and stopped at Aunt P's. Warren went P.M. Mr. Nichols preached. Dr. McCollester came down P.M. Lizzie Turner had a son born yesterday.

Feb. 20: Beautiful. Mrs. Sherman washed here three hours. I helped some and Sarah did. --Sarah did all the irony but my dress. Mrs. Luke Fletcher and Luanner came here. Mrs. F. brought tumbler of jell for mother.

Feb. 22: Fair. --I washed Warren's frocking and mended my rose dress sprinkled it and ironed it and the frocking. Warren went to Lowell and Sarah went down to Mrs. L. Fletchers to get some wine and came back and called to Mrs. Shermans. Warren got two chambers and one iron bean pot and three spools of B thread No. 10 and 1 doz buttons for my black dress.

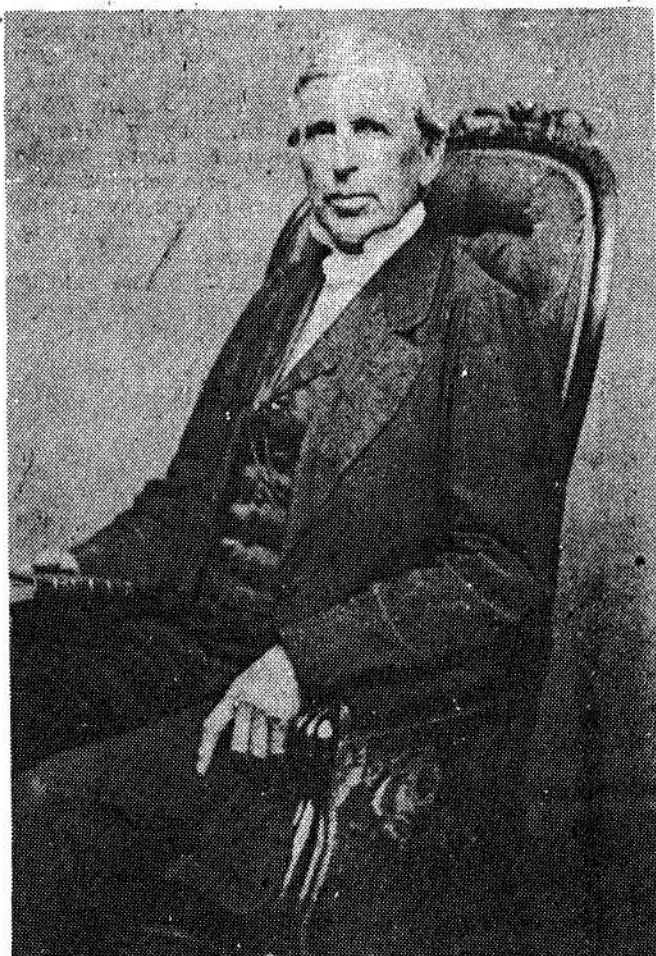
Feb. 25: Mother had a very bad night. I sat up till most one and worked over her. I wrote a letter and W. carried it to depot to the Dr.

Sun., Feb. 26 Cloudy. W. went to church all day. Uncle Eldrige and Aunt A. just called at the door to see how the folks were. The Dr. came after dark. He did not get his letter till to night. I took care of her last night and are going to tonight.

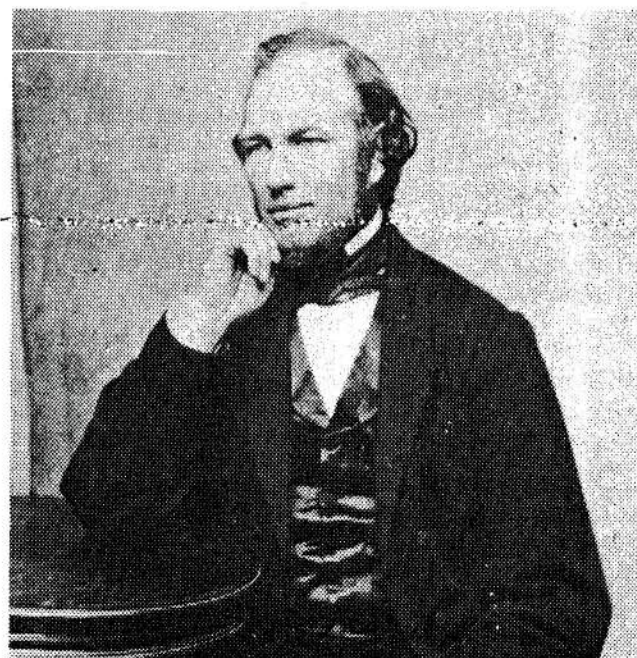
Feb. 28: Fair. Mother is no better. I was up till after twelve and Warren sat up two hours helping me. I finished hemming handkerchief. Dr. came down tonight and is going to stay all night. Mrs. Sherman washed 4-1/4.

- (-) - insertions by columnist.

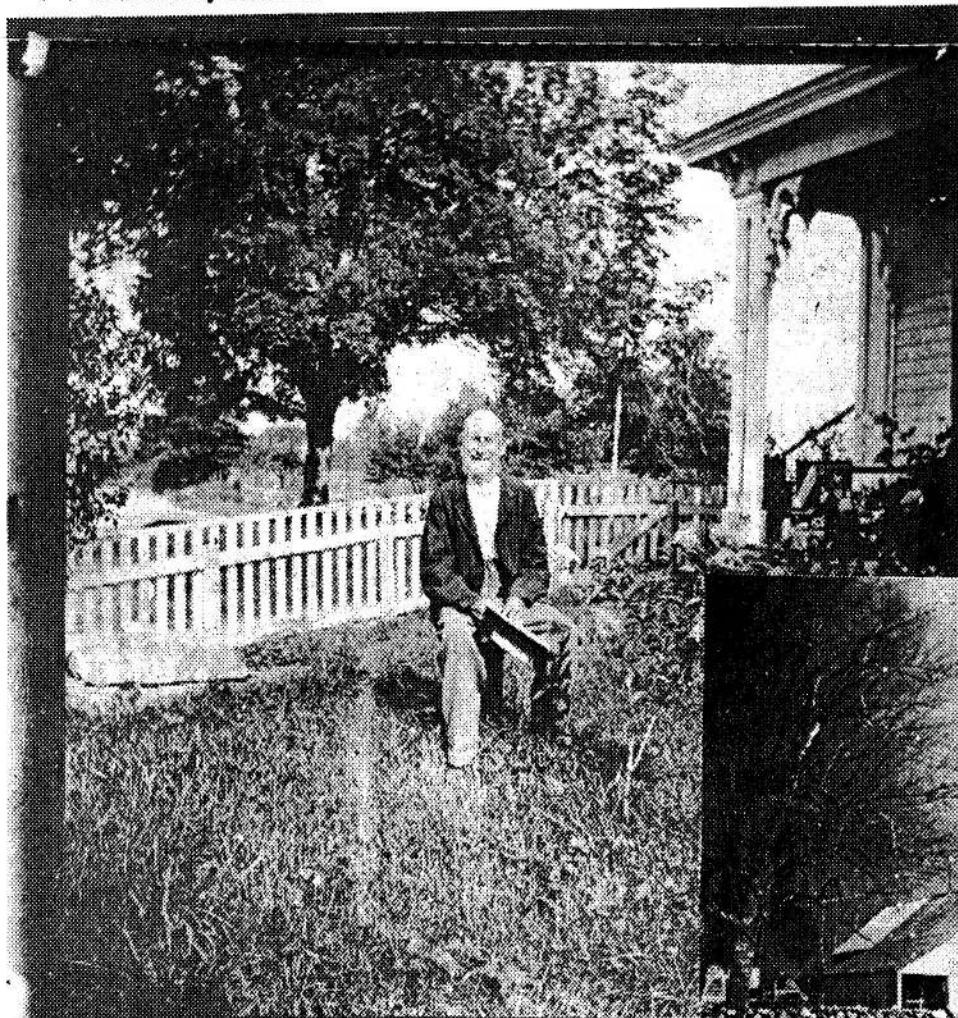
VOLUME 4, NUMBER 22



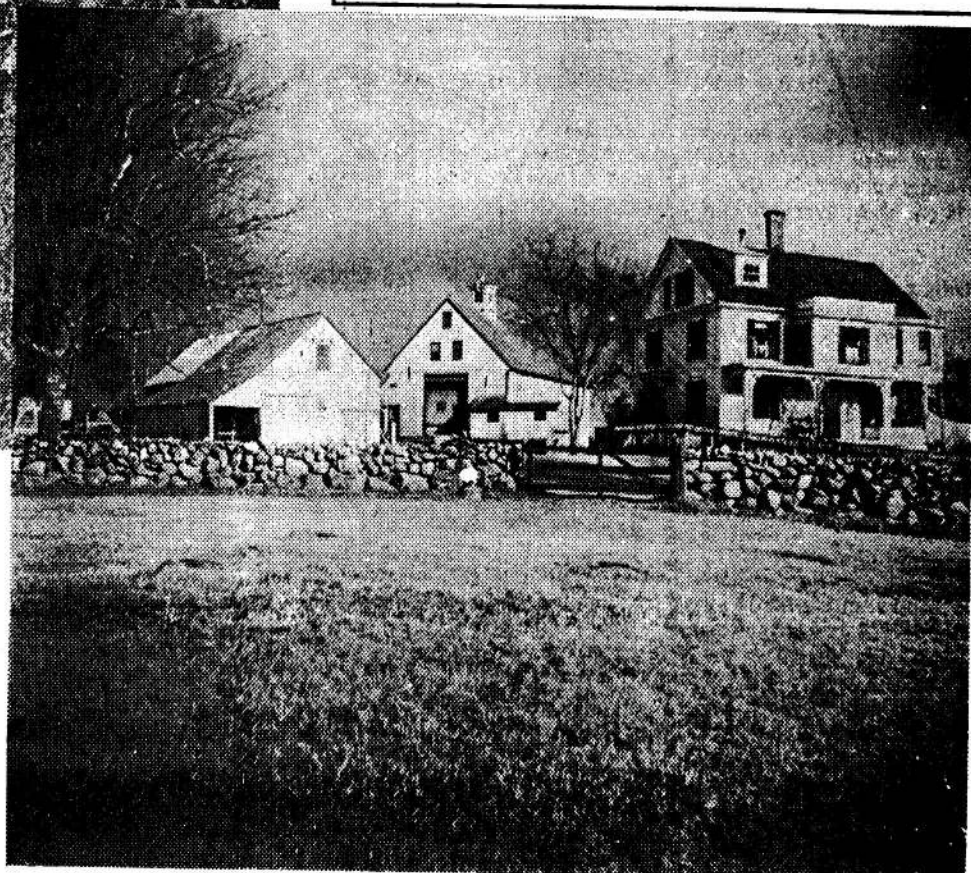
ANOTHER FREQUENT visitor to the home of Emma and Warren Day was Rev. Leonard Luce who resided in Westford following his pastorate here at the Union Congregational Church. (Photo: Courtesy of First Parish Church United of Westford)



"MR. HODGMAN rode as far as here and just went in to see mother." Mr. Hodgman served as preceptor of Westford Academy, minister of the Union Congregational Church and wrote the "History of Westford," 1659-1883. (Photo: Courtesy of First Parish Church of Westford)



"UNCLE ELDRIGE (Wright) came over to see how we did and help W. if he needed" . . . a common gesture of concern and neighborliness in the 1870's. (Photo: Courtesy of First Parish Church United of Westford)



THE OLD DAY HOMESTEAD at the crossroads of Cold Spring and Graniteville as it appeared just before the turn of the century. It was here that Emma M. Day penned her diary of 1871. Present owners are descendants, the Roger Day family. (Photo: Courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. W. Otis Day)