“OH: WHO CAN APPRECIATE THE WORD HOME BUT THOSE WHO ENJOY ONE:”
THE LIFE AND WORK OF EDITH BUSHONG

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Abstract:

This thesis examines the role of rural mid-Atlantic middle-class women in the antebellum period through a close reading of the diary of Edith Bushong. Edith was a Quaker farmer's wife in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania.

Edith kept a diary from December 1856-December 1857 that detailed her work, including sewing, preserving and preparing food, hauling firewood and water, gardening, cleaning; laundering, ironing, milking cows, collecting eggs, churning butter, making soap, candles, and other wares, keeping household accounts, and caring for her infant son. Yet the idea that she did not “do” enough haunted her constantly. The ideology of domesticity proclaimed that women belonged in the home, tucked away from business and the so-called “public sphere;” it also re-categorized their work as “leisure” as they did not earn a wage and they supposedly enjoyed performing it. Edith’s diary tells a different story. I will both demonstrate the importance of her daily work—for her family as well as for the development of the rural market economy—and examine the source and larger implications of her anxiety.

Edith’s daily tasks supported her family and allowed them to embrace a comfortable middle-class lifestyle, both because of the food and clothes she produced for them and because of the cash she accumulated for her family by selling her goods—such as butter, eggs, candles, and soap—at the local store. The development of a rural capitalist economy, defined by a shift from barter to cash-based exchange that occurred in the mid-Atlantic region and in New-England in the nineteenth century, relied on home production in which Edith participated; the continued importance of home-based production distinguished rural capitalism from the urban variety, which relied on factory production and wage laborers. Thus, the sale of Edith’s goods critically contributed to the creation of local capitalist markets.

Edith also participated in a national economy of reading. Antebellum ideology constrained women’s authority to think, speak, and act; yet Edith interacted with the world beyond her home through her reading newspapers, periodicals, and literature. She was well-educated and an intellectual person who enjoyed reading for both the escape it offered her from her work and the opportunity it gave her to engage with ideas and form opinions. Reading—and the intellectual space it provided—allowed her, and others like her, agency that she did not possess in her working life.

Thus, many aspects of Edith’s supposedly “private” life in fact overlapped with the public. “Separate spheres” did not exist as distinct entities: the ideology of spheres was incompatible with the reality of daily life. Although Edith, at the age of twenty-one, did not feel that her work was important and was frustrated by her confinement to her home, she in fact made significant contributions to the world around her—to her family, community, and beyond.
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I hope that [readers] will recognize in this episode an unnoticed but extraordinary fragment of a reality, half obliterated, which implicitly poses a series of questions for our own culture and for us.

—Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*

You must not go to the burial places and look only about for the tall monuments and titled names. It is not the starred epitaphs of the Doctors of Divinity, the Generals, the Judges, the Honourables, the Governors, or even of the village notables called Esquires, that marks the springs of our successes and the sources of our distinctions. These are rather effects than causes; the spinning-wheels have done a great more than these.

—Horace Bushnell, “The Age of Homespun,” 1851

In Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun*
INTRODUCTION

One spring evening in 1857, Edith Bushong took advantage of a rare peaceful moment in her household. Between her daily work and family supper, she stole a moment to record in her diary the scene that unfolded before her:

I cut out a pair of pants for George Books this morning we have been sewing some at them tis now evening Hannah is getting supper Mother is sewing Pap lying on the setee Susana has just come in from milking is now standing by the stove saying “Oh dear me” Gilbert stands by the window soldering a tin tea kettle Pusey is carrying in his night wood little Charlie sits in his little rocking chair playing with a half dollar and a glass knob on a string and here I sit on the bench back of the supper table writing it is now so dark I must close for tonight.¹

In this brief excerpt, Edith reveals many aspects of her life and family. Hannah and Susana, the family’s domestic help, prepared meals in the Bushong household. That the family could afford to employ two servants discloses something of their socio-economic standing: they were well-off enough to not have to cook their own food—although not so well-off that the women were women of leisure. As we will see, Edith grew, harvested, processed, and prepared much of the family’s food stores herself. Susana had “just come in from milking,” implying that the family kept livestock, which other documents confirm.

The Bushong men tended to agriculture: they would begin to sow their fields around this time of year, as the ground thawed. In other entries near this one, Edith confirms that the men have commenced plowing and seeding the fields. “Pap,” by whom she meant Gilbert’s father, was most likely resting “on the setee,” or the couch, after a hard day of manual labor—he was over fifty years old at the time Edith wrote—before

¹ Edith Bushong, Diary of Edith Bushong, Mar. 12, 1857, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA
sitting down to supper. Gilbert, younger and with greater stamina than his father, did not rest but continued to lend his assistance around the house—in this particular instance by fixing a tea kettle. Pusey, a farm hand, also continued to labor. He hauled wood for the family's fire that would warm the house and provide light as darkness fell. This, as well as Gilbert's working at the window and Edith's own notation of the quickly fading light—"it is now so dark I must close for the night"—tell us of the little artificial light the family had available to them. Although Edith records later that the family owns at least one lamp, artificial light was a luxury at the time; this lack of light also indicates that the family was not so well-off that they could afford unlimited fuel.

The women of the house both sewed often—almost constantly during winter and early spring months. "Mother," i.e. Gilbert's mother, and Edith herself, though she has taken a brief break to write, worked on a pair of pants for George Brooks, another farm hand. Thus, we begin to understand why antebellum women spent so much of their time sewing—they not only had to outfit themselves and their families but also the help.

The only person not working in this scene—besides Pap, as he was presumably exhausted from the day's work—was Charlie, Edith's six-month-old son, who played on the floor. Even his activity reveals something of their life—while many infants today receive constant supervision, Charlie played by himself with his rocking horse and makeshift toys—a half-dollar coin and a glass knob. Nineteenth-century rural life required hard work from every able-bodied person, and there was little spare time to sit and amuse a child.

What else can we infer from this passage? For one, it divulges something of the layout of the house. Edith could see all of this activity from her vantage point at the
“supper table.” From what we would now call the “dining room,” then, she could clearly see and hear the activity in the “kitchen,” as well as the “family room,” where Mother sewed, Pap lay on the couch, and Charlie played. A single room accommodated all of these functions. We also understand that Gilbert, Edith, and Charlie shared a house with Gilbert’s parents, although this was not the permanent arrangement. From March to July of 1857, the extended Bushong family lived under one roof while the family built an addition onto Gilbert and Edith’s house. While all is calm and cordial on this evening, Edith did not always get along so well with her in-laws; living together wrought significant tension.

Furthermore, Edith’s literary style, especially notable in her quoting of Susana saying “Oh dear me” at the stove, provides insight into the mood of the scene. This quotation may imply Susana’s concern over the quality of the meal she will serve the family, and perhaps suggests something of the relationship between the family and the help. What sort of reprimand would Susana have received for serving a poorly cooked meal?

Because Edith so rarely recorded dialogue in this fashion, it is difficult to get a sense of her relationships and the texture of her environment. In this instance, however, she provided a clear picture of the activity of daily life for her and her family. Her notation reveals something of intra-household relations. More importantly, that this type of entry is the exception demonstrates that while Edith was capable of, and indeed seemed to enjoy, pausing to reflect on the elaborate network of activity around her, she rarely did so.
The reflective, intricate, and literary style of writing she employed here is not typical of her writing; she normally focused on succinctly enumerating her and her husband's daily tasks. The all-consuming nature of her work prevented her from recording and reflecting more deeply on her personal relationships, the activity of her household, and the significance of her work in a broader context. Over the course of a year, this is the only instance in which she captured, as if through a literary photograph, a moment in her household.

What provoked this unusually long and descriptive entry? Perhaps it was a desire to remember the setting of the early years of her son's life; or the time of year—March was a relatively slow month on the farm, or rather the calm before the storm of the next eight months of planting, harvesting, processing, churning, and butchering that the summer and fall brought; or perhaps the calm of the household at twilight inspired her—we will never know for sure. Whatever her motivation, however, this entry provides invaluable insight into the daily rhythms of rural middle-class life in nineteenth-century Lancaster County. While her household was certainly individual, the picture she painted of her family gives shape to the actual, as opposed to ideological, domestic life prescribed in antebellum literature.

In this entry, Edith has presented a rosy picture of her family's home. Yet, even in this relaxed moment, the labor necessary to maintain such a household is evident. Every family member and servant was an active contributor to the household: in this scene, everyone is either working or is taking a brief respite from labor before supper. As the title of this study suggests, a "home" was special. Edith clearly appreciated hers. But the intensive labor—especially female domestic labor—that went into the production of
this pastoral scene expounds the tension between Edith’s love of her home and her frustration over the labor that made such a home possible.

The mid-Atlantic region underwent a significant economic shift during the nineteenth century. Historians, including Christopher Clark and Allan Kulikoff, debate the exact moment of the rise of rural capitalism and the end of self-sufficient farms—and indeed whether farmers ever operated independently of trade networks. But they generally agree that the magnitude of the change became apparent in the 1850s, as Edith lived and wrote her diary. While in urban areas, industrialization brought the rise of factories, wage work, and the emergence of new social patterns as both men and women increasingly worked outside of the home, in rural areas the transition to capitalism saw different types of changes. Mid-Atlantic rural capitalism contrasted sharply with Jacksonian ideals of a wholly integrated national economy. While early nineteenth-century advances in communications—the telegraph and the post—and transportation—including canals and railroads—meant that farmers became enmeshed in market relations, rural capitalism continued to rely on home production.

The social and cultural shifts in the mid-Atlantic countryside, then, were not as dramatic as they were in urban areas. For most families, work patterns remained similar. Households served the role of factories in rural areas; they produced necessary household goods, such as cloth and, perhaps most importantly in the mid-Atlantic region, butter, in surplus for market exchange. Historian Joan Jensen argues that households increased

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their levels of production in the early nineteenth century so that they could sell the surplus in order to participate in a broad—though still mostly regional—network of exchange.

Rural women were disproportionately responsible for the increase in workload. Women, not men, spent more time producing butter for the regional markets because butter-making was a female task. Jensen posits that the “flexibility” of women’s work, which encompassed all tasks associated with the running of the household—as opposed to rural men’s work, which was more strictly defined in terms of agriculture—gave their families the financial means to participate in the market and allowed them to navigate the expanding market structure.

Women occupied an ambiguous position in the antebellum rural mid-Atlantic economy. As urban men of all classes as well as working-class and single women increasingly worked for monetary wages, the work that women performed within the household—both in urban and rural environments—was reconstituted as non-economic. Unlike the colonial period, when, as Historian Jeanne Boydston argues, “housework was viewed as central to economic life” and the “value of [women’s] labor—both to their households and to their communities—was openly and repeatedly acknowledged,” by the antebellum period industrialization had reframed work in terms of the money it earned rather than the productive value it generated, to the distinct disadvantage of housewives. As men’s work moved outside of the household to shops and factories and antebellum ideology promoted men as the heads of households and as public

6 Ibid., 5
representatives for their families, their wages came to be understood as the sole source of a family’s subsistence. This trend is most clearly exemplified in the fight for men to receive a “family wage.” In fact, the value of unwaged domestic labor enabled employers to pay their workers wages that were below subsistence-level.

Simultaneously, the development of an ideology of gendered spheres in antebellum discourse began to formally differentiate between men’s and women’s work. These spheres encompassed not only domestic roles, but also extended outside of the household. They identified the home as the women’s, or “private” sphere and everything supposedly outside of it—the economy, business, politics, etc.—as belonging to the male-dominated public sphere. The spheres dictated that women belonged in the home because of their work; but also deemed the public arena too business oriented and unrefined to allow female presence. As Boydston notes, the ideology of spheres was the “final phase in the industrialization of housework—the denial that it produced any economic value at all:” in this transition, women’s work lost its economic value and more fundamentally, its recognition as work, such that many women—Edith included—felt that they did not “do” enough.

Yet as the definition of work changed, the nature of women’s work remained the same. While it is true that Edith probably produced and sold more butter than her mother, it is also true that both women were responsible for providing butter for their own family’s table. The task of butter-making—as well as the production of cloth, soap, candles, and so many other household products—was not new; only the context and

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8 Ibid., 21
9 Boydston, Home and Work, 141
10 Ibid., 11
volume was. Although the discourse on women’s work shifted to focus on “the glorification of wife-and motherhood,” the work itself did not relent, but rather increased.

The ideology of spheres, then, had an arguably more significant effect on rural than urban women, as they took on—without recognition—productive market roles that were disguised as part of their housework. Historian Catherine Kelly discusses the peculiarity of the rural middle class: she argues that the changing relationship between the home and the market during this period, as defined both by the expansion of rural markets and ideological claims that distinguished the private home from the public market, created a rural bourgeois. Kelly draws on Boydston’s analysis, stating that in this “bourgeois imagination, the labor of feeding, clothing, cleaning, and nursing evaporated, rematerializing first as women’s duty and later as an act of magical transformation” achieved “not through women’s physical exertions but as a result of women’s heightened sensibility.” Women’s special gifts—their emotional sensitivity, delicacy, and nurturing selves—made a household a neat and orderly home and refuge. In other words, the ideology of spheres presented housework as a magical manifestation: a woman’s true calling.

The ideology of spheres permeated antebellum life: the literature of the period espoused a powerful ideological fiction that reinforced bourgeois gender roles. T. S. Arthur’s Home Magazine of 1857 instructed women in how to be good wives, mothers,

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11 Ibid., 142
13 Idem.
and housekeepers with such columns as “The Housekeeper: Useful Recipes”\textsuperscript{14} and “The First Quarrel,”\textsuperscript{15} which illustrated how wives should diplomatically resolve marital disputes. Nineteenth-century writer Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel, \textit{Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp} (1856), portrays housework as “gay” rather than backbreaking and tedious, as it was in reality. Stowe describes one of her characters, Lisette, as “danc[ing] hither and thither”\textsuperscript{16} while performing her chores with “a zealous, bustling earnestness, which characterized everything she did.”\textsuperscript{17} As we will see, Edith did not share the same enthusiasm for her housework. These examples, both taken from Edith’s reading list, were typical of antebellum discourse on women’s work. They perpetrated an ideological fiction of the home that shaped Edith’s perception of her own household and her labors.

As Kelly points out, however, the development of rural capitalism actually “tied [women] more closely to a world of work.”\textsuperscript{18} Yet this notion contained an inherent contradiction that lies at the heart of the conflict between the dominant ideology of spheres and Edith’s lived experience. As Boydston so succinctly explains, “Unless a woman was literally to confine herself within doors—scarcely a feasible alternative, given her various responsibilities to her family—she simply could not avoid contact with the larger society she was presumably to be protected from.”\textsuperscript{19}

In this study, I will introduce you to Edith Bushong in 1857 as I have come to know her from her writing. It is not a complete picture of her life, nor an empirically

\textsuperscript{14} T. S. Arthur, \textit{Lady’s Home Magazine}, Jan. 1857, 66
\textsuperscript{15} Virginia F. Townsend, \textit{Lady’s Home Magazine}, Feb. 1857, 99
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 56
\textsuperscript{18} Kelly, \textit{In the New England Fashion}, 24
\textsuperscript{19} Boydston, \textit{Home and Work}, 100
researched history of the middle-class farming households of the antebellum rural mid-Atlantic region, but it will show you how one woman perceived her everyday life: I will provide a microhistory centering on Edith’s diary. Although her particular circumstances are distinct and her diary only scratches the surface of this portion of her life, Edith’s experience is part of a broader mid-Atlantic antebellum culture. Understanding how she lived her daily life has powerful connotations for more fully understanding the history of the period: the daily lived experience of common people is the basis of history, if not always historical study.

Historian Carlo Ginzburg addresses the importance of microhistory in his groundbreaking work, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*. Historians often overlook the daily lives of common people when researching and writing, partly because so few traces of those lives remain and partly because those lives have been undervalued for their historical importance. Microhistory, however, treats ordinary people as mines of historical artifacts that can not only portray the lives of individuals but can also stand for larger cultural patterns. It transforms the few fragments that remain into a story that can illustrate aspects of history that were previously unknown—aspects that were often times thought to be unknowable. Ginzburg cherishes the details and minutia of the life of Menocchio, a sixteenth-century Italian peasant accused of heresy during the Inquisition. In doing so, Ginzburg illuminates a distinctive peasant cosmology.

Because Ginzburg saw that Menocchio’s understanding of the universe confounded Inquisition officials, he set out to investigate the origin of that discrepancy. He examined both the archived Inquisition trial transcripts and the texts that Menocchio
read, and worked to understand this research in the social and historical context of
sixteenth-century Italian culture. He found that Menocchio’s radical ideas about religion
and the universe were not attained passively from above, but rather were the product of
his own thoughts and culture. Menocchio, proud of his ""artful mind,"" had
"assimilated, transposed, and remolded" the literature he read to create his own
understanding of the cosmos. Consequently, Ginzburg posits that oral peasant culture
shaped Menocchio’s unique reading of his texts, much as the ideology of spheres shaped
Edith’s understanding of her work. Menocchio’s interpretations offer a means of
understanding something of this culture that would otherwise be lost to history. Ginzburg
argues that remnants from ancient peasant culture produced Menocchio’s quite literal
interpretation of God.

While Ginzburg makes it clear that there are some elements of history that are
impossible to recover, his approach offers a means to understanding “anonymous” lives
throughout history. He writes that:

A number of biographical studies have shown that in a modest individual who is
himself lacking in significance and for this very reason representative, it is still
possible to trace, as in microcosm, the characteristics of an entire social stratum in
a specific historical period, whether it be the Austrian nobility or the lower clergy

Or, for that matter, nineteenth-century farm women in rural Pennsylvania. Ginzburg
argues that microhistory, in conjunction with the study of broad historical trends, can
provide a more balanced and complete historical narrative:

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20 Carlo Ginzburg, The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller (Baltimore:
Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 12
21 Ibid., 47
22 Ibid., xiii
23 Ibid., xx
It is not my intention to pass judgment on qualitative versus quantitative research; quite simply, it must be emphasized that, as far as the history of the subordinate classes is concerned, the precision of the latter cannot do without...the notorious impressionism of the former.

Ginzburg’s assertion of the importance of Menocchio’s story extends to Edith. Through her diary, we can begin to understand the culture in which she lived. Moreover, the distinctiveness of her household does not make the examination of it any less valuable; rather, it illustrates the diversity of individual experience, even within similar class status and geographic region. As Ginzburg points out, “even a limited case ...can be representative.”

Recognizing Edith as both representative of historical trends and as an individual contributes to our understanding of the variation and nuance underlying broader patterns.

This study, then, will attempt to do what she has done for us—if unconsciously—in the passage above. It will reveal the texture of her daily life using the records she has left behind. Using her diary, I will try to reconstruct a small part of her life.

The diary, an eight by ten inch hardcover book with about two hundred lined pages, written in ink, covers from December of 1856 to December of 1858. I have only used her entries through December 31, 1857. Edith’s writing was sparse; in general, there was little interior contemplation. On occasion, however, she exposed the frustration and self-doubt that shaped so much of her everyday life. Because of this personal nature of her diary—the means by which I have come to know her—I have chosen to refer to her as “Edith” throughout my study. To call her by her last name seemed inappropriate.

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24 Ibid., xxi
25 Ibid., xx
as it did not capture the intimacy with which she revealed herself and her feelings in her diary.

Her diary makes clear that she worked hard and provided critical support for both her family and the rural capitalist economy growing up around her. I will examine her doubts and anxieties about her life, and in doing so will reveal the tension in her daily work that underlies the period not only for her, but for many women like her. Edith worked so hard and provided so much for her family, yet she so undervalued her contribution that she wrote,

[A]las!—how little good I have done in this year that is now about to leave us[,] how much better am I fitted to perform my duties here? [H]ow much more capable of guiding my infant’s footsteps aright than one year ago? Alas: none; and I am one year nearer to the grave.26

Why does a modern reader understand her work so differently than she did herself? What is the nature and origin of the dissonance between her heavy labors and her own understanding of them? While it is impossible to retrospectively convince her of the importance of her work, it is necessary to understand how an intelligent, well-educated woman came to feel this way; as well as the power of the ideological fiction of domesticity that caused her to do so.

Although the daily events of Edith Bushong’s life were prosaic, the work she did and the thoughts she had were significant. They enmeshed her in local and national communities, both real and imagined. The rhetoric of the so-called public and private spheres constructed an artificial divide that meant little in the day-to-day lives of Edith, her husband Gilbert, and their contemporaries. Edith’s “private” production that she

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26 Bushong, Dec. 31, 1857
conducted in the household made her part of a public arena of market relations, and her shared reading with Gilbert brought national and sectional politics into their rural farmhouse.

Edith was an economic actor on the local productive level and beyond, but neither she nor the society in which she lived realized her contribution, causing her to live in constant fear that she was not "doing" enough. Because she was so deeply embedded in a culture that denied the value of her life's work, she never took pride in the tremendous amount she accomplished. She viewed her work through the lens of a pervasive domestic ideology that negated its value and importance. In antebellum rural mid-Atlantic culture, women's work was taken for granted as a part of a privatized social world rather than as a generative facet of rural capitalism.
THE LIFE OF EDITH BUSHONG

Her Background

Edith Bushong was born Edith Kinsey Paxson, in Little Britain Township in Lancaster County, not far from the Bushong farm complex. The Paxsons, as well as the Bushongs, were Hicksite Quakers; both families belonged to the nearby Sadsbury Meeting House. Edith’s parents, Elwood H. Paxson and Elizabeth White Paxson, appear to have lived on a farm located only several miles—within walking distance—from Edith’s later home, the Bushong farm, located in the neighboring Eden Township. [See Figure 1.]

Edith was the second oldest of eight siblings. She was born January 14, 1836—and although she noted both her son’s first birthday and the two-year anniversary of her marriage, she did not mention her own birthday in her diary. Rather, her anniversaries of motherhood and marriage marked her passage of time. Edith’s mother continued to have children for another twenty years, until after Edith herself married. Edith’s youngest brother, Joseph, was only six months older than her own son. As one of the oldest children in a large family, Edith surely gained much experience child-rearing before giving birth to Charlie. This experience explains her acquired knowledge apparent in such comments as “Charlie very unwell this afternoon and evening, has some fever. I expect it is his teeth.”

27 The Paxson Family, Bushong Family Papers, Swarthmore College Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore, PA
28 Bushong, Feb. 17, 1857
Figure 1: Map of Eden Township in 1899, showing the property of Gilbert Bushong in upper right quadrant.

Edith remained close to her family after her marriage. The short several miles between the Paxson family home and her home with Gilbert facilitated the ease with which she maintained those relationships. The proximity of the two farms provided Edith with the freedom to visit her family as often as she liked—barring work—because she could, and did, walk to the farm herself and did not have to rely on anyone to take her

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there. She went frequently, whether to help with work, share food, or simply visit. Interestingly, she continued to refer to her parent’s house as “home” despite the fact that by the end of 1857 she had lived with Gilbert’s family for two years. At various times, depending on surrounding events, she alternately used the term “home” to refer either to hers and Gilbert’s house or to her parents’ house. Her use of the term indicated her relative homesickness, concern for her sick father, and discontent with her role in her new home on the Bushong farm.

Among her siblings, Edith was closest to her sister Caroline, or Cal, who was a year and a half older than she. Edith and Cal were great friends: when Cal moved West with her husband, Nash, the sisters stayed in close contact. They wrote each other several times each month. Even during the busiest time of the farming season she made time to write letters to her sister. Edith expressed her excitement upon receiving letters from Cal by recording when she mailed a letter or she or her mother received one. For the most part, Edith made the best of the situation and communicated with Cal through letters and gifts, such as a daguerreotype of Charlie and a pincushion, exemplifying one historian’s assessment that letter-writing “diminish[ed] the psychological costs of moving away from home.” Fortunately, their separation corresponded with a period of increased letter

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30 Bushong, Jan. 31, 1857: “I walked down to the house to help Mother bake some mince pies;” Jul. 15: “I took some few cherries to Mother that I had put up for her seeded red sweet ones;” Jul. 12: “Marion and I had a nice walk and chat up on the hill...how much like home it feels to be at my old home so many a happy hour I have spent beneath its humble roof.”
31 Ibid., Dec. 21, 1856: “Gilbert, Charlie, and I all went home to find Pap [her father] much better;” Mar. 19, 1857: “Gilbert...took me home after dinner;” Apr. 12: “Gil and I walked to my old home in the evening;” May 1: “today I walked home Gilbert was there all day putting in Pap’s oats;” Sept. 2: “busy untill ten I then got my little one ready and walked ‘home;’” Oct. 24: “after dinner I...went home and got my Mother and went to Quarryville.”
32 Ibid., May 6, 1857: “Gilbert and I at ‘home’ in the evening preparing some little presents for Cal and Nash;” May 7: “Mother, Charlie, and I went to Johnson’s Daguerrean Gallery there got Charlie’s picture for Cal;” May 2: “made...two little Toilet pin cushions of Brown and black silk, one I intend for Cal.”
33 Henkin, The Postal Age: The Emergence of Modern Communications in Nineteenth Century America (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 50
writing across the country as postage rates decreased and more people began to regularly
write letters: had Cal moved away only thirty years earlier, “such [an] intense long-
distance relationship[] would have proved virtually impossible to sustain,” and the
distance between her and her sister surely would have had an even greater effect on
Edith’s well-being. The loss of her sister left a void in Edith’s life, and she often noted
how badly she missed her—on these days, she wrote that she felt “very, very sad.” On
Christmas day, Edith reminisced about the previous Christmas, before “life’s stormy
seas” had separated her family; and on Cal’s wedding anniversary she wrote, “poor girl
she is now far from all her early friends and childhood home, now she dwelleth among
strangers all for the husband of her heart. Well should he cherish her who has sacrificed
so much for him.” Edith could not imagine making such a sacrifice, as her choice to
marry within walking distance of her childhood home indicates.

As a girl, Edith attended a Quaker educational institution, the Penn School. It is
unclear which years and for how long she attended, but the school was founded prior to
1843, so she could have received ten years of schooling or more. Penn School
accommodated the farmers in the region by holding school around the agricultural
seasons: students attended for four months in the summer and three in the winter, but
stayed home to help on their farms in the spring and fall.

34 Richard John, *Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse* (Cambridge,
Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), 158
35 Bushong, Jan. 3, 1857
36 Ibid., Dec. 25, 1856
37 Ibid., Feb. 20, 1857
Cook Publishing Inc., 1990), 174
39 Ibid., 170-171
Quaker schools held female students to the same standards as the male: "they were expected to study the same subject and to excel." Edith's essay below demonstrates that she met this expectation. Her education resonated with her and had a lasting impact throughout her life, as made especially apparent from her love of reading and writing. A reflection on her education upon her commencement from Penn School, addressed to her "kind Teacher and Fellow students," demonstrates her intellectual nature:

The last day of school has come at last; the day that is to separate, and send us to our respective homes and duties with what different feelings of joy and of sorrow is the word spoken, some says "Oh! my but I am so glad school is nearly done I am so tired of going to school and studying such hard lessons as our Teacher gives us." Pause and think fair friends—for what purpose are you sent to school. Is it for the benefit of that Teacher? No; verily it is [so that you] gain all the useful knowledge you can to enable the better to fill the station allotted you in this terrestrial sphere, that you may be an ornament and blessing to the family of relations and friends that you may call your home, that you may when called upon to be the instructor or guide of the infant footsteps that you may be competent to the task, for the home education is vastly the most important one that the child receives, then dear children employ well your school days...But again there are others amongst us who dread the near approach of the last day of school; those who have been diligent studious pupils and have employed well their time and still find they are far behind the goal they wish to attain and that session has been only long enough for them to find out how much they still have to learn although their school days are over for a time they will employ well their "spare moments" and if all would do that how much wiser would they soon become?

Edith first explained the importance of education: to better fulfill one's "station," to make oneself a better companion for family and friends, and to be able to educate one's children well. She then placed herself in the second category of students who "dread" the end of their schooling. But for these students, including Edith, their education did not

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41 Edith Bushong, Bushong Family Papers, Swarthmore College Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore, PA
42 Idem.
end with commencement; rather, they continued to use their “spare moments,” away from work and other family obligations, to expand their intellect on their own. Edith wrote that through reading and discussing books, these students could further their education on their own and become life-long learners. Jensen claims that this “love of knowledge and self-improvement”\textsuperscript{43} was a common trait in educated Quaker women. This deep-seeded belief came to fruition later in Edith’s life; both in her habit of reading as often as she could and in her keeping of a diary to record her activities and thoughts.

Edith’s education endowed her with certain expectations of life. It instilled in her the desire for knowledge and the expectation to be a thinking person; that is, to use her intellect. Although she most likely knew when writing the above passage that the “station” she was destined for was that of a housewife and mother, she expected to be able to exercise her intellect in her everyday life, as she made apparent in her writing. Her limited terrain of providing a home education to her son, however, did not fulfill her intellectual capacity to the extent that she had hoped; this later caused her disappointment with the limits of her daily life.

In addition to her rigorous Quaker education, Edith’s religion played a specific role in her daily life. Although she never wrote about spirituality or the significance of being Quaker in her diary, being Quaker was an important part of her upbringing. It shaped her social world and made her part of a wider network of people outside of her immediate neighborhood. Many of Edith’s friends and acquaintances were fellow Quakers; and while she was not able to attend Quaker meeting often, when she did she certainly would have enjoyed the opportunity for extended social interaction it provided.

\textsuperscript{43} Jensen, “Not Only Ours but Others,” 13
Furthermore, Edith and Gilbert both belonged to the Sadsbury Meeting. On December 20, 1855, the nineteen year-old Edith Paxson married Gilbert Bushong before the meeting. They moved into their own house on the Bushong family property, which consisted of three houses, two stables, and a springhouse on ninety-nine acres of land with a creek running through it. Eight days before their wedding, on December 12, 1855, Gilbert’s father, Henry Bushong, had presented his son with “the following described personal property as an outfit for farming biz.”

He gave Gilbert Two horses...the two cows...Six pigs, waggon, Bed, wood bed and hay ladders, 2 ploughs 1 self sharpener and one of the barshears with one plough double tree, the largest spike harrow, one hoe harrow, the rockaway, 2 dung forks...1 mattock, 1 feather bed and 1 chaff bag with bed clothes for both and 2 pair of bed steads...1 large walnut Chest known as his, 1 Beaureau, Book case and half dozen chairs, [and] 1 corner cupboard that stands in the front room.

He also sold Gilbert “my oxen and ox cast for the sum of Two Hundred dollars to be paid April 1st 1857.”

Essentially, Henry Bushong provided Gilbert with the means to start his own household—the furniture and bed clothes—and his own farming income, as well as selling him other goods with the expectation of payment over two years later once Gilbert had accumulated some amount of personal wealth. While it is difficult to place the Bushongs precisely in terms of the family’s wealth, this list situates them solidly within the middle class and possibly above it: bedsteads and feather beds were particularly valuable at this time because of the intense labor that went into producing them.

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44 Bushong, Dec. 20, 1857: “two years ago to day since we were married it is a clear and pleasant day very much such a one as the one that this is the second anniversary of.”
45 Henry Bushong, Dec. 12, 1855, Bushong-Gilbert Papers, Lancaster County Historical Society, Lancaster, PA
46 Idem.
47 Idem.
Be it Known, to all whom it may concern, that this is to certify that I have in my life time and of my own free will and accord given to my son Gilbert Bushong the following described personal property as an outlet for farming viz., Two horses, four and three with gear, the two axes I got from Allen and Harding, Six pigs Meggon, bed, wood bed and hay ladder, 2 ploughs 1 self sharpner and one of the baronets with one plough double bire, the largest spike harrow, one hoe harrow, the rockaway, 2 laying forks, 2.5 pronged hay forks and 2.2 pronged do one half bushel, 1 Master, 1 feather bed and 1 chaff bag white bed clothes for both and 2 pair of bed sheets 1 pair got of Martha A. Price and 1 of the old pair 1 large walnut chest known as ties, 1 Bedroom Block box and half dozen chairs, 1 corner cupboard that stands in the front room. I also will to my son Gilbert my 3 horse threshing machine my oven and my cart for the sum of Five hundred dollars due to paid April 1st 1847

In testimony whereof I have hereunto set my hand and seal this 12 day of 1846 month 4th.

Henry Bushong

Witness Present.

J. H. Gilbert

Figure 2: Henry Bushong's bequests to his son, Gilbert

...Daughters and sons received feather beds in addition for money bequests. Bedsteads frequently accompanied the bed, but in most cases it was the feathers that gave them their value. Raising, butchering, and plucking fowl and then saving the feathers became a part of women's productive work.”

Idem.
Thus, Edith entered into an economically stable union with good future prospects for maintaining their comfortable circumstances. Yet, her feelings about marriage were ambivalent. While she never criticized Gilbert in her diary—indeed, she frequently referred to him as “dear Gilbert,” recorded that she missed him when he traveled, and noted the gifts he bought her—she also never explicitly stated that she loved him, and she made other comments that betrayed her suspicion of loving marriage. Not only did she voice her sadness that Cal had sacrificed so much for her husband, but upon hearing of a friend’s marriage she remarked that she “hope[d] she love[d] him.” This offhand comment indicates that while love was potentially involved in making a marriage match, it was not required or even necessarily expected. Only a year into her own marriage, Edith seemed all too aware of the importance of the feelings between a husband and wife. Was this because of her own lack of affection for Gilbert?

To be sure, the two seem to have enjoyed each other’s company. Edith wrote positively about the nights they spent together: “Gilbert and I alone this evening how pleasant these evenings are.” In another entry, she reflected that “we have a happy home and spend many happy evenings when G reads I sew and little one sleeps, such a one was last evening.” With the few clues she left, and without any record of his

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50 Bushong, Jan. 6, 1857: “dear Gil is busy, I see but little of him;” May 2: “Oh my Gilbert is at the store I hope he will soon come. I am sleepy and tired...Gilbert has come brought me a new yellow calico dress;” May 22: “Gilbert and Latham went to Lancaster for iron for James Mathews, he got me a brush to clean combs and a very nice hair brush. Dear one he always remembers me when away;” Jun. 16: “Gilbert at Georgetown this evening got...me a palm leaf fan;” Sept. 10: “Gilbert at the R[ail] Road for Phosphate to day but did not get any, he got me a fluid Lamp it cost 70 cts, it is very nice;” Nov. 29: Gilbert is away, “how lonely I feel tonight.”

51 Ibid., Feb. 20, 1857: “Poor girl she is now far from all her early friends and childhood home, now she dwelleth among strangers all for the husband of her heart. Well should he cherish her who has sacrificed so much for him.”

52 Ibid., Jan. 3, 1857

53 Ibid., Jan. 17, 1857

54 Ibid., Jan. 22, 1857
feelings, it is difficult to understand the feeling in their marriage; but it appears that the
two shared at least settled companionship if not passionate love.

Her Daily Life and Labor

The physical scope of Edith’s day-to-day world encompassed a small
constellation of the general store, her neighbors, and her family. In general, she left the
Bushong farm no more than two or three days per week to visit her parents’ house or a
neighbor; a particularly active week led her to dryly comment that “one might think I
went abroad often from this being the only day this week that I spent at home.”

Trips beyond the several mile circumference of the farm were rare: some trips to the town store
with Gilbert, a few shopping outings to neighboring towns with her mother, a day trip to
Lancaster with her parents, an overnight trip to visit relatives in Chester County. She
also occasionally attended meeting in Sadsbury Township, but more often than not her
work kept her at home. The frequency of Edith’s travel patterns in her neighborhood
and beyond approximately matched those of other American farm women. Women of
Edith’s material and social circumstances did not possess either freedom of movement or
the need for it: outside of their farms and neighborhoods, there was little place for them
to go.

55 Ibid., Feb. 13, 1857
56 Ibid., Jun. 13, 1857: “Gilbert and I went to the store this evening;” May 7: “Mother, Charlie, and I went
and I went...to Chester Co left home at ten arrived at brother John’s at one [stayed overnight].”
57 Ibid., May 17, 1857: “I so badly wanted to go to meeting this morning.”
58 Emilie W. Gould, “On Reading the Diaries of American Farm Women,” in A Women’s Diary Miscellany,
Edith was responsible for running her household and all that entailed: feeding, clothing, and caring for her family and domestic servants, as well as producing saleable goods, such as butter, for local and regional markets and keeping family accounts. Historian Daniel Howe singles out heavy domestic labor as one of the notable differences separating free labor in Northern societies from slave-labor based in Southern societies. "[E]ven nonslaveowning white families could hire slave women from their owner to perform the heavier domestic tasks. But in the North, middle-class women had to do more of their family's housework, cooking and child care.”

Caught in the middle, middle-class women like Edith had fewer servants than elite women but "fuller larders and more expensive equipment than poor women." Thus, they spent significantly more time at their work than other members of their sex. Even though Edith had live-in help, still performed much labor herself. This work consumed her life: she spent most every minute from the time she woke to the time she went to bed providing for her family in one way or another.

A typical day for Edith involved getting up early and waking her husband and son; sewing, or in the summer gardening, until the help served breakfast, then completing her daily list of "things that have always to be done," including sewing, cleaning, and various other tasks that Edith found too mundane—although obviously not easy to complete—to list. Two or three days each week, Edith would visit a neighbor or friend

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59 Howe, 555
60 Boydston, Home and Work, 17
61 Bushong, Sept. 14, 1857
62 Sally McMurry, Families and Farmhouses in Nineteenth-Century America: Vernacular Design and Social Change (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 91: McMurry lists some of the rural household chores typical in the nineteenth century that Edith performed: "The most onerous of the farm women's tasks still involved substantial manual labor. Even the improved cookstove required hauling wood and careful attention to fire building. Laundering entailed heating and carrying gallons of water, and food had to be processed from its rawest form. Women usually milked the cows, baked bread daily, kept a kitchen..."
and assist her with work; on the other days, one of these women might do the same for her. After cleaning up from supper, Edith would sometimes be able to sit and sew by the fire with her husband and son while Gilbert read aloud to them from a book, newspaper, or magazine, although during her busiest times of year, summer and fall, she did not read but often continued to work on her current project, as on September 22 when “Gilbert and [she] peared untill late bed-time, Mother come in and helped [them] after they got done theirs.”

Work pervaded every aspect of her life and required consistent cooperation with those around her. Much of Edith’s work either contributed to or relied on the help of others, including her hired help, family, and neighbors and friends. These mutually beneficial labor networks were critical to her success in running her household. As Kelly explains, collective labor was a key method for working productively during the period because often domestic and agricultural tasks required many hands.

These networks were long-standing. Jensen notes that when Esther Lewis, another Quaker woman who lived in antebellum rural Pennsylvania, arrived on her husband’s farm after their marriage the farm was already entrenched in “an intricate web of family and work relationships, tied to neighbors and meeting by other economic and social networks.” Edith’s own network included members of Gilbert’s family and her own cousins, friends, and neighbors. Because the Bushong family farm was only several miles away from the farm where Edith grew up, she maintained the network of her youth.

garden, and preserved vegetables and fruit. Making butter was still done by hand churning. Domestic cheese manufacture demanded exacting and strenuous labor. Much of the family wardrobe was hand-sewn. Farm women cooked and cleaned for the hired hands as well as for the family, so it is possible that, as farms expanded, the burden for the well-to-do, progressive farm wives was actually greater than for their neighbors who hired fewer hands.”

63 Bushong., Sept. 22, 1857
64 Jensen, Loosening the Bonds, 132
and to continued to rely on her own family and friends in addition to Gilbert’s family network.

For example, Edith especially enjoyed visiting and working at her “home,” as she referred to her parent’s house, because it allowed her to spend time with her family. These visits always involved work, however; one time when her mother came to visit her, they “spent the whole time sewing at [her] brown silk dress.” Edith continued to rely on her mother for help—in fact, it was the taxing demands of Edith’s work, and her need for assistance, that provided her with the opportunity to visit her mother on a regular basis. Edith lived her life through labor: her daily work structured her social experiences and relationships.

Hannah and Sue, the Bushongs’ hired help, were of the most immediate help to Edith. Sue mostly worked in the main house for Edith’s mother-in-law, but occasionally helped Edith when necessary. It appears that in the Bushong household the help spent most of their time preparing meals, the most time-consuming and constant part of daily upkeep. Because the Bushongs had enough money to employ two live-in domestic helpers, Edith could avoid some of the more arduous physical labor. Hannah typically did the weekly laundry and ironing, but when there was more wash than usual, or there was bad weather, or Hannah was away—as occasionally happened—Edith took on this labor herself.

When Hannah performed major chores, such as laundry, on her own this at best allowed Edith more time to sew—the chief demand on her time. At worst, it meant that Edith was left to complete all other work without assistance, as on May 18, when

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65 Bushong, Apr. 9, 1857
66 Ibid., Jul. 17, 1857: “we arose early and worked in the garden until breakfast was ready.”
67 Boydston, Home and Work, 107
“Hannah wash[ed] so [Edith] was pretty busy” with the rest of the chores. Edith relied heavily on Hannah’s help, and noted that the days she was away were particularly difficult. Good help in the Pennsylvania countryside was hard to find and to replace, as Edith acknowledged when Hannah left to be closer to her family. Edith wrote that she was “very sorry to see her go.” Although tension existed between middle-class women and their help, these women ultimately appreciated and even cared for the girls.

Rural women so valued their help “not because they identified with the women they hired but because they understood the value of the labor those women performed—understood it personally, immediately, and physically” as they, too, spent their lives doing it. Having help in rural areas did not allow middle-class women to escape labor, but rather to complete more tasks than one person could squeeze into a day, week, or year. The same was true of labor networks that extended beyond her household.

Rural men and women participated in these networks to better complete their work. In the mid-Atlantic and Northeast, familial and neighborly relationships shaped rural communities. The amount and degree of difficulty of manual labor a farm required mandated that families and neighbors assist each other with their work, especially for complex and time consuming tasks such as butchering.

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68 Bushong, May 18, 1857
69 Ibid., Jul. 15, 1857: “Hannah away in the afternoon so I am very busy”
70 Ibid., Sept. 9, 1857
71 Ibid., Feb. 2, 1857: “Hannah very angry all this day.”
72 Ibid., Jul. 25, 1857: “We came home about nine, found everything going on very well thanks to Hannah she is a very good girl when I'm away.”
73 Kelly, In the New England Fashion, 35
Edith and Gilbert both gave and received entire days of labor to and from nearby families during November and December of 1857— butchering season in rural Pennsylvania. The butchering and meat preparation that farm families executed during these months provided them with much of the meat they would eat over the course of the following year. The task of butchering required an entire day per cow or pig. The strenuous process entailed placing the animal in a large cast iron pot of scalding water over a fire, scraping its hide clean, hanging it by its hind legs, and gutting it and saving its organs. At that point, the women cut the meat off of the animal and cold-packed it, then later cured the meat and made scrapple and seasoned sausages that they preserved in rendered lard. It necessitated many helping hands.

As technology improved and more goods became available for purchase during the nineteenth-century, these networks gradually dissolved; but in 1857, when Edith lived and worked, they remained critical. Neighbors “exchanged labor and surpluses, raised barns, made quilts, purchased reapers together, and borrowed money from one another to expand their operations.” The need for assistance was no less palpable in women’s work than it was in planting and harvesting crops as done by men. Indeed, women supported each other as part of the phenomenon that Kelly refers to as kinship networks. The women who participated in these networks helped each other sew, quilt, can, entertain, clean and more.

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75 Bushong, Dec. 1, 1857; Dec. 10; Dec. 16
76 Solanco Heritage, 41
78 Kelly, In the New England Fashion
79 Bushong, Apr. 19, 1857: “my own mother came to day we spent the whole time sewing at my brown silk dress.”
80 Ibid., Sept. 17, 1857: “quilting at Mercer Whitson’s this afternoon…we were the company and quilted two comforts for her.”
Preparing bedding exemplified such cooperation, as it was typically done in a group. Making bedding started with raising and plucking chickens for feathers for stuffing. Feather bedding was highly valued, providing a respite in houses otherwise devoid of comfortable seating. It was also a labor-intensive task, however, and was significantly easier as a multi-person job.

Communal work was social as well as necessary: in "provincial communities, the grandest occasions—barn raisings, huskings, quilting parties—merged work and sociability." The need for many people to work together provided an opportunity for companionship in an otherwise toilsome and isolated life. The most common task that women assisted each other with was sewing. Outside of the planting, growing, and harvesting months between December and June, Edith stitched with other women multiple times each week. Furthermore, the majority of social calls involved some sort of sewing. Kelly confirms this common practice and cites an example of a dinner party where "women’s labor pervaded the evening; after the fine meal, the hostess and her female guests settled in to quilt a comforter." On one visit to a cousin’s house, Edith wrote that she “helped them sew some.” Quilting, in particular, was a common group activity because, while it was normally a long and tedious process, with many women

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81 Ibid., Sept. 16, 1857: “[I] went over to help Margaret put up some Tomatoes we worked at it most all day we put up two gallon for each of us.”
82 Ibid., Aug. 29, 1857: “I went up to Harding’s to help Hannah prepare for their Party to come off this evening, had very good success got done and came home before dinner.”
83 Ibid., Nov. 3, 1857: “Hannah Johnson came to day, she and I cleaned the Parlor and sitting room.”
84 Ibid., Aug. 4, 1857: Edith and her mother worked together to “fill[] Gilbert’s featherbed.”
85 Jensen, Loosening the Bonds, 49
88 Ibid., 114
89 Bushong, Feb. 10, 1857
working at once it could be completed quickly. On August 27, for example, "Caroline Morrison...[and] I put a shirt in the frames this evening she helped me quilt it [and] we finished by bed time;" thus demonstrating that collective labor was speedier and more efficient for certain tasks.

Even with the help of her servants, family, and friends, Edith's labor took its toll. During the growing and harvesting seasons, Edith often recorded being tired: between June and December she wrote that she felt "somewhat tired," "quite tired," or "very very tired" thirteen times. Even on days when she did not note how tired she felt, she implied it in the brevity of her diary entries: she reduced her typical approximately third of a page entry to less than a line, as on December 23, when she wrote, "churning ironing &c to day." On days like this that included much heavy lifting, Edith did not even have the energy to detail her activities in her usual style, but rather quickly scratched a few words before falling asleep. She especially tended to note her exhaustion after activities such as churning; canning—which involved heavy-lifting and stirring large, hot kettles for hours at a time as well as heavy lifting; whitewashing; and "cleaning"—which

90 Ibid., Aug. 27, 1857
91 Ibid., Jun. 2, 1857: "I whitewashed the springhouse and Sue helped me clean up the things...I feel somewhat tired tonight;" Jun. 3: "We cleaned the cellar to day it was a big days work I feel tired now tis bedtime and I worked in the garden since supper;" Jun. 12: "Hannah and I very busy all morning baking &c. feel quite tired by night;" Jul. 8: "Cleaning house to day, got out up stairs done; feel very tired to night...whitewashed the back room today also to day we did not get it fixed up;" Jul 9: "Washing bedclothes, and very busy all morning...cleaned the parlor and sitting room this afternoon feel very very tired;" Sept. 4: "Busy nearly all day, we went to the orchard in the evening got some ripe Peaches, I pearred and put up two quart cans after supper I feel pretty tired to night;" Sept. 21: "we were very busy all day washing, gathering, and putting up Tomatoes and churning; I feel very tired at night;" Sept. 29: "Made Peach butter to day made three bushel of Peaches took two gallon of molasses and 15 #s of sugar. I canned three gallon of Peaches and 2 1/2 of Tomatoes feel very very tired tonight;" Oct. 21: "Boiled the second kettle of sauce today very tired when night comes;" Oct 27: "I did a large washing today and made a barrel of soap, got very good; I also cleaned my room this evening, feel very very tired tonight;" Nov. 2: "Susana helped us wash to day then she and I cleaned two rooms upstairs and one down very tired, but Gil she and I went to the store after supper;" Dec. 7: "Butchering day we killed five porkers; very busy and very tired when night came got all done in one day;" Dec. 14: "Feel very tired to night, we washed churned &c&c this afternoon I made a flannel shirt for Jacob (our colored man)."

92 Ibid., Dec. 23, 1857
involved moving heavy furniture and stores. Her work was physically demanding and
taxed her on a daily basis. She worked through tiredness and illness,\textsuperscript{93} not once in 1857
did she have a day off. Edith’s lived experience contrasts sharply with the image that
Boydston presents as the ideal nineteenth-century household: in this idyllic setting, “all is
ordered, and the ordering of it is not only \textit{not} burdensome or tiring, but the certain vehicle
of good health and a cheerful disposition. \textit{Far from laborious, housework is positively
regenerating}.”\textsuperscript{94} This was not the case in the Bushong household, and if we take Edith’s
life as representative of other rural, middle-class women’s of the 1850s in Pennsylvania,
then her diary firmly refutes this representation of reality.

Not only Edith’s work but also her relationships taxed her. Although Gilbert,
Edith, and Charlie were fortunate enough to have their own house, giving them privacy
from Gilbert’s family and a limited degree of independence, the three of them did live in
the main house from March through July of 1857\textsuperscript{95} while adding to their own house.
While the openness of its architecture that Edith indicated in the opening vignette of the
introduction “signified cooperation”—she illustrated how everyone cooperated to
contribute to the family’s greater good—“it also implied excessive work [and] lack of
privacy.”\textsuperscript{96} The limited and communal nature of the workspace within the house and the
need to work so closely together day in and day out surely wore everyone’s patience thin
and contributed to domestic disputes, particularly between Edith and Gilbert’s mother.

Even when they lived in a separate house, however, Edith and Gilbert had little autonomy

\textsuperscript{93} Ib\textit{id}, Sept. 9, 1857: “Unwell all day to day but had to be busy put up two gallon of Tomatoes and one of
Peaches;” Oct. 3: “I feel quite unwell today still with the Peaches;” Oct. 7: “Still unwell but still able to be
up and at my work...I put up my peach butter today and put the last of my Peaches today.”

\textsuperscript{94} Boydston, \textit{Home and Work}, 148

\textsuperscript{95} Bushong, Mar. 6 and July 7, 1857

\textsuperscript{96} McMurry, 7
from their extended family. One unusually frank entry conveys Edith's frustration with
the extent to which her in-laws controlled her life. Edith wrote: "Gilbert and I at the store
stayed until ten when we got home found them cross at us; we have as great a time as if
we were little children; we must just go and come when they want us too or else there is a
fuss." Edith wrote that "contrary reigns in our home; scarce a day passes with all being pleasant."  

The old Bushongs' reproach exemplified the trend of Edith's confinement to the
farm, a recurring theme in her diary and constant source of frustration for her. On
various days, she expressed her resentment through self-pity, sarcasm, and bitterness. On
January 20, Edith wrote:

Gilbert at the store...how many weary hours a Wife puts in at home with her
children which the husband knows nothing of while he is away; I do not complain
for mine is at home all his spare time in a general way, but he has gone to-night
and I feel so very sad.  

Gilbert could escape to the store—the store served as a town meeting place; it was not
only a place to exchange goods but also to exchange conversation—after a long day of
work. Meanwhile, Edith had to remain at home with their son. Not only could she not
go out and socialize as he did, but by going himself Gilbert made Edith feel even lonelier
as the one left behind. She tried to downplay her complaint by thinking that she was
lucky Gilbert spends so much of his spare time at home, but that did not mitigate her
sadness and sense of under-appreciation, both for her work—for she too deserved a
break—and as a companion. On January 30, Edith wallowed in more explicit self-pity,
writing that although the weather was "quite pleasant" and there were "sleighs running all

97 Bushong, Jul. 29, 1857
98 Ibid., Aug. 15, 1857
99 Ibid., Jan. 20, 1857
day," “poor” Edith had to sit and watch “others enjoying it and could not] go at all.”\textsuperscript{100} Her work and her responsibility for Charlie did not allow time for recreation.

Work also curtailed Edith and Gilbert’s social life. In addition to being scolded for returning home from the store too late, on March 28 they “attended a Surprise Party” for a neighbor. The party included about fifteen people close to them in age. Gilbert and Edith enjoyed themselves but “left about twelve”—presumably much before the party ended—“thinking that quite late enough got us married folks with a baby at home.”\textsuperscript{101} At the young age of twenty-one, responsibility and parenthood already constrained Edith and Gilbert. Edith felt burdened by responsibility another night as well; while visiting Uncle Joshua Gilbert, they had to leave “before supper as Gilbert had no one at home to do the feeding.”\textsuperscript{102} Their responsibility, not only to their child but also to their farm, greatly affected their ability to socialize in their limited time off.

By late summer of that year, possibly because of her amount of work, or possibly because of the tension that mounted from consistently not being able to do as she wanted, Edith’s entries grew openly bitter. On July 30, she wrote that she “wanted to go to the funeral to day but could not get to on account of the work.” Deeply resentful of her work, but unable to see any escape from it in the future, she wrote, “I will soon get used to being disappointed I expect.”\textsuperscript{103} Only two days later, when a family member—most likely her mother-in-law, as Edith was subject to her demands—would not allow her to attend a nearby abolitionist convention, Edith responded,

Nearly all the people of the neighborhood [at the convention]. I wanted to go very badly but was disappointed again; I do not expect to build so high any more then

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., Jan. 30, 1857
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., Mar. 28, 1857
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., Mar. 22, 1857
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., Jul. 30, 1857
they cannot make me feel so badly about not going; I only hope that some people
may be as much disappointed as I have been to-day it makes me have bitter
feeling to be crossed so much as I have been lately.\footnote{104}

Her resolve not to “build so high any more” exudes bitterness and resentment and
epitomizes her frustration with her confinement and lack of independence. Alternately,
on July 12, Edith expressed relief when relaxing “at her old home” where “so many a
happy hour [she] ha[d] spent.”\footnote{105} In this instance, her dissatisfaction with her married life
and accompanying work manifests itself as homesickness for her bygone childhood, in
which she did not have as much work for she was not yet in charge of her own
household.

Her Doubts and Anxieties

Edith found ways to deal with her discontent. She used reading and writing, in
her diary and in letters, as an outlet. Both allowed her to temporarily escape the grueling
labor of her everyday life, as when she felt “quite lonely and somewhat sad” and spent
the day “reading and writing to put in the time.”\footnote{106} For Edith, it was important to “steal a
few moments” out of her busy day to “pen [her] thoughts” and “not[e]...events that ha[d]
ocurred.”\footnote{107} Her diary provided a space to keep a record of her thoughts and activities
and “a grounding for self reliance, a source of self validation...[and] a source of
comfort.”\footnote{108}

\footnote{104} Ibid., Aug. 1, 1857
\footnote{105} Ibid., Jul. 12, 1857
\footnote{106} Ibid., May 17, 1857
\footnote{107} Ibid., Jan. 29, 1857
This space was necessary for Edith, for she constantly doubted her capability to execute her role as a wife and mother, “the station it [wa]s [her] destiny to fulfill.”

Self-doubt pervaded her writing, especially with respect to her roles of “Wife” and “Mother:"

I feel every day my incompetancy to fulfill my duties; the duties of Wife and Mother are numerous, and hard for me at least to perform. So difficult is it for me to please all I only hope to do right by both, and if I can please them both it will be my greatest pleasure and comfort.

Her son was a significant part of her day-to-day work, but he also was the source of much of the joy she derived from an otherwise dreary and laborious life. Edith’s care and love for him is tangible in her diary. She spent much time worrying about and often wrote of her concern for her son, fearful of the “many snares ...[that surrounded] his youthful steps.” Another night she lamented, “[P]oor little one he knows not the sorrows of this world” Her certainty that he would be disappointed with life as he grew older haunted her thoughts. She treasured her time with her family, yet even during these “happy evenings” concern for her son’s future nagged at her:

We spend many happy evenings us all alone in this little room with our dear little one by us, sometimes sleeping in his cradle, or up and amusing us with his little baby ways, how anxious we feel for him to grow useful and good, and to honor his parents, and County, and a comfort to all who know him, but there are so many snares for his youthful steps to be surrounded by, it makes us fear for him.

While Edith’s status as a new mother contributed to her anxiety, the pressures and expectations for women in rural antebellum society almost certainly compounded her

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109 Bushong, Aug. 15, 1857
110 Ibid., Jan. 8, 1857
111 Ibid., Jan. 10, 1857
112 Ibid., Jan. 20, 1857
113 Ibid., Jan. 22, 1857: “Oh: who can appreciate the word home but those who enjoy one; we have a happy home and spend many happy evenings when G reads I sew and little one sleeps, such a one was last evening.”
114 Ibid., Jan. 10, 1857
fears. Edith’s feeling of “incompetancy”\textsuperscript{115} haunted her every thought and made her feel “sad and lonely.”\textsuperscript{116} Although she never explicitly recorded any task she performed badly or specific instance of her failure, the “evocation of the Home as a new Eden”\textsuperscript{117} pervaded antebellum domestic ideology and powerfully shaped Edith’s conception of how her house should function and how she should feel. Her own feelings about married life did not measure up to what she perceived as the cultural norm; however, the ideology and reality of housework radically diverged.

Antebellum ideology of housework preached “self-sacrifice as a positive good and as the female equivalent to self-fulfillment.”\textsuperscript{118} Some of Edith’s contemporaries believed that marriage was “essential for the realization of a woman’s potential,”\textsuperscript{119} but this is only true if women only had the potential to be housewives—as domestic ideology said that they did. Furthermore, “the images and language of the ideology of spheres did not remain distant and distinct from daily life” but rather the prescriptive literature of the period, which Edith read. This literature offered up “idealized images of Woman and of the Home...not as constructs in a system of intellectual conventions, but as simulations of

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., Jan. 8 and Aug. 15, 1857
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., Aug. 15, 1857
\textsuperscript{117} Boydston, \textit{Home and Work}, 147
\textsuperscript{118} Kathryn Kish Sklar, \textit{Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), xiv: “Much of the ideology of domesticity is still with us. Perhaps the most powerful tenet supporting it today is the principle of female self-sacrifice. Women have always been praised for their readiness to put the needs of others before their own, but not until Beecher’s lifetime were they expected to accept self-sacrifice as a positive good and as the female equivalent to self-fulfillment. As American culture developed new forms of self-realization in the nineteenth century (exemplified in the image of the frontiersman and the writings of Emerson), it attached a male label to these experiences and called women selfish if they wanted the same set of personal goals. For them another set applied: devotion and service to others, selflessness, sacrifice. Beecher was especially attracted to this formula since it described her own experience and since it focused the spotlight of cultural virtue on women. Self-sacrifice, more than any other concept, informed both the triumphs and the tensions of nineteenth century womanhood, and Catharine Beecher was its major theoretician.”
\textsuperscript{119} Claudia L. Bushman, \textit{A Good Poor Man’s Wife: Being a Chronicle of Harriet Hanson Robinson and Her Family in Nineteenth Century New England} (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1981), 104
living people and tangible locations in the geography of daily social intercourse.” The real women of the period, like Edith, held up their own lived experience to an idealized and fictional experience of domesticity.

Many women consequently felt dissatisfied and unfulfilled; and, if Edith serves as a reliable indicator, understood this frustration as personal failure. She frequently expressed her unhappiness, yet often tempered it with the resolution that she must not despair anymore: “I have felt very sad and unhappy to day; but must try to do so no more for dear Gilbert’s sake.” She felt that in addition to the unending household tasks she performed, it was her duty to do so cheerfully so as not to upset her husband. She blamed herself for her sorrow, as she divulged in a particularly heart-breaking entry: “I feel very, very sad and unhappy tonight; why am I so? I am blest with a good kind husband, a good home and a sweet little babe, I wish I were good and contented, the fault must be mine.” She assumed the fault was her own—that something was wrong with her—because her domestic life left her unsatisfied.

The transition from life under her parents’ roof to married life especially wreaked havoc on Edith’s well-being. Domestic ideology of married life sharply contrasted with pre-married life for girls. Alexis de Tocqueville noted the “‘freedom and pleasure’ American women enjoyed within the households of their fathers juxtaposed with the ‘strict obligations’ and ‘cloister[ed]’ confinement they faced in the homes of their husbands.” His observation mirrors Edith’s experience and explains her resentment at

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120 Boydston, *Home and Work*, 146
121 Idem.
122 Bushong, May 9, 1857: “I feel very ‘blue’ and almost unhappy to-night;” Aug. 15: “I feel sad and lonely this eve why is it? I feel my utter incompetancy for the station it is my destiny to fulfill.”
123 Ibid., Mar. 8, 1857
124 Ibid., Sept. 13, 1857
125 Kelly, *In the New England Fashion*, 108
not having been able to come and go as she pleased; had she experienced the same strict control throughout her childhood, it is unlikely that she would have written of her married experience with such bitterness. Historian Nancy Cott referred to this trend—the situation was not particular to Edith—as “marriage trauma.”[^126] “[D]emanding that women find happiness in marriages that subordinated their interests and desires to their husband’s needs and ambitions”[^127] was bound to cause problems and create dissonance in women’s lives and work.

Edith worked constantly, and yet her writing makes clear that she did not feel her labor was important. She often wrote how “busy”[^128] her days were and how tired she felt. But she did not equate her work with the economic—inherent in her production—or social—as in the mutually-beneficial labor relationships she cultivated and maintained—value it contained. Rather, she commented that though she was “busy...as usual, nothing of great importance” occurred, or that she was “busy at various things...nothing of importance.”[^129] Why did she understand life and her work differently than we do? Why did she not recognize the significance of her contribution to her own family and beyond?

The portrayal of the home as paradise left little room for the reality of women’s work. Women, including Edith, “were not immune from the values of their community, and many wives appear to have shared the perception of the larger society that their work

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[^126]: Idem.
[^127]: MM.
[^129]: Ibid., Aug. 24, 1857; Nov. 5
had separated from the economic life of the community and that it was, in fact, not really
work at all."\textsuperscript{130} Thus, Edith derived the feeling that her taxing daily work was
unimportant and emphasizing the potential for economic value of women's domestic
work from the society and culture of which she was a product. While Catharine Beecher
insisted "that housework was hard work, and...did not shrink from suggesting that its
demands and obligations were very similar to men's 'business,'"\textsuperscript{131} she also advocated
that women belonged in the home and should find their work and families fulfilling and
rewarding. Thus, even those who recognized the intensity of housework failed to accept
that women might feel stifled by their seclusion within the home and their limited range
of activities.

Diary-keeping allowed Edith to express herself and confide in something on
topics on which she could not confide in anyone else. Her frustrations with her work and
confinement were not appropriate for conversation with her husband or in-laws, and to
discuss them with her friends and neighbors might have been construed as being disloyal
to her family. Perhaps she confided in Cal, but their distance and the daily hardship of
her work necessitated another, more constant, outlet. Edith's diary was almost like a
friend to her as she revealed one night with the statement "Good night old book."\textsuperscript{132} Her
diary provided a space in which to express herself and reflect on her life. It was the only
place where she could attempt to come to terms with her discontent: she needed it to
express her disappointment with her life and herself.

Harriet Beecher Stowe, an important novelist and public figure in antebellum
America, as well as a wife and mother, expressed similar doubts. In a letter to her sister-

\begin{footnotes}
\item[130]\textit{Boydston, Home and Work}, 162
\item[131] Ibid., 161
\item[132] Bushong, May 13, 1857
\end{footnotes}
detailing the child care she had provided and the housework and professional
writing she had done in the past year, she paused to note that she was "'constantly
pursued and haunted by the idea that I don't do anything.'"  
Boydston responds that

It is a jarring note in a letter—and a life—so shaped by the demands of
housework. That a skilled and loving mother could impart dignity and a sense of
humane purpose to a family otherwise vulnerable to the degradations of the
marketplace, Stowe had no doubt. But was that really 'work'? She was less
certain.

The domestic ideology of the era led women—and men—to question the value of
women's household work, and whether in fact it could really be classified as work at all.

Refusing to classify housework as "work" had broad implications. Not only did
doing so deny its economic value to the family, but it also induced anxiety in the women
that spent their lives toiling in the home—as Edith and Stowe's doubts demonstrate.
Furthermore, Edith’s education instilled her with a desire not only for life-long learning
but also for activism: "Quaker education would...not be content when boys and girls
[we]re sensitive to social problems unless they want[ed] to do something about them. It
is the concern to do, activating the sensitivity, which counts."  Perhaps it is this lack of
doing, implied in the assertion that housework was not work, that led to Edith’s and
Stowe’s anxiety and explains their interest in public participation and activism. Edith’s
desperate desire to attend the abolitionist conventions and Stowe’s writing make clear
that if they were not doing anything in the home, then both women wanted to act outside
of it.

133 Boydston, Home and Work, 163
134 Idem.
135 John A. Lester, Ideals and Objective in Quaker Education (Philadelphia: Friends Council on Education,
1939), 12
Edith, Stowe, and other middle-class women of the antebellum Northeast did work. Day in and day out, they acted as part of an elaborate network of economic and social obligations that allowed their households and communities to function. Despite their doubts, these women made concrete contributions to their families and societies that I will examine more fully in the coming chapters.
WOMEN'S WORK IN THE HOUSEHOLD AND LOCAL MARKET

Although Edith did not recognize the importance of her domestic labor, it had significant consequences for her family and beyond. This chapter will examine Edith's work in detail. Her labor—made up of daily, weekly, and seasonal chores—represents her economic engagement, i.e. her participation in and contribution to the market economy. It included concrete contributions to her family, for whom she earned income from her production of marketable goods, as well as to the local market economy, for which she provided these goods.

Edith's production and sale of goods in the vicinity of her home, such as butter, eggs, and candles, contributed to the rise of rural capitalism by providing goods for local stores. The evolution of the rural economy allowed more Americans...[to] purchase goods...[eat] off plates instead of wooden platters, sit on chairs instead of stools, seek the comfort and illumination of a lantern instead of candles or the fireplace at night, buy ready-to-wear clothes instead of donning homespun, and purchase any one of hundreds of items that they perceived would ease their lives.¹³⁶

By both providing goods for the market and purchasing goods from local stores, Edith acted as a part of that transition. Therefore, her work assisted not only her family but also the rural marketplace; she and others like her were an integral part of establishing a rural capitalist economy.

Domestic Work

In 1856, Edith gave birth to her first child, Charles. Three more would follow over the next twenty years. She spent her days caring for Charlie: nursing him, changing him, and watching him play. She also spent her days sewing and crocheting; preserving, preparing, and cooking food; hauling firewood and water; gardening; whitewashing; cleaning; laundering; ironing; bathing her family members; milking cows; collecting eggs; churning butter; butchering animals; making soap, candles, and other wares; entertaining; accounting; and performing countless other tasks. Edith performed the same work of many rural middle-class housewives in the antebellum, mid-Atlantic region. Catharine Beecher, a nineteenth-century social activist and reformer, wrote in her *Treatise on Domestic Economy* that this work “required the ‘wisdom, firmness, tact, discretion, prudence, and versatility’ of a politician, an economy of time and expenses ‘bound by the same rules as relate to the use of property,’ characterized by the ‘system and order’ of a business, and, like an office routine, intended to ‘promote systematic and habitual industry.’”

In the nineteenth-century, Americans came to believe that housework was not really labor so much as a “new form of leisure reserved to married women.” Ironically, the nature of women’s work did not change, but the definition of what counted as work did. Despite this ideological rhetoric, the work of middle-class wives was strenuous, tedious, and omnipresent. Days were long, stretching from before

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137 Boydston, *Home and Work*, 114
138 Ibid., 141
light, even in the summer, until ten o’clock or later,\textsuperscript{139} and involved “substantial manual labor.”\textsuperscript{140}

Her daily tasks included making the beds, creating and mending clothes, processing food, milking cows, churning butter, caring for Charlie, and “other things that always ha[d] to be done.”\textsuperscript{141} Typically, she did not record these tasks, and only occasionally did she make note of them at all: “very busy all day...whitewashed the store room we had baking on our hands too; and blacked two stoves &c &c.”\textsuperscript{142} Her dismissive use of “&c &c” encompasses substantial work, but she apparently did not consider it worth listing because it was so routine to her.

Edith’s work fell into four main categories: child care, sewing, food preparation and production, and cleaning. None of Edith’s tasks were simple, but the truly taxing work was seasonal—whitewashing, gardening, canning and preserving, candle-making, soap-making, and butchering. These jobs required much arduous labor and time. They sometimes consumed entire days or weeks, forcing Edith to let her other work accumulate for later.

Child care consumed a substantial amount of her time, as Edith was effectively her son’s sole caretaker. The family did not employ a nanny or governess. When her work took her away from the farm she had to find a friend or family member, such as her mother or mother-in-law, to watch him; or she brought him with her, as on September 16, when she “took Charlie went over to help Margaret put up some Tomatoes [and] worked

\textsuperscript{139} Bushong, Sept. 19, 1857
\textsuperscript{140} McMurry, 91
\textsuperscript{141} Bushong, Sept. 14, 1857
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., May 30, 1857
at it most all day.”

Because no one else could watch him, and he required constant care, her day of already difficult household work was continually interrupted by the need to tend to her son.

She only occasionally mentioned her daily care for Charlie, but she did note if there was a change or problem with him, as on October 27, 1857 when she began to wean him at the age of twelve months. On February 14, 1857, when he had a fever, she “expect[ed] it [wa]s his teeth.” Edith also spent a substantial amount of time making clothes for her son. As he grew quickly, he constantly needed new garments. When he began to walk, she started to “make all of [his dresses] short” and dressed him in “shoes and stockings he c[ould] creep across the room.” Edith even used her own old stockings to make new pairs for Charlie.

Sewing accounted for much of her time and labor. In addition to Charlie’s garments, she made clothing for herself, her husband, and the live-in help. She occasionally produced clothes for extended family members, neighbors, and friends. She stitched almost daily, except during the harvest months, from June to October, when she sewed less often because of the many other chores that absorbed her time. During these busy months, she only sewed as was necessary, as she noted on October 8 when she wrote, “I have been sewing today for the first time in some time (except for my patching).” That she distinguished her “patching” from the rest of her “sewing” points

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143 Ibid., Sept. 16, 1857
144 Ibid., Oct. 27, 1857
145 Ibid., Feb. 14, 1857
146 Ibid., May 18, 1857
147 Ibid., Bushong records completing clothes for the hired help on Mar. 13, 1857; May 19, 1857; May 28; and Dec. 7, 1857
148 Ibid., Oct. 8, 1857
to the former’s status as mere maintenance rather than a task unto itself, and speaks to the volume of her “sewing,” by which she meant complete garments.

During the winter and spring months, Edith produced a great deal of clothing. By February 24, she had completed Gilbert’s fifth shirt of the winter.149 That season, she also sewed numerous garments for Charlie, at least seven women’s dresses, two pairs of men’s pants, a quilt, and various accessories, such as bonnets and collars. On May 27, she recorded that she “finished Mother’s dress [she] commenced on the evening of the 25th:”150 she was so skilled and practiced at sewing that she could complete a dress in only two days.

Sewing contained emotional as well as practical significance for nineteenth-century women. According to Kelly, “sewing rivaled nursing and child care in its power to evoke women’s love for their kin, male and female,”151 and the “practice...gave shape to provincial women’s sense of themselves as women.”152 The vast amount of time that Edith spent sewing for her family and friends, then, functioned as both an expression of her affection and a task that allowed her to embrace part of her identity as a rural middle-class woman. This is clear from her January 22 entry, in which she described an idyllic fireside family scene: Gilbert reading aloud to her and Charlie while she worked at her sewing and the baby slept. That sewing was part of her “happy evening”153 means that for Edith, although sewing was usually painstaking work, it was also—rarely—something distinct from that work: it was part of her happiest moments, those that formed her identity as a wife and mother.

149 Ibid., Feb. 24, 1857
150 Ibid., May 27, 1857
151 Kelly, In the New England Fashion, 50
152 Ibid., 49
153 Bushong, Jan. 22, 1857
Food growth, preparation, and storage were among the most important of Edith’s chores. Because reliable refrigeration did not yet exist, properly preserving food was critical to the family’s health. In the summer and fall, Edith canned fruit and vegetables for the winter and spring, and in the winter she preserved meat and made sausage to eat for the remainder of the year. Milking the cows—some farmers owned twenty or more—collecting eggs from the chicken coop, and churning butter were constant tasks. Jensen describes the similar life experience of Esther Lewis, another Quaker woman in rural Pennsylvania.

Food processing...increased in the 1830s. The Lewis farm bought coffee, tea, sugar, fish, spices, chocolate, molasses, and soda...flour was ground at the mills, but they baked all bread and pies at the farm. At Christmas in 1831, Esther counted forty-three mincemeat pies baked in the outdoor oven. All the butchering of beef and hogs and processing of meat was done on the farm. They raised chicken, turkeys, and geese and saved feathers for featherbeds and pillows....She processed large quantities of butter [and] preserved fruit...Esther also worked in the garden...She supervised the drying of apples, the making of applesauce, and the rendering of lard. The women not only provided enough for their extensive household but also prepared large quantities of butter, eggs, poultry, lard, and meat to send to market along with oats, cider, apples, and lambs. They produced large quantities of candles as needed in the household, making, by Esther’s count, one thousand in 1830. And they experimented with new labor-saving ‘soft soap’ for their weekly washing.¹⁵⁵

Twenty years later, Edith still performed these tasks on the family farm. Furthermore, this description of Lewis’s work demonstrates that even as households purchased more food goods—as opposed to eating only what they produced themselves—women’s food processing responsibilities did not cease.

Edith planted and harvested cabbage, peas, radishes, parsley, tomatoes, cucumbers, cantaloupe, corn, watermelon, and sweet potatoes in her garden plot. During the planting, growing, and harvesting months of May, June, and July, she spent long

¹⁵⁴ Solanco Heritage, 27
¹⁵⁵ Jensen, Loosening the Bonds, 135-136
hours tending to her plants: she gardened before breakfast and after supper, as well as during the day. Once she had picked the produce, Edith then processed and preserved it so that it would last the family through the winter. In 1857, she canned upwards of twelve gallons of peaches and sixteen gallons of tomatoes. She preserved cherries, raspberries, currants, blackberries, pears, grapes, and apples. Edith also processed this produce into products such as fruit jellies and “jambs,” apple butter, apple sauce, and apple cider for her family and to share with others.

Many rural families gave and received food as part of local barter and neighborhood networks of support. For example, Edith’s mother gave her a bushel of apples, a rare treat since the apple crop had been bad that year. Items such as fruit, fresh produce, and doughnuts were expressions of generosity; they added variety to a family’s diet by providing something it would not otherwise be able to serve. Gifts of this nature mutually benefited families, as they would eventually be reciprocated in kind: Edith “sent [her] Mother a basket of Peaches [and] she sent some fine Peppers [which Edith did not grow herself] back.”

After butchering days in the late fall, Edith used tallow, an animal by product, to make candles, an important good, especially for families like the Bushongs who so often used their light to read and sew at night. One historian notes that “[d]im and flickering as they now seem, candles were in fact relatively expensive in terms of the beef tallow and household labor that went into making them.” Edith herself produced a hundred

156 Bushong, Jul. 17: “we arose early and worked in the garden until breakfast was ready;” and Jun. 3, 1857: “we cleaned the cellar to day it was a big day’s work[. I feel tired now tis bedtime and I worked in the garden since supper”
157 Ibid., Jul. 17, 1857
158 Ibid., Dec. 30, 1856
159 Ibid., Sept. 23, 1857
160 Larkin, 136
pounds of candles in two days in the fall of 1857, which provided enough for her own household for a year and some left over to sell, thus earning money for her family.

On a daily basis, Edith and her domestic help prepared three meals for themselves, family members, including Gilbert's parents and brothers, the domestic help, and the hired farm hands. During harvest season, when Gilbert hired numerous farm hands, this sometimes amounted to twenty people or more. At a minimum, the household fed seven people. The amount of food required to feed this many mouths took hours of daily preparation. If guests showed up unexpectedly, Edith had to put aside her other chores and provide for them, as she did on December 19: she was “busy patching all forenoon...[then] came home and found Henry Bushong and his Wife here from Lampeter[. She] had to get them dinner[, and] also had the cows to milk and supper to get, which ke[pt her] quite busy.” Hospitality took priority over her other tasks, but those tasks still needed to be accomplished before she could retire. Additionally, every Friday was baking day, when the women of the household made enough bread and pies for the coming week.

Other tasks absorbed considerable time as well. Cleanliness took on new importance in the mid-nineteenth century: as bodily cleanliness came to be associated with health and morality, women invested more time in washing themselves and their family members. Edith bathed her husband and son every Sunday, and generally made them look presentable. Her work included “washing Gilbert and getting his clothes clean

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161 Bushong, Oct. 22 and Nov. 26, 1857
162 Ibid., Dec. 1, 1857
163 Ibid., Aug. 15, 1857
164 Ibid., Dec. 19, 1857
165 Kathleen M. Brown, Foul Bodies: Cleanliness in Early America (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 213
and combing his head [and] bathing Charlie."\textsuperscript{166} 

"[B]ehind nearly every refined body [wa]s the labor of a woman...[P]roducing the bathed modern body was the work of a discerning, refined woman, sensitive to the opinions of others, who took on the task of enforcing standards,"\textsuperscript{167} which explains why Edith became upset at Gilbert for going out in public without washing or changing his clothes after working in the fields. She wrote,

Gilbert went to the store this evening without changing his clothes after threshing all day[.]. Oh! he little knows how badly he makes me feel by doing so I am sure if he could know he would not do so, it makes me feel so unhappy when he goes away so dirty.\textsuperscript{168}

By venturing out to town dirty, Edith felt that Gilbert poorly represented their family and her labor.

Tuesday was washing day and Wednesday was ironing day. The early nineteenth-century transition from seasonal to weekly washing meant considerably more work for housewives, further reinforcing the new importance of cleanliness.\textsuperscript{169} Edith and her domestic help "dutifully tackled [these chores] every week...out of the desire for a neat appearance that reflected positively on the family."\textsuperscript{170} No matter how tired she felt, Edith did laundry every week to maintain the standards and reputation of her family. Doing laundry was an intense and time consuming process that consisted of hauling gallons of water and firewood to heat it, scrubbing the garments, wringing them out, and hanging the heavy, wet clothes to dry. In bad weather, washing became even more challenging because there was no place to dry the clothes. In one instance, Edith resorted

\textsuperscript{166} Bushong, Feb. 1, 1857
\textsuperscript{167} Brown, 4
\textsuperscript{168} Bushong, Aug. 22, 1857
\textsuperscript{169} Brown, 215
\textsuperscript{170} Ibid., 219
to hanging them around the stove in shifts until they were all dry. Ironing was also challenging and often resulted in burns.

Edith's cleaning responsibilities also included house cleaning and annual whitewashing of the interior and exterior of all buildings on the property.\textsuperscript{171} In the summer, Edith cleaned out every room in the house—in addition to the usual sweeping and dusting—from the cellar to the parlor to the bedroom.\textsuperscript{172} She whitewashed the spring house, the garret, the back room, and the storeroom. Some days her help assisted her, but on several occasions she performed the work on her own. Both cleaning and whitewashing required strenuous labor, and she often noted that she "fe[lt] very very tired"\textsuperscript{173} at the end of these days.

As demonstrated above, it was not unusual for Edith to feel tired. Women who ran their own households, like her, worked constantly. Edith relied on her help, family members, neighbors, and friends in her extended labor network to complete her work; and increasingly to allow her more time to produce surplus goods that she could sell to earn income for the household.

The "Transition to Rural Capitalism"

Labor networks, local trade, and the desire for regional self-sufficiency characterized early rural America. According to Clark, although farmers' "pursuit of household 'independence'...rarely produced a literal self-sufficiency, [it] strongly

\textsuperscript{171} Christopher Clark, \textit{The Roots of Rural Capitalism: Western Massachusetts, 1780-1860} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 143
\textsuperscript{172} Bushong, June 3, 1857; June 9; and October 27
\textsuperscript{173} Ibid., Jul 9, 1857
influenced rural culture.”¹⁷⁴ Farmers did not rely on distant trade networks, but rather on local “networks of cooperation and exchange.”¹⁷⁵ As discussed above, these local networks of exchange of goods and services were an integral part of rural life in early America. In the nineteenth-century, however, this began to change, as innovations in transportation and communications expanded markets beyond the local level. Farmers produced and sold more goods to earn income and used that income to buy items that they had previously produced themselves.¹⁷⁶

The changing market structures brought farmers new freedom. Because their rural isolation “no longer limited [them] to informal networks of exchange,”¹⁷⁷ rural men and women had new markets for their products and goods available for purchase. They could earn credit at local stores by producing goods and use this credit to buy items manufactured anywhere in the country.¹⁷⁸ The shift transformed the rural economy as more Americans could and did purchase a rapidly expanding number of available items.¹⁷⁹ Many, like the Bushongs, welcomed the transition and saw it as an opportunity to improve their prosperity and quality of life.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁶ Clark, Roots of Rural Capitalism, 121
¹⁷⁹ Gilje, 169
¹⁸⁰ Howe, 5: “Most American family farmers welcomed the chance to buy and sell in larger markets. They did not have to be coerced into seizing the opportunities the market economy presented,” and Jeanne Boydston, “The Woman Who Wasn’t There’: Women’s Labor Market and the Transition to Capitalism in the US,” in Wages of Independence: Capitalism in the Early American Republic, ed. Paul A. Gilje (Madison, Wisconsin: Madison House, 1997), 26: “Although some people may have sought to avoid the increasing interdependencies of the economy, most free Americans lived in middling households that already were deeply, deliberately, and contentedly immersed in commercial relations. For them, the goal
In addition to the material changes that the transition brought about, it also restructured the way that people understood production. Throughout the course of this transformation, rural Americans began to distinguish between the household and a commercial economy. Whereas the two terms had once been intertwined, they came to represent two separate spheres: the household referred to the private, or "woman’s," sphere and the economy referred to the public domain, in which presumable only men were present. This distinction between men and women’s work relied on the assumption that men’s work occurred outside of the home, in the public world of business and markets, while women remained ensconced within the home, isolated and protected from the outside world.\footnote{Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, “Women in Agriculture during the Nineteenth Century,” in \textit{Agriculture and National Development: Views on the Nineteenth Century}, ed. Lou Ferleger (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1990), 270}

As this division deepened, the “formulation of ‘economy’ as an extra-household activity encouraged the perception that the work that went on within the household,”\footnote{Boydston, \textit{Home and Work}, 28} i.e., women’s work, was not economic in nature. Therefore, because this ideology relegated women to the realm of the household, \textit{de facto} they did not interact with the economy. As demonstrated by Edith’s productive capacity, nothing could be farther from the truth—but the “class significance”\footnote{Ibíd., 128} that endowed the work of middle-class housewives as a “divinely sanctioned calling”\footnote{Kelly, \textit{In the New England Fashion}, 50} “obscure[d] its value as labor.”\footnote{Boydston, \textit{Home and Work}, 128} The ideology of separate spheres voided women’s domestic labor in the household of any
economic value because it did not earn a wage. Yet, Edith’s life demonstrates that women’s labor played a crucial role in the emerging market structure.

In addition to their already burdensome household tasks, from the early nineteenth century women took on extra-household production, such as dairying. Rather than only producing enough butter for her own family, Edith also had to produce surplus butter to exchange at the local store. [See Figure 3.] As their list of tasks grew, women worked longer and harder days, yet farmers “maintained their expectation, however unrealistic, that women could somehow continue to pick up the slack during hard times.”186 This expectation is puzzling given that, as we shall see, “women’s flexibility and ingenuity in producing marketable products,” such as butter, is the reason that “these farms [were able to] survive [the] tremendous market pressures” that the nineteenth-century economic transformation placed on them.187

The availability of an increasing number of household goods and read-made clothing for purchase alleviated some aspects of women’s work—for example, Edith, unlike her mother, did not have to weave her own cloth, but could buy it.188 Furthermore, even though she sewed almost everyday, she and Gilbert also purchased some articles of clothing for themselves and Charlie.189 That they purchased some clothing items, however, did not make up for the time required for new tasks, especially since sewing continued to occupy so much of her schedule.

186 Kelly, *In the New England Fashion*, 44
188 Bushong, Mar. 12, 1857: “Gilbert at the store this afternoon...he got me some tidy cotton;” Aug. 31: “Gilbert got a web of muslin at Breneman’s to day paid 11 cts per yd for it”
189 Ibid., Feb. 2, 1857: “Gil got me a new calico dress at the store;” May 14: “Gilbert at Georgetown got his pants from the tailor they are very pretty pair of light summer cassimere will cost $6.35 ready made;” Sept. 28: “Pap, Mother and I went to Breneman’s they got me a delaine dress I also got Charlie a pair of shoes and three pair of hose;” et al.
Edith exchanged eggs, fruit, lard, and candles that she produced and prepared at the local store, but butter, at the price of eighteen to twenty-five cents per pound, was the most common and valuable of the market goods that rural Pennsylvanian women produced in this era. Butter represented a reliable source of income because of its stable price. According to Jensen, "men considered butter an important part of the farm produce, mainly because it provided a commodity for use in the family and an income with which women could purchase other items needed for the household." Because families often funneled the income from butter making and other domestically-manufactured products back into the household through store credit and the purchase of staple items for the household, the monetary value of this labor was rendered further invisible.

Although constituting a more informal part of their fungible resources, Edith's production provided a constant, steady source of income that covered their total purchases at local stores. She recorded every transaction, even those she did not make herself, for many women during the period maintained household accounts. Gilbert often did the purchasing, as was common at the time, but Edith always kept track of the prices he paid and received.

190 Ibid., Apr. 9, 1857: "Gilbert at the store in Georgetown took ten dozen eggs got 14 cts per dozen;" Apr. 6: "Gilbert took three bu[shels] of dries peaches to the store got $3.50 per bushel;" Apr. 11: "Gilbert at the store this evening took some "little onions" got 20 cts per qt for them;" Nov. 5: "took some lard to the store got 14 cts per #;" Dec. 1: "Gilbert took me to J Hood's store I took some candles got 14 cts pr #" 191 Ibid., Feb. 11, 1857: "I went to the store...took sixteen #s of butter got twenty-five cts per #;" Nov. 5: "took some lard to the store got 14 cts per # and 18 for some butter" 192 Jensen, "Butter Making and Economic Development," 107 193 Ibid. 194 Ibid. 195 Ibid., 115 196 Mary Beth Sievens, "Female Consumerism and Household Authority in Early National New England," Early American Studies (2006): 363, http://projectmuse.org: "That men bore the primary responsibility for making purchasing is not surprising, given the physical realities of the gendered division of labor prevalent in New England households. Women engaged in a ceaseless round of tasks, including caring for children,
which kept them close to home. Men were more mobile and better able to spare the time that traveling to shops entailed. In addition, men’s greater physical strength made it easier for them to handle goods, like barrels of flour, which were usually purchased in bulk. Indeed, Helmbrecht-Wilson’s analysis of men’s and women’s purchasing patterns reveals that the majority of purchases women made themselves were for relatively small items that could be carried easily: several yards of cloth, a few skeins of yarn, buttons, ribbons, needles, thread.”

197 In one case, she left the price blank, presumably because she forgot to go back and fill it in once Gilbert reported the amount: Bushong, May 5, 1857: “Gilbert went to the RRoad with the two horse wagon for Pap Bushong, took some oats got ___ cts per bu[shel]”

198 McMurry, 98
It is not entirely clear whether their income generated cash or only credit at local stores, but it is important to distinguish the income from the earlier practice bartering. The Bushongs did not trade their goods for other goods, but exchanged them for monetary credit that could be used to purchase anything in the store at a later date.\textsuperscript{199} Furthermore, her calculations are in money.\textsuperscript{200} Because this trade was calculated in monetary terms and women kept household accounts, women felt price fluctuations first.\textsuperscript{201}

Edith also recorded the profits of Gilbert's labor and production. His income consisted of the sale of crops, farm animals, and his wages from laboring on other farms.\textsuperscript{202} Although it is difficult to deduce from her incomplete bookkeeping, it appears that Edith's own production was of greater value to the family than that of her husband. While he often acquired greater sums, as an animal was more expensive than a pound of butter, his sales were sporadic, whereas Edith traded at local stores regularly—usually at least twice per week. Thus, there is evidence that the monetary value of her production was equal to, and possibly greater than, his. Her bookkeeping account for both his and her income represents an integrated household economy—meaning that she tracked

\textsuperscript{199} See Naomi R. Lamoreaux, \textit{Insider lending: Banks, personal connections, and economic development in industrial New England} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 2: Economic transactions between farmers and local merchants presumably paralleled those of manufacturers and merchants—“Commercial paper consisted of notes generated in the course of actual business transactions. When a manufacturer sold his wares to a merchant, for example, the merchant would often pay for them by giving the manufacturer an IOU, which he pledged to redeem in cash by a certain date.” This process, like that of the Bushongs, is comparable to a credit system, as opposed to barter.

\textsuperscript{200} Bushong, Nov. 17: “went to Hood's [store] this morning I took 45 #s ham got 16 cts and 10 #s butter got 20 cts per # for it”—this represents a monetary, if not necessarily cash, income of $9.20. Edith also paid close attention to changes in price—Feb. 25, 1857: “eggs...are still 20 cts per dozen, have been all winter, butter has come down to 22 cts it has been 25 for some time.”

\textsuperscript{201} Gilje, 179

\textsuperscript{202} Bushong, Jul. 17, 1857: “Gilbert sold a load of hay in Georgetown to George Johnson for 12$ per load;” Nov. 30: “[Gilbert] at the R. Road with Oats got 33 cts per bu[shel];” Jan. 5: “Gilbert brought 2 pigs to the R. Road, sold them for $79;” May 1: “Gilbert was [at my home] all day putting in Pap's oats he has done eleven and a half dollars work for him this week”
Gilbert’s and her own accounts together—as opposed to a “dual household economy”\textsuperscript{203}—which according to Jensen was commonplace in the nineteenth century—in which the male income cycled back into farm production and the female income into household production.

Edith’s bookkeeping and production of income sustained her family’s economic well-being in this period as money acquired significant value in the new capitalist market. The “gradual growth of commercial networks in early America, the slowly decreasing cost and greater availability of household goods, made possible an awakening interest in domestic consumption and comfort.”\textsuperscript{204} “As textiles, carpeting, wallpaper, chairs and looking glasses became less expensive in proportion to their resources, [rural families] filled the rooms of their houses and embellished bare walls, windows and floors;”\textsuperscript{205} the emerging trend of consumerism, however, depended entirely on the amount of money available within a given household.\textsuperscript{206} Edith recorded that over the course of 1857, her family purchased cloth, yarn, needles, a work basket, clothes, glass jars, animals, corn, wheat seed, and farm labor, as well as luxury items such as lamps, pins, a gold pen, a magnifying glass, a palm leaf fan, pineapples, a daguerreotype of Charlie, and furniture—including a feather bed and a bureau. Most of these goods came from the same local stores at which Edith sold the goods she produced. These purchases necessitated money, of which, according to Edith’s bookkeeping, she was most likely the main provider. Thus, she made a tangible contribution to her family: her work enabled them to live in material comfort.

\textsuperscript{203} Jensen, “Butter Making and Economic Development,” 109
\textsuperscript{204} Larkin, 134
\textsuperscript{205} Ibid., 139
\textsuperscript{206} Boydston, \textit{Home and Work}, 123
More significant from a historical standpoint than the immediate subsidy she provided to raise her family’s quality of life, Edith and women like her contributed to the evolution of the rural economy in the mid-nineteenth century. Jensen argues that the market impact of home-produced commodities such as butter was only slightly less than that of factory-produced commodities such as textiles. Like outwork, another female driven production industry in the nineteenth-century, butter making “play[ed] a major role in the [economic] transformation that makes that world [of the nineteenth-century] barely recognizable...today.”

Edith’s income allowed her family to embrace a middle-class lifestyle that might not have been otherwise possible. In addition, she provided the goods for and laid the foundation of a capitalist economy recognizable today. Her accounting provided a valuable service to her family and represents another task that the transition to capitalism added to her work. Furthermore, her detailed knowledge of the market and her household’s purchasing suggests that she had some input in economic decision making. Neither this input, however, nor the “increased the dependency by men on women’s labor and the products of their labor...cause[d] a redistribution of power within the household.” Women continued to be the economic, social, and political inferiors of men. They did not have access to economic resources; yet women’s own

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207 Jensen, “Butter Making and Economic Development,” 117: “the farm income from America’s dairy production in 1860 was ‘almost equal to the value-added [increase in value resulting from the processing of a commodity] produced by the nation’s textiles (cottons and woolens) industry.’”
208 Outwork, a process in which women obtained raw materials—such as palms—from country stores and then produced finished products—such as palm hats—to return to the store for credit, was popular in nineteenth-century New England. See Dublin, “Rural Putting-Out Work.”
209 Dublin, “Rural Putting-Out Work,” 573
210 Sievens, 371
understanding of their economic importance, within and outside of the household, held the potential to promote both confidence in their abilities and a sense of autonomy.\textsuperscript{213}

Edith’s writing, in addition to chronicling her work, makes it clear that she longed to reach beyond the physical isolation of her daily life and into public worlds of words in print, of collections of readers and writers exchanging ideas and haggling over the correct views on the major political issues of the day.

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\textit{Putting-Out Work}, 553: “The economic disabilities of married women are evident in Whittemore’s accounts....for Fitzwilliam families, the hat-making activity of married women was generally subsumed within a family economy controlled by their husbands. In rare cases in which the wives traded in their own names, they bought store goods form the limited proceeds of their own and their children’s hat-making.”

\textsuperscript{213} Boydston, "’The Woman Who Wasn’t There,’” 31
FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN THE ECONOMY OF READING

Edith contributed meaningfully to local economic life; she also participated in a broader regional, and even national, economy by reading popular newspapers and literature. Although her work often kept her from venturing out of the house, Edith longed to experience something outside of her day-to-day work.

The literature of the time enabled her to take part in important national debates, such as the abolition of slavery. She enjoyed her time spent reading more than any other, and eagerly anticipated the arrival of news and stories in the mail. Notably, Edith enjoyed discussing this literature with family and friends as well as reading it, demonstrating her desire to immerse herself in a larger conversation with the developing literary public. She cherished her “many happy evenings” spent with “G[ilbert] reading” a newspaper or novel aloud. For her, reading provided an outlet through which she could engage with issues outside the realm of work; it created a quiet interior space for ideas that sharply contrasted with her time performing physical labor. Her time spent reading with Gilbert also allowed them to develop intimacy—to grow closer to one another through the time they spent together and through their exchange of ideas. For Edith, reading held many connotations: while in her daily life, it was a leisure activity that provided a respite from work, reading also had economic implications.

In his book, The Business of Letters: Authorial Economies in Antebellum America, Literary critic Leon Jackson thinks broadly about what constitutes exchange. Proposing that economic activity exists outside of the traditional marketplace, he argues that other, more particular economies of information, ideas, and political power exist.

\[214\] Bushong., Jan. 22, 1857
within the larger marketplace. This "embedded" economic activity, he says, is "relatively invisible" because of the "multiple social functions it serves" aside from economic—e.g., in this context reading serves social, cultural, and political functions as well as economic purposes. Thus, if we understand reading as a mode of engaging and participating in public discourse, then it can and should be characterized as an economic activity. Jackson's "economy of letters"—which for the purposes of Edith and her contemporaries is better described as an economy of ideas—constituted a market in which ideas were formed, exchanged, and debated in a public forum. Reading, then, is a form of economic engagement, which in turn means that Edith was an economic actor beyond the local productive level.

Nineteenth-century America gave rise to an increasingly vocal public; a public that increasingly included women as well as men. Reformers supported abolition, women's rights, temperance, and other contentious issues through newspaper editorials, published novels and pamphlets, and speeches at public conventions. They worked in conjunction with the press and the postal system to create an expanded forum for public debate. According to Historian Richard John, nineteenth-century postal reforms encouraged the wide dissemination of print material and created an "imagined community" in which Americans, because they had access to the same publications,

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215 Jackson, 40
216 Idem.
217 Idem.
218 Nancy Isenberg, "'Pillars in the Same Temple and Priests of the Same Worship': Women's Right and the Politics of Church and State in Antebellum America," *Journal of American History* 85, no.1 (1998): 103, http://www.jstor.org: Hannah Arendt does not define the public sphere not as a physical space but rather states that "a 'public' was called into being when citizens spoke in a distinctive way that disclosed fundamental truths about the human condition." When I refer to the public, I intend it in this way: as forum for the exchange of ideas.
could spread and exchange ideas, converse with one another, and debate national problems from their own home—however remote it may have been. This invasion of national issues into the home shattered the divide between the so-called public and private spheres and invited the political participation of those people, like Edith, who had never before had the opportunity to engage with, or even be aware of, defining national issues.

Because of these “new opportunities for disseminating ideas,” the public increasingly included not only white men, but the disenfranchised populace as well. Edith was among them. She and others like her engaged with these ideas through reading and attending local political conventions. As we will see, the intense desire she expressed in her diary to attend these events demonstrates that her consciousness extended beyond local and regional matters.

Expanding the Sphere of Daily Contact: Reading, the Post, and the Local Store

As Edith frequently expressed in her diary, she resented her confinement to the farm and the immediate surrounding area. On May 17, she wrote that she “fe[lt] quite lonely and somewhat sad” because she “so badly wanted to go to meeting.”

Subsequently, on August 1 she wrote about a “convention of colored people”—an abolitionist event—“at Christiana to day[. N]early all the people of the neighborhood states: “It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the mind of each lives the image of their communion.” Richard John adopts this concept of the imagined community to describe the American public discourse as facilitated by the United States Postal Service.

220 Howe, 7
221 Bushong, May 17, 1857
[were] there; [she] wanted to go very badly but was disappointed again.” In both
instances, she could not leave the house because of her obligations to her household and
family.

Edith attempted to accept the “station it [wa]s [her] destiny to fill” by resolving
to “not build [her hopes] so high” because then she would not “feel so badly about not
going.” Her resolution was fraught with resentment, however, for she went on to write
that she “only hope[d] that some other people may be as much disappointed as I have
been to-day.” According to Howe, this “bitter feeling” was not uncommon among
women like Edith. Although an increasing number of middle-class women received a
formal education over the course of the nineteenth century, most continued to work as
housewives. For the most part, these women did not have other career opportunities, and
certainly very few that were suited to the level of their education. This left them often
dissatisfied with their lot and with a strong desire for intellectual stimulation. For
instance, Edith observed that one of her childhood friends, Sue, was “now teaching at
Penn School.” Edith rarely mentioned her old friends, and the abrupt manner in which
she noted this, as well as its proximity to her resolution to accept her own “destiny” suggests that she dwelt on the contrast, possibly because of both the mobility and the
intellectual nature of Sue’s work.

222 Ibid., Aug. 1, 1857
223 Ibid., Aug. 18, 1857
224 Ibid., Aug. 1, 1857
225 Idem.
226 Idem.
227 Howe, 844
228 Idem.
229 Bushong, Aug. 18, 1857
230 Idem.
Edith desired more from life than her housework could offer. Howe notes that many middle-class women like her compared their confinement with the freedom of movement of their male counterparts.\textsuperscript{231} While Edith typically remained at home after a long day of work, Gilbert frequently escaped to the "store."\textsuperscript{232} Country stores flourished in the nineteenth century:\textsuperscript{233} the rural town store represented not only a place to exchange goods but also a social meeting place for townspeople. It also housed the post office. Town residents went to check their mail and ended up "spen[ding] the afternoon."\textsuperscript{234} John describes the scene depicted in Thomas Wood's nineteenth-century painting entitled \textit{The Village Post Office} as "friendly [and] inviting[; a] place where men, women, and even a dog or two could come together to get their mail and catch up on the affairs of the day."\textsuperscript{235} [See Figure 4.]

Edith recorded that Gilbert went to the store at least once or twice per week, and only rarely—six times in 1857—did she accompany him. She often wrote of his trips with longing both for his companionship—as on May 2, "Oh my Gilbert is at the store I hope he will soon come"—and for a break from her own work—as on January 20, "Gilbert at the store...[H]ow many weary hours a Wife puts in at home with her children which the husband knows nothing of while he is away."\textsuperscript{236} John characterizes the store as a "new social form"\textsuperscript{237} of which Edith desperately wanted to be a part. On one occasion, Edith seized the opportunity to go to the store even though she felt "very tired."\textsuperscript{238} The sociability of the store and, more importantly, the access to mail that the store provided,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{231} Howe, 844
\item \textsuperscript{232} Bushong, Jan. 20, 1857
\item \textsuperscript{233} Solanco Heritage, 92
\item \textsuperscript{234} Bushong, Jan. 28, 1857
\item \textsuperscript{235} John, 115
\item \textsuperscript{236} Bushong, Jan. 20, 1857
\item \textsuperscript{237} John, 168
\item \textsuperscript{238} Bushong, Nov. 2, 1857: "Very tired, but Gil...and I went to the store after supper."
\end{itemize}
shaped public participation in the mid-nineteenth century. John argues that the post and the news it brought rivaled major political events, such as elections, in their importance to public life.²³⁹

This engraving, based on a painting by Richard Caton Woodville, shows how eagerly the public awaited news from the front during the war. Two African Americans and a woman, wanting to hear too, are relegated to the margins of the crowd. A single periodical or book often served many persons, and reading aloud was common practice.

*Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society.*

*Figure 4²⁴⁰*

The development Post Office effected tremendous change on the quantity and distribution of published material. The post and the press were “deeply intertwined and mutually supportive.”²⁴¹ The post facilitated the development of the press; it provided a means for newspaper editors and other printers to distribute their content to the public.

²³⁹ John, 168
²⁴⁰ Howe, photograph insert
²⁴¹ Henkin, 43
The press grew over the course of the nineteenth century—writers provided and publishers printed a plethora of newspapers, periodicals, and books which the information-hungry American people devoured.

The federal government encouraged the distribution of reading material. John McLean, Postmaster General from 1823 to 1829, considered the U.S. Post Office a means to national unification. From 1817 to 1841, newspapers substantially quickened the pace of the dissemination of information from major news centers. [See Figure 5.] To encourage national dialogue, the government subsidized postage for newspapers. This policy especially benefited rural areas and provided them with access to significantly more, and more frequent, information than had ever been possible before; it consequently fostered the development of the mail into a “popular, participatory network” that redefined American life. The low cost of mailing newspapers contributed to the rapid dissemination of public information in the nineteenth century. As early as 1822, more Americans subscribed to newspapers than citizens of any other country. The Bushongs subscribed to two newspapers, which was not uncommon at the time.

The postal system served to unify the country by providing a forum for national discussion on important issues and debates:

[T]he expansion of the postal service had created by 1828 an imagined community that incorporated a far-flung citizenry into the political process. For millions of Americans, reading a newspaper became, rather like attending a political rally or religious revival, a great collective ritual in which the faithful joined together to affirm their fundamental beliefs... Now, for the first time in American history, a politics of vigilance supplanted a politics of trust, and participation became a valued ideal.

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242 Howe, 226
244 Howe, 227
245 John, 168
In 1831, Alexis de Tocqueville declared that the Post Office was a "great link between minds" that penetrated into "the heart of the wilderness," and Margaret Fuller called the press "the only efficient instrument for the general education of the people." The U.S. Postal Service served the admirable function of allowing almost all free Americans to participate in national discourse as they had never before had the opportunity to do.

![Map of the United States](image)

**Figure 5: Average Time-Lag for Public Information from New York City, 1817-1841**

Furthermore, by 1830, improvements in the national communications and transportation infrastructures had created a national market for a much wider assortment of printed genre than just news through the mail. The newspaper and periodicals of the day contained prescriptive literature and serialized novels. Serialized novels were common and constituted an important literary form—for instance, Harriet Beecher Stowe

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246 Howe, 226
248 Ibid., 224
249 Howe, 227
originally wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin* not as a book, but for a newspaper—\(^{250}\)—that were the medium through which many Americans read the popular texts of the day.\(^{251}\) Additionally, Howe notes that books often arrived through the mail.\(^{252}\)

Edith’s reading list in 1857 consisted mostly of newspapers and periodicals, as well as a few books. In her diary, she mentioned reading the *Dollar Newspaper*, the *New York Ledger*, T. S. Arthur’s *Home Magazine*, Longfellow’s “Song of Hiawatha,” and Stowe’s *Dred*. All types of publications shaped nineteenth-century life: “[c]ontemporary newspapers, although highly partisan, were useful both as reflectors and molders of local attitudes.”\(^{253}\) The same can be said of books and periodicals. Through examining Edith’s reading material more closely, then, certain themes and trends that indicate the important national issues of the year may emerge.

The Bushongs subscribed to the *New York Ledger*. The Ledger’s editor, Robert Bonner, declared that “at the birth of 1856, it is known by ALL THE PEOPLE that no paper is equal to the *New York Ledger*.”\(^{254}\) Bonner envisioned his audience as the “widest possible reading public;”\(^{255}\) he achieved his goal through his “perfect understanding of the great new reading public that was growing up in America.”\(^{256}\)

Bonner printed a wide variety of material—including news, poems, stories, and advice—


\(^{251}\) Howe, 627: “Novels often appeared serialized in newspapers or magazines prior to their publication between hard covers—that taking advantage of the low postal rates charged periodicals. Serialization helped rural people far from libraries or bookstores.”

\(^{252}\) Ibid., 231


\(^{256}\) Noel, 58
on topics that appealed to popular interest at the time. He paid vast amounts of money
for original material by famous authors, such as Longfellow. Because of the wealth of
original literature, the low subscription rate, and Bonner’s desire to appeal to all social
classes, the paper circulated far beyond its city of origin to involve what Charles Dickens
referred to as the far-flung and “‘Unknown Public’” into a community for discussion
and debate of sectional and national issues. Thus, the Ledger had a “democratizing” and
unifying effect on its extensive readership because of its broad base: 400,000 socially, economically, and geographically diverse Americans read everything that
Bonner printed.

The Bushongs also read the Dollar Newspaper, a Philadelphia based paper that
published news, agricultural advice, and light literature. What the editor hailed as an
“unequaled” low price made the paper accessible to common people. It carried both
regional and national news to keep its readers informed of events across the country, and
the paper boasted that “[n]o farmer or housewife…can fail to be interested and instructed
in the suggestions” in its agriculture section. The readership encompassed rural
Eastern Pennsylvania and both men and women read the paper. Thus, even though
Gilbert subscribed to the paper, Edith read it as well.

Edith confirmed this in her diary when she wrote of the “very good ‘tale’ coming
in [the paper] called ‘Mabel.’” Charles J. Peterson’s “Mabel,” also called “Darkness
and Dawns,” was the serialized story of a young woman who came to a big American

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257 Warren, 58
258 Noel, 56
259 Warren, 59
260 Idem.
261 Noel, 44
263 Idem.
264 Bushong, Feb. 26, 1857
city in search of work only to face hardship and temptation. Mabel did not yield, however, nor did she lose “her faith in Heaven, or her earnest resolution to keep her path of rectitude.” The story, which the editor of the paper hailed as “eminently instructive,” taught its readers “not to yield to temptation, but to bravely struggle on.” This story preaches temperance; it fell into the category of the moralizing literature popular in the nineteenth century. Edith, her family, and the Dollar Newspaper’s other readers eagerly anticipated each new chapter of the story every week.

Edith herself—as opposed to her husband—subscribed to Home Magazine. The periodical printed mostly prescriptive literature aimed at housewives: its stories, such as “Married Politeness,” and poems, such as “Live to Do Good,” instructed its readers on how to live a proper and fulfilling life. It also printed recipes and instructions on gardening, sewing, and housekeeping. Home Magazine propagated the “glorification of wife- and motherhood” that Boydston views as a pivotal theme of domesticity during the antebellum period.

Notably, although T. S. Arthur aimed the magazine primarily at women, Gilbert read at least part of it as well. He read “Dr. Kane’s Artic Explorations” aloud as each new episode was published. “Dr. Kane” chronicled the travels of the explorer by the same name. The series portrayed Dr. Kane as a well-educated, pioneering, virtuous man.

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265 Wm. M. Swain & Co., Jan. 16, 1857
266 Idem.
267 Idem.
268 Noel, 84
269 Arthur, Jan. 1857, 30
270 Ibid., 38
271 Boydston, Home and Work, 142
272 Bushong, Mar. 1: “Gilbert read some to us in Dr. Kane this evening;” Mar. 2: “reading some in Dr. Kane[,] we are all quite interested in it;” Mar. 8, 1857: “Gilbert reading aloud to us in Dr. Kane.”
and promoted the execution of his "religious and social duty" to the peoples he encountered on his trip. An advertisement for the story in the Dollar Newspaper claimed that it aimed to "not only excite...wonder, but borrow a novel grandeur from the truly benevolent considerations which animated and nerved him to the task." Thus, the text both enlightened and instructed the readers.

Much as "Mabel" and "Dr. Kane" propagated moral behavior, so too did "Hiawatha" aim to speak to its readers on a moral level. Edith and her husband read Longfellow's sentimental tale of the "noble savage" together. Longfellow's work constituted "the quintessential record of middle-class norms, ideals, and anxieties in...antebellum culture." Perhaps this was because, as Howe notes, "Longfellow made it his task as a poet to remind people of cultural and moral values, to show that there was more to life than material pursuit....He evoked sympathy for victims of injustice with his..."The Song of Hiawatha.""

The use of sentimentalist literature to conjure sympathy from readers was a defining feature of antebellum American culture. Harriet Beecher Stowe rose as one of this genre's quintessential practitioners. For example, Stowe wrote Dred in 1856 as a response to the Dred Scott Supreme Court case, a highly-controversial trial that pitted Northerners and Southerners against one another, sewing strife and national divide over the issue of slavery. Following the trend of Northern antislavery sentiment first evoked

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273 Arthur, Jan. 1857, 10
274 Wm. M. Swain & Co., Jan. 16, 1857
275 Bushong, Dec. 22, 1856 and Jan. 22, 1857: "Oh: who can appreciate the word home but those who enjoy one; we have a happy home and spend many happy evenings when G reads I sew and little one sleeps, such a one was last evening, G read in Hiawatha."
277 Howe, 630-631
in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Dred dealt with both antislavery and temperance. While temperance was an important national issue, slavery was the single most contentious debate of the time. In both *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, in which Stowe chronicles the life of an loyal slave to expose the harsh realities of slavery, and Dred, in which an escaped slaved preached on the evils of slavery, Stowe invoked religious and moral suasion to attract her readers to the abolitionist cause. She put forth “a moral authority for American law so deeply embedded in the national conscience that it is immune to the pull of factional self-interest and so emotionally galvanic that...mov[ed] Americans of good will to eradicate such tyrannies as slavery.” Edith and others like her constituted these “Americans of good will” whom Stowe reached through her writing. Stowe’s novels used moral suasion to raise awareness of the cruelties of slavery and garner support to end the institution.

Because Edith read mostly from popular newspapers and periodicals, her reading matter probably reflects with reasonable accuracy what other white, Northern, middle-class women—and men—read at the time. The themes present in her reading matched the themes in the literature that her contemporaries read, making them national, or at least sectional, themes: promotion of moral behavior, domesticity, temperance, and, most importantly, antislavery. Thus, through literature, people from different regions of the

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280 Howe, 234
282 Bushong, Dec. 21, 1856: about Dred—“we have read it and liked it very well, but not so well as Uncle Tom, by the same Authoress ‘H B Stowe.’”
country could and did engage with the same ideas, unifying the literate public and creating topics for national discourse.

Reading: A Means of National Economic Engagement

The widespread dissemination of reading material effected major changes in daily American life. As periodicals became more available they “came to play a central role in communication, information, and entertainment,” and Americans began to read more. Jensen’s research on Esther Lewis, another Quaker woman who lived in antebellum rural Pennsylvania, illustrates this trend: it shows that between 1824 and 1848, the number of candlesticks in the Lewis household—and presumably others like it—increased from one to seven, suggesting that Lewis and her family read more frequently.

Reading became one of the main modes of entertainment and leisure for middle-class Americans. Its potentially communal nature reinforced the degree to which the proliferation of reading matter created a literary public. Not only was there an “imagined community” of readers across the country but also an actual community on a local level that read together and exchanged books and ideas. Edith spent one happy day at a friend’s house where she “had a fine time eating fruit and reading and conversing,” indicating that reading had become an integral and enjoyable part of social interaction, when there was time for it. Additionally, on several occasions Edith recommended literature to or shared it with her friends and family members. She found one issue of *Home Magazine* so interesting or useful—she does not specify her motivation—that she

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283 Smith, “Introduction,” 6
284 Jensen, *Loosening the Bonds*, 136
sent a letter “to T. S. Arthur for four copies of his *Home Magazine*—one is for Aunt Caroline Gilbert one for HH Gilbert one for my mother and the other for Edith.”

This sharing represented an expansion of the literary sphere by adding to the number of people with whom Edith could discuss her reading material. Historian Mary Kelley suggests that this type of interaction was not uncommon, as “reading women made engagement with books a collective practice. They shared discoveries, exchanged volumes, and suggested titles. Together they measured and interrogated responses.”

The practice of collective reading was referred to as “‘parlour literature,’” and newspapers and periodicals capitalized on this trend. The *Dollar Newspaper* claimed to be “a complete *FIRESIDE FAMILY COMPANION*, embracing the tastes and interests of the Household Circle.”

This exchange of literature and ideas that the emergence and “expansion of markets, including those for information and reading matter” made possible endowed nineteenth-century rural communities with cultural “vibrancy.”

Jackson posits that economies—including the market, or economy, of literature—not only serve to “convey goods and money from one party to another, but also...function[] to create and sustain powerful social bonds.”

Thus, the people who read literature and exchanged ideas participated in such an economy, in which literature functions as an economy.

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285 Bushong, Mar. 23, 1857
287 Smith, “Introduction,” 7
289 Clark, “Economics and Culture,” 294
290 Idem.
291 Jackson, 2
292 Ibid., 5: “The question that then arises is, Why literature? If what I am interested in exploring is not literature as a form of artistic expression but the ways in which social bonds were created...when literature
availability of reading material—newspapers, periodicals, and books that dealt with abolition, domesticity, temperance, and morality—brought national and sectional debates to the local level. Similarly, letter-writing, e.g. Edith’s correspondence with her sister Cal, was also part of this economy of letters. Jensen argues that the same “market economy that linked the Lewis farm to the marketplace also linked it to the marketplace of ideas” through reading material such as antislavery tracts.²⁹³ This suggests that reading, by dint of the exchange of ideas that it makes possible, constitutes an economy in itself.

The Importance of Reading

What were the implications of Edith’s reading when construed as an economic activity? In order to understand this, we first must understand how she read—the context of the activity, what it meant to her, and what she got out of it. While the activity certainly had economic implications, for Edith, it was first and foremost a pleasurable respite from her daily labors.

Edith often described the “happy evenings when G[ilbert] read[] I sew[ed] and little one sle[pt]”²⁹⁴ and afternoons reading with friends²⁹⁵ with contentment. She also read on her own, as is clear from her subscription to Home Magazine. She referred to the

²⁹³ Jensen, Loosening the Bonds, 137
²⁹⁴ Bushong, Jan. 22, 1857
²⁹⁵ Ibid., Jul. 19, 1857: “spent the day at Abram’s[,] had a fine time eating fruit and reading and conversing.”
periodical as “my Home Magazine,” whereas she characterized newspapers—which she read also—as belonging to Gilbert. Furthermore, she recorded several times when she “spent most of the day in reading and writing.” Edith recognized the importance of reading in both solitary and communal settings; she wrote in her Penn School commencement essay:

...they would have some useful and instructive book and read an hour aloud then converse about it, and express their different opinions upon it how much better it would be for their minds; some may think this would be very dull way of spending time, but just try it and see if it will not grow more and more interesting until it will be a real pleasure to you, and how much knowledge you will have attained by merely a little exercise and exertion of your mind. Some of our most learned men have been among the self-taught; remember this, and strive on and on, never give up and say I cannot, but “try try again”...

This passage indicates the thoughtful and introspective manner in which Edith has considered the personal significance of reading and reveals much about its importance to her, as someone who had few other means of self-improvement. First, she believed that discussion was a critical part of digesting and understanding new material—“some useful and instructive book and read an hour aloud then converse about it, and express their different opinions upon it”—which reinforced the importance of the creation of national discourse, and the existence of local communities of readers and the concept of “parlour literature.” Second, she truly enjoyed reading—“some may think this would be very dull way of spending time, but just try it and see if it will not grow more and more interesting until it will be a real pleasure to you”—which was highly significant in a life otherwise defined by work and dissatisfaction with her limited role. Third, she

296 Ibid., Dec. 31, 1857
297 Ibid., Feb. 26: “his paper;” Mar. 12: “his paper;” Jun. 4, 1857: “Gilbert...got the first two number of the New York Ledger which he subscribed for.”
298 Ibid., Dec. 6, 1857
299 Bushong, Bushong Family Papers
understood reading as a means of self-improvement—"how much knowledge you will have attained by merely a little exercise and exertion of your mind." This particular sentiment reveals a great deal about her particular condition, and that of her female contemporaries: their societal roles limited the activities of these well-educated women to housework, without providing an outlet for their intellectual and creative energies. Thus, she reiterated why she so enjoyed reading—as a way of "exercis[ing]...her mind" and, as Howe notes, broadening her horizons\(^{300}\) by engaging with issues and ideas apart from her daily work.

Edith's feelings about reading echo the trends that Kelley has asserted in her work on women and reading. Kelley not only describes reading as a "collective practice"\(^{301}\) for many women, but also that many women felt that "happiness...[was] a place where [they found their] thirst for knowledge gratified;"\(^{302}\) in other words, that many women, like Edith, enjoyed reading and understood it as a means of self-improvement. The seizure of activity and escape to "a fully realized world set apart from life's external circumstances"\(^{303}\) that reading provided created a space for intellectual life and ideas in a life otherwise filled with work. For example, on the day that Edith could not attend Quaker meeting, she wrote, "my little one and I have the house to ourselves, I feel quite lonely and somewhat sad, I so badly wanted to go to meeting this morning; I have been reading some and writing to put in the time."\(^{304}\) Thus, she used reading and writing as an outlet for her frustration and also as an alternative to and stand in for Quaker communion.

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\(^{300}\) Howe, 234  
\(^{301}\) Kelley, "Reading Women," 55  
\(^{302}\) Ibid., 57  
\(^{304}\) Bushong, May 17, 1857
The intellectual space books provided could "kindle the imagination and lead to unexpected outcomes,"\(^{305}\) such as the "discovery of an unanticipated dimension of self."\(^{306}\) For Edith, this allowed her to temporarily escape from the drudgery of her work and engage with and form intellectually stimulating thoughts. Her reading not only invited her to participate in a broader network, but also enhanced her quality of life by providing an intimate space for introspection.

Reading and thinking allowed Edith to exercise the agency\(^{307}\) that her societal role, or "destiny," denied her. Kelley argues that Edith and other women used the agency that books gave them to "form[] their own opinions and mak[e] public opinion."\(^{308}\) Literacy became liberating.\(^{309}\) It allowed women to access ideas and form opinions as never before. Much as Carlo Ginzburg reveals how the peasant culture of sixteenth-century Italy and Menocchio's library converged to shape his ideas,\(^{310}\) the rural Pennsylvanian culture in which Edith lived and the literature she read provided the framework to shape hers. In both cases, reading facilitated their development of original ideas and served as the basis for political, religious, and other "public" opinions.

Knowledge (acquired through reading) gave women the "ability to make independent decisions."\(^{311}\) Furthermore, if women could form their own personal opinions, then they could participate in political debate because personal opinions—for example how one

\(^{305}\) Kelley, "Crafting Subjectivities," 64
\(^{306}\) Idem.
\(^{307}\) Kelley, "Crafting Subjectivities," 66
\(^{308}\) Idem.
\(^{309}\) Jensen, "Not Only Ours but Others," 17: Jensen poses the idea of a "liberating literacy through which [women] could interact with the social and intellectual life of the new nation in ways that only males had done earlier."
\(^{310}\) Ginzburg, 33: "It was the encounter between the printed page and the oral culture, of which he was one embodiment, that led Menocchio to formulate—first for himself, later for his fellow villagers, and finally for the judges—the 'opinions...[that] came out of his head.'"
\(^{311}\) Isenberg, "'Pillars in the Same Temple and Priests of the Same Worship,'" 111
feels about the slave question—are often political, a significant example of the overlap of the intimate and the public. The agency that reading gave women of this period allowed them to then participate more actively in public life.

Creating a Participatory Network: Women in National Discourse

Reading allowed antebellum women to cross the ideological boundaries from the private to the public sphere. Through literature, they became aware of and engaged with national issues from their own homes. As John notes, “at no point in the early republic was it possible to exclude women and blacks entirely from public life. In myriad ways, they participated in the new informational environment.”

Reading allowed women to immerse themselves in politics.

Moreover, reading encouraged some women to expand their political participation beyond only reading and contemplation. Edith wrote about political conventions that took place in nearby towns. In her diary, Edith expressed her strong desire to attend these events in order to further integrate herself into public discourse. She wrote of the abolitionist convention with disappointment, but on a different day, “Susana, HH Gilbert [a female friend] and [Edith] went to Bart to hear Lucretia Mott preach.” Edith noted that “although it was very wet there were quite an assembly of persons” there.

Lucretia Mott was a Quaker minister and traveled around the country to preach and assume leadership roles in nineteenth-century movements for women’s rights and

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312 John, 168
313 Bushong, Sept. 5, 1857: Bushong attended the “Lycerny Convention.”
314 Ibid., Oct. 25, 1857
315 Idem.
abolition. The reforms she propagated “depended upon a flourishing literary public sphere”\textsuperscript{316} to gain the support of other Americans, thus making clear the connection between the literary public and participation in national debate. After hearing Mott speak, Edith commented that she thought Mott “said a great many good and true things the world would be better were there more persons like her in it is my opinion.”\textsuperscript{317} Edith’s desire to publicly engage with these ideas exemplifies the increasing political participation of women in this period.

Howe posits that a “history of battles over public opinion”\textsuperscript{318} comprises the history of early America. The development of the postal system and subsequent distribution of reading material across the nation in the nineteenth century meant that people waged these battles largely in print. The opening of this medium provided a space for previously politically disengaged groups—women, free blacks, and even white men living in remote areas—to read and exchange ideas on a broad scale. The postal system made people aware of a larger world and encouraged their participation in it. This “democratization of information”\textsuperscript{319} empowered thousands of Americans, including Edith, to take part in national discourse. On historian captures the spirit of the age in this description of the following scene from 1854, only three years before Edith wrote her diary:

When Ralph Waldo Emerson delivered an address on “The Fugitive Slave Law” in New York City in 1854, he was acutely aware of reporters in his audience turning his lecture into news for the daily papers and thus disseminating his words

\textsuperscript{317} Bushong, Oct. 25, 1857
\textsuperscript{318} Howe, 6
\textsuperscript{319} Ibid., 626
far beyond his immediate audience. Emerson took the occasion to reflect on the revolution that the periodical press was bringing about in America: 'For who are the readers and thinkers of 1854? Owing to the silent revolution which the newspaper has wrought, this class has come in this country to take in all classes...there is fact, thought, and wisdom in the crude mass, from all regions of the world.'

In what Emerson referred to as the “silent revolution,” the post and press had collaborated to make content and ideas available to the masses to the extent that, by 1854, speakers expected their words to reach many of the American people. Emerson knew this, and so he spoke directly to not only those in his audience, but also the people who would read his speech in newspapers in the coming days. He referred to them as the “readers and thinkers of 1854”—and Edith, though often physically confined to her house, counted among them.

Although Edith was not an activist, she did engage with the major national issue of the time, slavery, through literature she read and conventions she attended. She and others like her formed opinions and exchanged ideas from their homes, thus disproving the fiction that women could not participate in politics since their primary arena was the home. Reading allowed women to construct their own political identity, and Edith was a living testament to this. From her Lancaster County farm, she reached out to make herself a national economic actor, thereby contesting the ideological fiction that women did not participate in nineteenth-century public life.

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320 Smith, “Introduction,” 3-4
321 Isenberg, “‘To Stand out in Heresy,’” 8
EPILOGUE

Edith Bushong’s obituary in the *Friends’ Intelligencer* reported that “For many years she was the State Superintendent of the Department of Narcotics in the W. C. T. U. of Pennsylvania.”322 The Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, or the W. C. T. U., founded in 1874, was the largest women’s organization in the United States in the late nineteenth century.323 Its members first lobbied against the sale of alcohol, but later expanded their reform agenda.324 Women held exclusive control of the W. C. T. U.: for many participants, like Edith, the organization was their first experience working outside of the home and the first time they had held an official leadership position.325 These roles inspired confidence and gave women the opportunity to exercise their intellects in a recognizable and significant way. It is fitting that Edith, who felt so confined and frustrated in her husband’s home from an early age, was able to work for the W. C. T. U. and lobby to effect regional and national change. She broke out of her prescribed domestic role and become a member of the paid workforce.

Edith exemplifies the ways in which middle-class women in the nineteenth century, while largely confined to the household and domestic space, gained access and contributed to the local market and beyond through their daily work, production, and reading. By earning a substantial income she enabled her family to live better than they otherwise could have; by producing marketable goods she helped create a rural capitalist

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325 *American Eras*
market; by taking advantage of the newly expanded postal system she participated in
national discourse; and by doing so interacted with a growing, active, and engaged
literary public.

This study has argued that Edith can serve as an example of mid-Atlantic rural
women who, although they spent the majority of their time working in the home, were
concerned with local and national economic issues and enjoyed reflecting on and
conversing about them. Reading empowered these women by providing a space in which
ideas temporarily took precedence over their daily work. It gave them agency. As a
broader public sphere that included women developed over the course of the nineteenth
century, these same women engaged in political and ideological debates that shaped the
path of the nation.

Despite her frequent frustration with the limitations of her roles in her household
and in American public life, Edith did indeed play a larger part than either she, her
family, or her contemporaries understood. Antebellum domestic ideology resulted in a
dissonance between her work and her perception of it. Yet when we examine her role in
historical context we realize that in addition to her unrecognized economic function in
her family and local market, her life held significance beyond the local as she participated
in a broader public economy of ideas.

Although Edith’s economic role went unrecognized—in terms of influence and
decision-making power within her household, the right to work outside of her household,
and the ability to influence national politics through the right to vote—in 1857, the next
half century would see major change in all three of these areas. We may never know if
Edith ever gained a share of decision-making power in her household, but her job at the
W. C. T. U.—fulfilling the second of the above criteria—suggests that she later vocalized her desire to work outside the household and possibly her other thoughts and preferences as well, leading to input in household decisions. Unfortunately, Edith died in 1914, six years before President Woodrow Wilson signed the Nineteenth Amendment, giving women the right to vote, into law. Edith certainly would have enjoyed the opportunity to vote.

The antebellum ideology that did not recognize the value of her labor made Edith believe that that she led a small life. But there are no small lives. The richness of Edith’s diary and the ways that complex regional and national forces shaped her life are among the reasons we need to take the lives of ordinary people into historical account. Edith’s life did not fit into the simple dichotomous categories of the public and private spheres. Many of her actions could be construed as public, just as many of Gilbert’s could be construed as private, but more often, the two categories overlapped: they were intricately intertwined and mutually dependent on each other. Edith’s experience demonstrates that in a person’s life, the intimate and the public often operate as one.

We should relish the richness and complexity in Edith’s life and work to understand how she and others like her fit into the bigger picture. Because domestic ideology defined her only as a wife and mother—two significant roles in their own right—she failed to see what this study makes so apparent: that her life and work helped to make history.
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