



A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812

By Laurel Thatcher Ulrich

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WINNER OF THE PULITZER PRIZE

Drawing on the diaries of one woman in eighteenth-century Maine, this intimate history illuminates the medical practices, household economies, religious rivalries, and sexual mores of the New England frontier.

Between 1785 and 1812 a midwife and healer named Martha Ballard kept a diary that recorded her arduous work (in 27 years she attended 816 births) as well as her domestic life in Hallowell, Maine. On the basis of that diary, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich gives us an intimate and densely imagined portrait, not only of the industrious and reticent Martha Ballard but of her society. At once lively and impeccably scholarly, *A Midwife's Tale* is a triumph of history on a human scale.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

The diary of a midwife and herbalist reveals the prevalence of violence, crime and premarital sex in rural 18th-century New England. "Fleshing out this midwife's bare entries with interpretive essays . . . Ulrich marvelously illuminates women's status, the history of medicine and daily life in the early Republic," said PW . Illustrated.

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From Library Journal

This book is a model of social history at its best. An exegesis of Ballard's diary, it recounts the life and times of this obscure Maine housewife and midwife. Using passages from the diary as a starting point for each chapter division, Ulrich, a professor at the University of New Hampshire, demonstrates how the seemingly trivial details of Ballard's daily life reflect and relate to prominent themes in the history of the early republic: the role of women in the economic life of the community, the nature of marriage and sexual relations, the scope of medical knowledge and practice. Speculating on why Ballard kept the diary as well as why her family saved it, Ulrich highlights the document's usefulness for historians.

- *Marie Marmo Mullaney, Caldwell Coll., N.J.*

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Review

"A truly talented historian unravels the fascinating life of a community that is so foreign, and yet so similar to our own." --*The New York Times Book Review*

"Expertly executed and endlessly interesting. An offbeat gem of scholarship." --*Washington Post Book World*

"A marvelously nuanced, subtle, and unillusioned portrayal of one woman's life in early America. It has the makings of a classic." --Stephen Innes, University of Virginia

"It takes a historian of extraordinary persistence, skill, and empathy to recognize [Martha Ballard's] diary as something of a buried treasure and to painstakingly unearth its gems. . . . Ulrich has recognized Ballard's great spirit, and has given to us the gift of a life worth knowing." --*Philadelphia Inquirer*

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