



# Between This Time and That Sweet Time of Grace: The Diary of Mandana White Goodenough

*Mandana White Goodenough's diary tells a compelling story about a woman who gets married, has four children, and then becomes a widow. It is well written, funny, and full of personality. It is also very revealing in the details it provides about life for women in the middle of the nineteenth century in rural Vermont.*

By CHRIS BURNS

**M**andana White Goodenough was born on January 15, 1826, in Calais, Vermont, the second of five daughters, to Jesse and Lovisa Tucker White. Mandana kept a diary, now housed at Special Collections at the University of Vermont,<sup>1</sup> which explores a range of issues in the context of nineteenth-century rural Vermont life: courting and courtship, gossip and the community jury, marriage, religion, visiting, widowhood, and family and social networks. The diary reveals the choices that Mandana faced and the factors that guided her decision making.

The bulk of Mandana's diary was written between December 24, 1843, and March 27, 1846, the period in her life when she met and married Eli Goodenough (1821–1860) and became pregnant with their first

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child, Myron. The entries in this section record Mandana facing decisions about work and marriage, deliberating in conjunction with her parents, and with respect to the family economy and community opinion. Established in her own home and raising a family of four children, Mandana appears to have put aside the diary. There is not another entry until April 20, 1860, a little after Eli died. Thereafter her entries become more regular again beginning on December 1, 1860, when she described the family's move from Hardwick to Walden. The diary ends on April 20, 1861, with the entry, "16 years ago today I was married." The later section finds Mandana faced with decisions caused by her husband's death. Again, the family's economic status and future are overriding factors. The earlier, youthful entries are long, introspective, and filled with anxiety and emotion. The later entries are shorter and tend to just list the main events of the day.

When she began the diary, Mandana was a young, educated, single woman in a family that appears somewhat well off. Although we have no documents contemporary with Mandana's first diary entries, in 1850 her parents owned a farm worth \$5,000, which made it one of the more valuable farms in Calais. The 1850 Census of Agriculture shows that Jesse White had 130 acres of improved land, \$300 of farming implements and machinery, 16 milch cows, \$750 worth of livestock, and that he harvested 55 bushels of wheat, 80 bushels of corn, 123 bushels of oats, and 350 bushels of potatoes. The value of his orchard products was \$210, and his dairying operation produced 1,000 pounds of butter and 2,800 pounds of cheese. He also produced 500 pounds of maple sugar that year. Jesse White was a prosperous farmer, with a diverse operation but largely dependent on dairy and his orchard.<sup>2</sup>

Mandana spent a considerable portion of 1844 and 1845 away from home, at the Lebanon Institute and teaching school in Marshfield. This situation gave her more time to write and fewer outlets for communication. In these earlier entries, she took time to contemplate the adult life that stretched before her. The later, shorter entries find her a widowed mother of four, responsible for running a farm and household.

Margo Culley writes that, "while the novel and autobiography may be thought of as artistic wholes, the diary is always in process, always in some sense a fragment." We do not know much about Mandana's life before the diary, after her marriage, or in her later years after the diary ends. In addition, it's impossible to know all that she is writing about and especially what she has left out. Culley likens the act of reading a diary to "putting together the pieces of a puzzle—remembering clues and supplying the missing pieces, linking details apparently unrelated in the diarist's mind, and decoding encoded materials."<sup>3</sup> Deciphering a fuller

picture of Mandana's life from her diary is not easy, requiring careful reading of the text and other primary and secondary sources to help discover the context in which this diary was written, as well as the historical evidence it contains.

#### “THE FUTURE SEEMS DARK TO ME”

In the first section of the diary, Mandana spends a considerable amount of time exploring what the future might hold for her. Typically, in the period before marriage, young women in the first half of the nineteenth century had fewer options than they might have in the modern world. It was not the norm to leave home to find work, although Mandana did contemplate that option. On February 20, 1844, when she was eighteen years old, Mandana wrote:

The future seems dark to me; what trouble is in store for me I know not but a heavy cloud seems to hang over my mind. What is to become of me I know not. I am at times discouraged and cast down. I think the best thing for me would be to go a short distance from home and procure constant employment, but to this they would not hear a word. All of my friends think it would be a disgrace for me to go out to work, but it is far different with me, it would be my choice to go.

That the prospect of going out to work was a plausible option was a relatively recent change for young women in the United States. In the first half of the nineteenth century, work that women had traditionally done in the household became more industrialized and the need for money to purchase these new products of industry grew. Alice Kessler-Harris writes, “As the rural household carried less of the burden of production, the need for female labor in it diminished. The household contribution of daughters sank from vital to marginal significance.”<sup>4</sup> The possibility of work outside of the home for young women did not mean that any and every job was available. The options were still restricted and were guided by cultural and religious values, labor demand, and the economic needs particular to each individual and her family. And it did not mean that every young woman worked. Kessler-Harris writes, “About 10 percent of all women took jobs outside their homes in 1840. Among these, most were young women who expected to spend an average of three to five years making a living before dropping out of the work force to raise a family. In 1840 single women constituted the great bulk of women wage earners.”<sup>5</sup>

The prospect of going out to work may have appealed to Mandana out of a sense of adventure. Writing of the mills in Lowell, Massachusetts, Philip Foner notes, “during the 1840s, newspapers and magazines

were filled with glowing pictures of life in the Lowell mills.” Mandana may have been swayed by these advertisements and by the idea of these mill towns as educated communities where “the young women who came into the mills from rural districts were interested in reading.”<sup>6</sup> Mandana made several references in the diary to her interest in reading, although she felt conflicted about the worth of reading novels. On February 20, 1844, she wrote, “I have seen the time when I would read every novel whether good or bad that I could lay my hands on and read almost all night when I could not find time to read in the day time; this not only injured my health but my reasoning faculties.”

A desire to be more independent from her family may also have been of interest to Mandana. Of her relationship to her parents she wrote on January 15, 1844, her eighteenth birthday, “The time has now arrived in my age in which girls are generally free from the control of their parents, but probably the control of my parents will not cease now.” Kessler-Harris writes, “As important as the feeling of having cash in one’s pocket was the sense of choice that many women experienced for the first time.”<sup>7</sup>

The idea that she would go away to work is not seriously raised again in subsequent entries in Mandana’s diary. In part, this was surely due to her family’s relatively high economic status. The 1850 census shows that only two individuals in Calais had a higher value of real estate owned than Jesse White. It would not have been necessary for Mandana to leave home for economic reasons. In addition, her decision was guided by the prevailing cultural mores of the day, and the middle of the nineteenth century was a time influenced heavily by the rise of the domestic ideology or code that “prescribed expected behavior for white native-born women—they were ultimately to be full-time mothers.”<sup>8</sup> The choices for young women were guided by both the reality and the perception of their growing importance in the domestic arena. The decision to take employment outside of the home, and what employment to take, was increasingly judged in terms of how it would prepare women for the roles of wife and mother.<sup>9</sup> When Mandana writes on February 20, 1844, that her friends “think it would be a disgrace for me to go out to work,” the evidence is strong that this process of judgment by family and community was quite real.

One area that was open to Mandana was further education and teaching. Kessler-Harris notes, “The same moral code that denied the legitimacy of wage work provided justification for opening up educational institutions on the ground that educated women made better mothers. And it also offered a rationale for women to become teachers, missionaries, and writers.”<sup>10</sup> The role of women as school teachers grew

in the nineteenth century as education became more important, because women teachers generally earned less than men, and women were believed by many to be better suited for nurturing the young.<sup>11</sup> When the diary begins, Mandana is seventeen years old, living at home, and working as a teacher. Of this job she wrote on January 1, 1844, “I am today in school, have been teaching now 2 weeks. I do not like the place very much, it is called Sodom.” (Sodom is in the southwest part of Calais, and is now called Adamant.) From this entry we get a glimpse of Mandana’s wit as well as her feelings toward this job.

Teaching at this time was often challenging, as schools were mainly one-room schoolhouses with classes ranging widely in age and ability. As Lynn Bonfield notes, “keeping order under such conditions was not easy, and discipline problems often disrupted the whole class.”<sup>12</sup> At the end of Mandana’s tenure at Sodom, she wrote of how difficult the job could be and how a teacher was measured by the standards of the community:

This is the last day of my school and glad am I, for it has not been very pleasant to me, at least many things have occurred which have not added to my happiness. But it is now over and hope it will be forgotten or its effects cease. Probably some have been suited and others have not: some things which I was severely censured for by some, the Committee approved of, but my conscience does not upbraid me; if I have done wrong, I hope shall see my error. (February 17, 1844)

Thomas Dublin writes, “The quality of one’s teaching was typically a public matter. Near the end of each term it was common to hold a public examination of scholars; but such events were, of course, also examinations of the teachers.”<sup>13</sup> This community scrutiny of her performance is what Mandana is defending herself against in the above passage.

Mandana would teach school once more, this time in Marshfield from December 9, 1844, until January 31, 1845, a typical winter session. While at Marshfield, she boarded with local families, moving once a week to a new family. Her entries about her time here show that any unhappiness she experienced was more likely due to her being among strangers than to the job itself. The class size was small—eight scholars the first day, only three on a particularly snowy day—and this may have made the job more enjoyable and manageable for Mandana. On December 10, she wrote, “the scholars are merry and I almost wish to participate in their sports, at least it adds to my happiness to see them so happy to all appearance, may they ever be thus united in friendship and no root of bitterness spring up in their midst.” Mandana seems to be enjoying this experience more, being not much older than her pupils she “almost” wished to join in their fun. At the same time, her reference to a “root of

bitterness” suggests some melancholy incidents may have occurred in her life.

It was common for a girl who started teaching as a teen to stop once she married. Thomas Dublin, in his study of New Hampshire teachers in the late nineteenth century found that 60 percent of women teachers had ended their teaching career by the age of twenty-four. “Most rural teachers,” he concludes, “worked for a limited number of years and then married and left the wage labor force.” Mandana’s last teaching job was in Marshfield. Although it is unclear how she supported herself after her husband died and her children grew up, it was rare for a woman to return to teaching once widowed.<sup>14</sup>

#### COURTING AND GOSSIP

On February 18, 1844, Mandana wrote,

How evil are the thoughts of mankind when not guided by the precepts of the gospel. What they will do when they are at [liberty?], this has been illustrated here lately. A Gentleman who was intimate here was inquired about and received a name which he would blush to own or at least he was presented in no favorable manner. These stories appear to be the invention of those who wish to injure him, their truth I intend to learn. If it is true or false, I wish to know it.

Someone who “was intimate” at the White household had obtained an unfavorable reputation and was the subject of personal gossip, demonstrating the importance of religion and gossip in the regulation of behavior in a community.

Historian Karen Hansen writes that gossip in the antebellum period “relied upon the medium of face-to-face contact that visiting afforded . . . [I]t provided a medium for monitoring as well as negotiating community opinion . . . [P]eople who gossiped potentially persuaded and influenced others and could, in effect, valorize or ostracize the subject of gossip.”<sup>15</sup> Again and again, Mandana wrote about gossip, most of it related face to face. On January 8, 1845, she noted that the Smith family in Marshfield, whom she is boarding with, “seem to feel terrible somehow, I know not how, towards me and it is made manifest sometimes by hints, which I can not fail to understand, the ‘I heard that Wm. was keeping company with one Mandana White.’” These diary entries demonstrate how people talked about one another, particularly about how females and males behaved together. A socially agreed upon code of conduct informed by religious values and regulated in part by gossip structured the community. It was very important to maintain a good reputation.

Gossip was not always accepted at face value, as is evident by Man-

dana's intention to learn the truth about the "intimate Gentleman." The fear of gossip about oneself is evident in her concern over the gossip that has influenced the Smiths. Referring to another incident, she wrote, "Slander. What is it but the destroyer of mankind. What blasts more of human happiness than slander" (June 23, 1844). As Hansen notes, "Both white men's and white women's reputations rested on their sexual behavior, their relationships with members of the opposite sex, and fulfillment of their marital and familial obligations."<sup>16</sup> Mandana's story of her relationships with suitors is interwoven with the greater narrative of family and community opinion.

Mandana's diary is filled with entries concerning her love life. Mandana married in 1845. In early 1844, however, she received a marriage proposal from J.C. Mallory. The event and its aftermath greatly upset Mandana. After consulting with her parents, she decided not to marry this person.

To marry a man who has no education, to get worldly gain his only aim, is an idea I wish to abhor. I prefer before this to be an "Old Maid" and know the "Loneliness of an Old Maid's life", for I have long been called one in sports. To marry for wealth, I do despise. Love in the retired cottage to please me. I want none of the idle flatterers of the busy world to surround. I want the approving of my conscience at all times. (May 10, 1844)

Rejecting this offer from a man who only seeks wealth, Mandana declares her aim in marriage to be love. In her diary, she tries to convince herself that she has made the right choice and that she's not afraid to become an "Old Maid".

On June 26, 1845, the topic of J.C. Mallory came up again. By this time, Mandana had married Eli Goodenough, but gossip still lingers and rumors persist in the community about Mandana's past with Mr. Mallory. Mandana's Aunt Lucy has informed her of

what Jason said when he was at her house. I am sorry for what has been said this spring for I think it has injured him much in the estimation of the people this way more than he thinks of. I can hardly help thinking but that some has been said to injure me. "He that robs me of my good name robs me of that which not enriches him but makes me poor indeed."

Mandana is still upset about the effect the gossip may have had on her good name, but her marital status and the growing distance from the events in question have lessened her concern. "So I will let it rest for the less I have to say the sooner it will be ended . . . I promised to marry Jason but the Old Folks were displeased so that he should never do any thing about it."

## ELI GOODENOUGH

The affair with Jason Mallory ended in the spring of 1844, with Mandana concerned about her reputation and willing to become an “Old Maid” if necessary. On July 28, however, a new suitor appeared, and his arrival on the scene is revealing in what it tells us about courting, particularly the role of church meetings in social life. Mandana wrote in her diary, “Have been to meeting to East Montpelier, there is something curious, I should think, on this days adventure.” She described a confusing story of conflicting invitations to Montpelier from her cousin Charles and brother-in-law Lester Warren, and the roles played by her mother, someone by the name of Laura, and Mandana’s sister Orrilla that eventually led to Mandana going to Montpelier with Orrilla and Lester. On the way home, Lester revealed “that he did not ask me to go with him to meeting but it was to go with Mr. Eli Goodenough, a gentleman at work on his house. I have not had any little circumstance mortify me I know not when.” Later that day, Mandana and Orrilla are at her sister Elivira’s, who is married to Lester, having tea with Eli, whom Lester teases, causing Eli to respond that “the next time he wanted any one to go to meeting or any where else he should ask them himself.”

Church meetings were an opportunity to socialize and a public place to go on a date. Hansen writes, “Social ties were a means and an incentive for involvement in the church.”<sup>17</sup> On August 3, 1844, Mandana wrote that Eli has come by to explain prior events and asked her to go to a meeting with him in Montpelier, which she does. On the way home, he asked her to go to another meeting the following Saturday in Cabot. Church meetings may have been an especially appropriate dating place for Eli and Mandana because Lester Warren, the man who had introduced them, was the local Universalist minister. As Hansen notes, the church “provided a ready-made community, mutual aid, entertainment, a base for organizing movements for political change, and an arena for socializing.”<sup>18</sup>

Mandana’s entry on August 9 provides insight into the anxiety she felt about courting with Eli, with elaborate reasoning for and some trepidation about accepting his offer to go to Cabot.

Have concluded to go to Cabot with Eli as Franklin has concluded he should not go to Montpelier and so Orrilla could not go if I went and as Charles did not ask me any more than he did her I concluded to let her go and I go to Cabot. I do not know but this will be wrong but it will soon be too late to extract.

Mandana enjoyed herself on this date and her bond with Eli grew from this day forward. She left Calais shortly after, on August 28, to attend school at the Lebanon Institute.



The Lebanon Liberal Institute was run by the Universalist Church in Lebanon, New Hampshire, and existed from 1841 to 1852. Financial problems forced the school to close. The school held four eleven-week terms during the year, and attracted local youths as well as students from Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont.<sup>19</sup> Mandana's attendance there is evidence both of her family's economic well-being and their Universalist faith. Mandana was one of forty-six girls and sixty-five boys who enrolled for the fall term. According to the *Catalogue*, "The course of Instruction is thorough, comprising all the branches usually taught in academies, and particular attention is paid to such as are fitting for College, or intending to teach." In addition to the regular course of instruction, Mandana took lessons in Greek.<sup>20</sup>

Eli escorted her to Lebanon, proving that he had become an important person in her life, as shown in her entry for that day: "Never before did I love a friend as I do him that I had not been longer acquainted with: I esteem his friendship much; he appears to think a great deal of me, and it was hard for us to part." Eli, like Mandana, has a dating history: "I fear he has left the company of another for me; if he has it will be too bad. I know he has left her, but know not why." Going into their courtship, both Eli and Mandana had recently finished other relationships. This is an era when romance and love had become primary considerations in marriage choice. Ellen Rothman states that by the end of the eighteenth century, "Americans were beginning to make love between men and women a necessary rather than a desirable precondition for marriage."<sup>21</sup> Eli and Mandana's expressions of love began in the month before she went to Lebanon, and grew while she was attending school in Lebanon, mainly through letters between them. Rothman notes that "increasingly after 1800, letters both demonstrated and deepened commitment between people who believed in the power of the written word."<sup>22</sup>

On September 3, 1844, Mandana wrote "I can not keep my mind on my book for I expected a letter tonight and am very much disappointed." On the 5th, when she received the letter, she wrote, "Eli expressed himself in the same tender manner concerning me as heretofore, he is very kind to me. O may nothing ever happen to mar our happiness in our intercourse and oh may it be lasting." Eli is frequently mentioned in the diary and corresponds with her regularly, more than her own family, as she emphatically pointed out in several entries. On September 22, she exclaimed, "O Eli, I can not be half thankful enough for having written to me. Thy letters have been a solace to me in my lonesome hours. They have been my stay and support. To them I go when lonesome. They tell me that one has not forgotten me if my Parents have." Karen Lystra

notes that “with almost no other means of voicing themselves across even the smallest distance, nineteenth-century lovers bridged the silence with ink and pencil.”<sup>23</sup>

Eli arrived on November 12, 1844, to bring Mandana back to Calais. They arrived on the 14th and after staying the night he headed home, causing Mandana to pour out her heart to her diary. It is evident that their affection for each other had grown, and that the courting is now quite serious. Mandana’s entry plainly betrays an anxiety over the growing seriousness of the relationship. She claimed that she does not deserve Eli’s love, that he does not see her faults. Declaring her ill-preparedness for marriage, she wrote “I know I have many things yet to learn before I could appear in company so that I should not cause a husband to blush at my blunders; for many times the crimson has appeared on my cheek, the effects of ignorance when in company.” Like so many other lovers, she cannot see how Eli could love her and how she will ever avoid embarrassing herself in front of him and others. That they are on the threshold of committing to marriage is clear: “to enter upon the duties of married life I must not expect all will be one calm and unclouded day, with nought to disturb the peace.” Mandana wrote of her concern over being able to make Eli happy, “at marriage his fate is fixed either for happiness or misery, there is no escape. Therefore, watch and pray.”

It appears that Eli proposed marriage in early December, and his courtship grew more serious from December on, leading to their marriage on April 20, 1845. On December 14, Mandana wrote,

Eli came here this forenoon and presented me with a new trunk. When I opened it I found it contained a letter, a few sheets of paper, and a [rule?]. The letter was written out of pure love to me. It breathed forth the same spirit as its predecessors. He said he did not know as the trunk would be acceptable, but he thought the letter would, and it was. It was read before I ate my dinner and with pleasure. I was requested to burn it as soon as I read it, but I forebore. It would seem too much like sacrilege.

On December 21, Eli gave Mandana his watch, as hers didn’t work, and they made plans to go to St. Johnsbury. That Mandana appreciated all of this attention and loves and respects Eli in return is clear, but she also is wrestling with the decision to get married and how to make that decision.

Evidence of her love and respect for Eli can be seen in the entry for December 29, when she wrote that Eli has not been able to come to Calais due to the weather and quotes a romantic poem by Fanny Kemble:

What shall I do with all the day and hours  
What must be counted ere I see thy face?

How shall I charm the interval that lowers  
Between this time and that sweet time of grace?

Interestingly, Kemble's *Poems* was first published in 1844, which means that Mandana, in Calais, Vermont, was staying abreast of the current popular literature. (Oddly, Fanny Kemble was herself going through a very trying time with her slave-owning husband that would eventually lead to a very public divorce proceeding).<sup>24</sup> Mandana's solution for the "lowering interval" is to spend most of the day reading.

More proof of her feelings for Eli, and her apprehension over her current state of affairs is seen on January 1, 1845: "I have been in hopes to see one I love but I fear I shall be disappointed but all will be for the best I hope, at least I trust it will." In declining an invitation from William, who also has a romantic interest in Mandana, she wrote, "I did not think it would be right nor did I wish to go after what has been said and I wish to have more respect for Eli than to go in company with him at the present. Even if I had been well or able to go, I know he does not wish me to go and why not obey his wish rather than that of others." She seems to struggle with the decision but ultimately chooses Eli.

A couple of weeks earlier she had received some advice from a Mrs. Wheeler, writing on January 17 of "the best advice I ever received from mortal," which seems to help her make up her mind. The advice was "to know my own heart and then decide accordingly, to let not the idea of worldly gain influence me in the least." Mrs. Wheeler also advised Mandana to make up her mind soon, as deciding in the negative in the future "would injure both of us very much." Although the advice doesn't seem uncommonly wise, it was probably what Mandana wanted to hear and allowed her to feel stronger about committing to Eli.

Her entry on January 17 declares, "No Eli, I will not forsake thee until something more than that now brought against thee that is true is presented in the shape of faults." She appears to have been hearing some talk that Eli is not wealthy enough for her. Mandana filled the rest of the page with her reasons for choosing affection over wealth, writing, "My father has told me never marry a man on account of his property, but to look to the disposition, to the character, there to put my reliance, for wealth produces no happiness where evil passions are concerned."

William attempted one last time to win Mandana's heart, writing a letter that made her hands "tremble like a leaf." She wrote on January 25, 1845, "this letter I have received has surprised me. To be addressed in this manner by Wm. was rather unexpected after I had refused to ride with him even a half mile, and then the sugar heart and the poetry that accompaning [sic] it was rather singular considering all things. But

I shall answer it so there will be no mistake this time in respect to answer.” Although she was clearly impressed by William’s letter and still had doubts about marrying Eli, she does decide here to put her foot down with William.

Her courting with Eli continued with a trip from February 7 to 17 to see some of his friends, taking them as far away as Wheelock. It was common for people to take these social trips in the winter, indeed, during the next winter one of the families visited on this trip came to see Eli and Mandana in Calais. Of visiting Eli’s friends, Mandana wrote on February 6, “though they are strangers to me I hail them as friends for they are his and they will seem near to me on his account.” At times in the diary Mandana seems to embrace her role as Eli’s partner, and at times she seems to worry about that role. That they will be married does not seem a certainty at this point. The couple had a disagreement of some sort on February 23 as Eli headed back to Cabot after a visit.

I think that we have never parted under similar circumstances or with similar feelings before and when I enquire the cause I shrink from the answer my own conscience would give, for I know I am the principal cause. For I know I have done wrong. That Eli feels bad for it, I can not doubt. He did not upbraid me but his manner plainly told me that it grieved him to see me do thus. I have tried to please him, until now, in an unguarded hour, I have offended and strayed from the straight and narrow path. Until now I have strived to have his every wish gratified, to please him if it laid in my power, but alas! Now is the spell broke. But I think in all of this the blame rests on me, that I have cause to complain of no one but myself. I was the first to transgress and now will I mourn in silence. No complaint shall pass my lips. I will strive by my future actions to atone for the past.

What on earth has she done? The diary offers no clue, and we are left to speculate on the cause of Mandana’s distress over her own behavior. Perhaps it was some minor incident and she is distressed because their feelings for each other and the lingering question about their relationship have elevated the tension, making a minor incident less trivial.

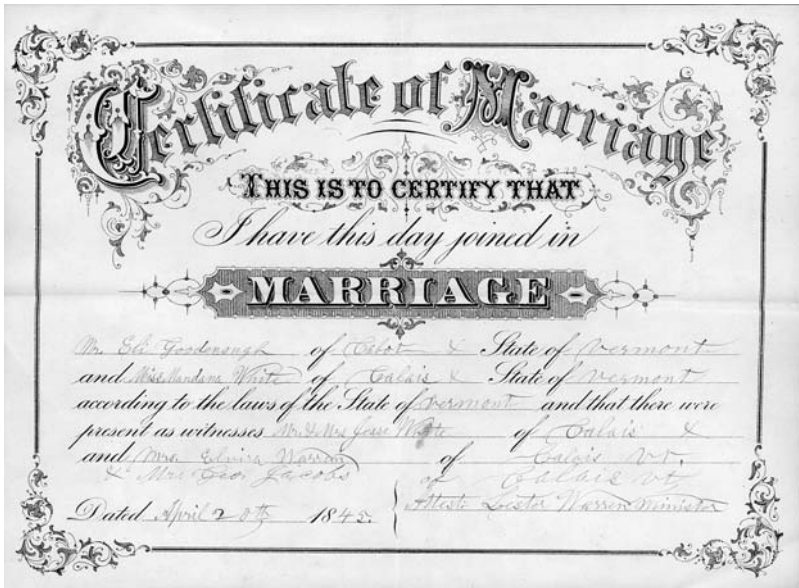
The event that so disturbs Mandana did not, in any case, cause a permanent rift in her relationship with Eli, who returned to Calais on March 4 with his parents, perhaps signaling another formal stage in the courtship process. On March 30, Eli got consent from Mandana’s father “that we may one day be united by stronger ties than now exist between us, never to be severed until death.” The role of parents in courtship was generally minimal. Bringing his parents to Calais and getting consent were most likely formalities, as generally “parents exercised little control of their children’s courtships.”<sup>25</sup> While Mandana wrote about her father giving advice not to marry for money, and an earlier incident

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in which her parents denied a gentleman their consent, her marriage to Eli was her decision. The earlier denial of consent may have been due to her younger age or she may have been simply hiding her lack of interest in marrying the other gentleman behind her parents' denial.

The approach of marriage was a very emotional time for Mandana. Her entry on April 6, 1845, expresses great doubt that she will ever be happy: "this morning thou arose early with the feathered songster, thou would gladly have tuned thy day for happiness, but now at near sunset, thou art in tears, thy glee is turned to sorrow." For women, the approach of marriage was often a difficult time. "Except when marriage would be followed immediately by a long-distance move, women generally made the decision to marry with far less conflict than the decision of *when* to marry. It was the timing of marriage that created the most ambivalence, distress, and self-doubt in women."<sup>26</sup>

It was common for the man to push for a wedding date while the woman delayed, in part because she had a great deal to do to get ready for the wedding. Rothman notes, "Because men expected marriage to enrich rather than restrict their daily lives, they were more eager than



Eli and Mandana's marriage certificate, April 20, 1845. Goodenough Family Papers, Special Collections, University of Vermont.

women to have the wedding take place.”<sup>27</sup> Mandana wrote on April 13, “He wishes me to set the day that we will be married and he wishes it to be within a few days or weeks at least. What to do I know not. I know not what is for the best but he is very anxious and if I thought it best I would by all means do it. I wish to do as he wishes me if it is in my power and it is right.”

They set the date for April 20 and Mandana spent most of the week spinning. On the 19th Eli came to her room and stayed until bedtime, and she “was glad to see him and once more to give him the hearty welcome.” She was anxious however about her big day and actually wrote her diary entry at 11 p.m. by candlelight, as she was unable to sleep. On the 20th she wrote, “This evening Eli has set for the time for us to be married. If nothing happens to prevent, then my fate will be fixed.” It was Eli’s role to set the time and date. It is hard to tell if she was resigned to her fate or anxious that nothing should go wrong.

The wedding party consisted only of family and the ceremony was performed by Mandana’s brother-in-law and Eli’s former employer, Lester Warren. Mandana “has vowed to love and serve my husband for life.” For a woman who wrote with great emotion and in great detail, her thoughts on her wedding are brief and unemotional, but this could be due to not having the time to write much in the diary.

#### MARRIED LIFE

The day-to-day lives of Mandana and Eli did not dramatically change in the beginning of their marriage. He still lived in Cabot and visited her on the weekend. She was not entirely happy with this arrangement and wrote of her frustration on August 3, 1845: “I am uneasy and long for the time to come when I should be with and live with my husband, that hills and valleys may not intervene, but that we may dwell in one house and be to each other what we should be and help to bear each other’s burdens.” She did visit Eli in Cabot on several occasions and she befriended several people in that circle, especially Eli’s sister, Sarah. This pattern of not setting up house immediately was not atypical in New England. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich details similar scenarios in her book on Martha Ballard’s diary, in particular when Ballard’s daughters were married and “went to housekeeping” after a period of time when they remained at home.<sup>28</sup>

The diary entries between the wedding and the birth of Myron Goodenough on April 18, 1846, record a large amount of visiting. A great number of people came to Calais, Mandana and Eli visited others, Mandana went to Cabot, and there were two big outings to Montpelier. The first outing was on July 15th to see “a caravan of animals.” Mandana’s

entry for that day reflects on a similar trip five years prior when she was with a prospective suitor. On the subject of a gift that suitor gave her, Mandana wrote, “the present that I that evening received I still keep and wear to remind me of what has been but what is not. Of what I then could have been if I had chosen it.” She looks back with a certain degree of melancholy but not with regret, stating that she has attended this event with her “dearly beloved husband.” The other trip was to see the State House with some visiting guests.

On October 3, 1845, Mandana wrote, “Eli has come home and moved all of his tools and now intends to stay here for a while.” There is some evidence that Eli leaving his family in Cabot had a great economic impact on them. On October 13, Eli and Mandana received news that the “whole family were going to Manchester in a few weeks.” Perhaps the Goodenough family was thinking about moving already, but it seems to come as a surprise to Mandana and very close on the heels of Eli moving to Calais. The effect of losing an adult male on the economies of some farm families in this period could be devastating. On October 29, Eli went to Cabot after receiving news the night before that his family had left for Manchester, “to stay at least one year and longer if they choose.” When he arrived in Cabot, he found that they had all left except for his sister, who had stayed behind “to regulate the house.” Where Eli’s family ends up is unclear; there is some evidence that his father moved to Calais for a time, and the collection also contains letters from Eli’s brothers in Alabama and Canada.

Eli and Mandana remained in Calais until around 1858, when they moved to Hardwick. They had four children together: Myron (April 18, 1846), Flora (November 26, 1849), Edward (October 13, 1851), and Charles (August 28, 1855). The 1850 agricultural census lists Eli farming in Calais with fifty improved acres, five milch cows, five other cattle, three sheep, and a farm with a cash value of \$1,200. The statistics of his farm when compared with Jesse White and other Calais farmers show that Eli is just getting his operation started. By 1860, the year that Eli dies, the family farming operation has grown significantly. The 1860 agricultural census shows the Goodenough farm with one hundred improved acres, twelve milch cows, sixteen other cattle, seventeen sheep, and the cash value of the farm is \$5,000. At the point of Eli’s death, the family farming operation has matured, but his death is a serious blow to the future of the farm.

#### WIDOWHOOD

On February 11, 1860, Mandana wrote in this diary for the first time in fourteen years. She may have stopped writing because she thought it

was a girlish pursuit, because she was too busy raising a family, or she may have been writing in another diary that has not survived.

Eli is dead. He died this morning at two o'clock. His sufferings are over. He is at rest. But not so with me, mine have but just commenced. But how can I live without him, he has always shielded me from harm and been my comfort and support. I could flee to him and unbosom my whole soul and he would sympathise and console we lived in close communion with each other and now his loss is doubly great; it was seldom he ever found fault with any thing I done and what I wanted if money could buy it I had it; but it is passed like a dream no more will his pleasant voice greet my ear no more his encouraging smile will guide me on we have done all we could for him doctors skill could not save him he was in so much distress all of the time that I could not talk with him about his affairs or about his situation I tried to but it would raise his fever and they said I should kill him

1860  
Feb  
11<sup>th</sup>

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The page from Mandana's diary, February 11, 1860, where she records Eli's death. Goodenough Family Papers, Special Collections, University of Vermont.



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With a broken heart and alone with four children, Mandana was forced to go on without her husband. Lisa Wilson, in her study of widows in Pennsylvania, writes that it was and is common for a widow to dwell on the happiness of her marriage, but that “the thought of past happiness was a comfort only when compared with the present of loneliness and despair.”<sup>29</sup>

Mandana's diary entries from this period find her depressed. On February 11, 1861, she wrote, “One year ago today Eli died and what I have felt and endured no one but my God can know in this short year. Sad and alone with the care of a large farm and four children to see to and look out for and no friends near to comfort and console. I have been alone today, no other one on the premises, and it has been lonesome indeed.” Her future prospects for herself and her children have dramatically changed. She has lost her partner in life, who was also responsible for running the farm. Her children are still young, ranging in age from 5 to 14.

Wilson states that “widows became resigned to widowhood in various ways.” Some relied on strength of character, others religion, and some on the love of their children.<sup>30</sup> Mandana's love for her children became her primary reason for living after Eli's death. On January 5, 1861, she wrote, “What has one short year accomplished for me—hopes blasted, expectations failed. I have now no bright anticipation of the future, when I pause to think, care & sorrow stare me in the face. My greatest ambition is to see my children grow to be virtuous and respectable and form good characters and how to accomplish the greatest good to them. They are my all to live for. When I can be of no more use to them, my task in life is accomplished.” Almost thirty-five and widowed with four children, Mandana saw little purpose left in her life beyond raising her children.

Mandana's new role in life was to be the head of the household and manage the farm, and it became readily apparent that they needed a smaller place. The farming operation that Eli had developed was too big for her to handle on top of running the household, and the children

were not old enough to take over much of their father's work. They had only moved to Hardwick two years before Eli's death, Mandana did not have a lot of friends, and she missed her family.

On January 1, 1861, Mandana and her father traveled to Mr. Richardson's in Walden, where her father offered \$2,100 for the farm. Mr. Richardson accepted the offer the next day and Mandana's father gave her \$100 to pay when she took a deed on January 16. She most likely had money of her own, but her prospects for future income had been reduced by her husband's death. The move is interesting mainly in the details the diary provides on what moving a household was like at this time. Mandana sold her farm to a Mr. Foster and around February 6 prepared to move to Walden. The move took several weeks, involving both the household and the farm. It occurred in the winter and largely by sleigh, which required good sleighing weather. Too much rain and warm weather made the job more difficult, as she attested on March 3, 1861. "It rains and the snow is fast disappearing and I fear we shall lose our sleighing and I shall have a hard time of it to move."

Myron, the eldest son at 14, helped out with the move, as did Jacob, but primarily the children were in school during this period. When they are finally moved out of the house, Mandana and family headed to Calais for a visit and to take care of some business in Montpelier. Returning to Walden, they began to settle in, hiring help and moving the animals up from the Hardwick farm. Remarking on the difficulty of the transition, Mandana wrote on March 24, 1861, "I feel like a cat in a strange garet." The diary entries begin to normalize at this point, recording visits, the hiring of labor, and chores, until the diary ends for good on April 20, 1861.

#### CONCLUSION

Mandana's diary tells a compelling story about a woman who gets married, has four children, and then becomes a widow. It is well written, funny, and full of personality. It is also very revealing in the details it provides about life for women in the middle of the nineteenth century in rural Vermont. Mandana's life, like most lives then and now, consisted of a series of choices, many of them about major life decisions such as work, dating, marriage, schooling, and housing. What makes this and other diaries important pieces of historical evidence is the context in which these issues arise and the factors that guide their resolution. Mandana's decisions were influenced by economic status, religion, community opinion, and her close relationship to her parents. Her decision to marry is influenced by economic considerations and consultations with her parents, but ultimately it is decided by love. A drastically

changed economic scenario guides the decisions she makes as a farmer's widow, decisions made again with the assistance of her parents. This diary, in combination with other sources, helps us envision the social lives of individuals in Vermont during this period. In particular, this work provides insight into the internal, emotional life of Mandana as she goes away from home to teach, enters into a romantic relationship that ultimately leads to marriage, and eventually deals with the loss of her husband and widowhood. In the end, Mandana's personal narrative, while certainly containing details that render it of a particular time, serves as a wonderful reminder of many of the aspects of social life that remain constant over time.

What happens after the diary ends is difficult to determine. There is a letter from her son Myron to Mandana in 1869 asking her to come and live with his family. In the 1870 census, Mandana is with her parents in Barre, Myron is in Hardwick, and Edward appears to be in Walden. Edward marries Flora Dutton and becomes a store and hotel proprietor in Walden, their offspring residing in that location until the 1980s.<sup>31</sup> Mandana is listed on the 1900 census as a widowed merchant living in Walden, not far from Edward, and in her own home which she owns free from mortgage. Her daughter Flora apparently ends up in Oregon, dying there in 1934.<sup>32</sup> There is some evidence that Mandana lives until 1924, which would have made her ninety-eight at the time of her death, outliving her husband by sixty-four years.<sup>33</sup>

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Mandana White Goodenough Diary, 1843–1861, Goodenough Family Papers, Special Collections, Bailey/Howe Library, University of Vermont.

<sup>2</sup>United States, and Vermont. *Seventh Census of the United States Original Returns of the Assistant Marshals: Fourth Series: Agricultural Production by Counties*, 1850. For more information on the early nineteenth-century decline in wheat production in Vermont see Lewis D. Stillwell, *Migration from Vermont* (Montpelier: Vermont Historical Society, 1948), 153–154.

<sup>3</sup>Margo Culley, ed., *A Day at a Time: The Diary Literature of American Women from 1764 to the Present* (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1985), 19–21.

<sup>4</sup>Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out To Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 27.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 47–48.

<sup>6</sup>Philip S. Foner, ed., *The Factory Girls* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), 19.

<sup>7</sup>Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 34.

<sup>8</sup>Lynn Y. Weiner, *From Working Girl to Working Mother: The Female Labor Force in the United States, 1820–1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 34.

<sup>9</sup>Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 51.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>11</sup>Lynn A. Bonfield and Mary C. Morrison, *Roxana's Children: The Biography of a Nineteenth-Century Vermont Family* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), 80–81. Joseph F. Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America, 1790 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 123–125.

<sup>12</sup>Bonfield, *Roxana's Children*, 81.

<sup>13</sup>Thomas Dublin *Transforming Women's Work: New England Lives in the Industrial Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 216.

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- <sup>14</sup> Ibid., 211, 217.
- <sup>15</sup> Karen V. Hansen, *A Very Social Time: Crafting Community in Antebellum New England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 115.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid., 119.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid., 137.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid., 138.
- <sup>19</sup> Roger Carroll, *Lebanon, 1761–1994: The Evolution of a Resilient New Hampshire City* (West Kennebunk, Me.: Published for the Lebanon Historical Society by Phoenix Publishing, 1994), 54–55.
- <sup>20</sup> *A Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Lebanon Liberal Institute at Lebanon, N.H. for the year ending November, 1844* (Concord: Press of Asa McFarland, 1844), 10–11.
- <sup>21</sup> Ellen K. Rothman, *Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 31.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid., 11.
- <sup>23</sup> Karen Lystra, *Searching the Heart: Women, Men, and Romantic Love in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 12.
- <sup>24</sup> *Fanny Kemble's Journals* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), xi–xii.
- <sup>25</sup> Rothman, *Hands and Hearts*, 28.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid., 70.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid., 71.
- <sup>28</sup> Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785–1812* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), 140–142.
- <sup>29</sup> Lisa Wilson, *Life After Death: Widows in Pennsylvania, 1750–1850* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 13.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid., 18–20.
- <sup>31</sup> *A History of Walden, Vermont*, compiled by the History Committee; sponsored by the Walden Public Library (Randolph Center, Vermont: Greenhills Book, 1986), 129–130, 141.
- <sup>32</sup> *Family Search Ancestral File for Flora Gertrude Goodenough*, retrieved November 29, 2008 from <http://www.familysearch.org/>
- <sup>33</sup> *Family Search Ancestral File for Mandana White*, retrieved November 28, 2008 from <http://www.familysearch.org/>