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MARY AUSTIN WALLACE: HER DIARY, 1862

A Michigan Soldier's Wife Runs Their Farm

Edited by JULIA McCUNE

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MARY AUSTIN WALLACE: HER DIARY
A Michigan Soldier’s Wife Runs Their Farm

The author of this diary was the wife of Robert Bruce Wallace, a farmer in Burlington Township, Calhoun County, living between Union City and Athens. On August 5, 1862, he enlisted in Company C, 19th Michigan Volunteer Infantry at the age of twenty-nine. His wife was twenty-four. She was left at home with a young son, John, two years and five months old, and a six-month-old baby daughter, Uvena. On her shoulders rested the full responsibility of managing their one hundred sixty acre farm, which Bruce had bought with gold he had found in California.

Because the Wallaces were building a new house at the time, many of the entries deal with Mary Wallace’s problems concerning that project. The spelling of the diary is erratic, but Mary’s spelling was a family joke. Her grandson recalls that once when he was a small boy, his grandmother said she could spell any word he could pronounce to her. The hardest one he could think of was Constantinople; when she got through, neither one of them knew whether it was right.

Mary Austin was eleven years old in 1849 when she came with her parents, Isaac and Patience, from Bath, New York, to Girard, Michigan, where her father bought a farm. She and Bruce Wallace were married on March 10, 1859. Mary was a fine seamstress and owned the first

1 Robert Bruce Wallace came with his parents in 1837 from Oneida County, New York, to Michigan where his father had purchased a farm near Athens in Calhoun County. According to his service record Bruce Wallace enrolled August 5, 1862 at Coldwater. He was mustered into his regiment September 5 at Dowagiac, Michigan.

2 This house is still standing in practically the original form.
sewing machine in the area. In addition to all the activities mentioned in her diary, she was also the neighborhood nurse.

Bruce Wallace was wounded March 5, 1863, at the battle of Thompson's Station in Tennessee. He was shot in both shoulders and carried deep scar holes for the rest of his life. The ball passed through the left scapula, crossed his back and came out at the top of the right shoulder, causing ankylosis of both shoulders. He was discharged May 8, 1863.

In spite of his difficulties he was able to continue farming until June 7, 1899, when his son-in-law, Preston D. Hughes, purchased the homestead. He died May 11, 1911. Mary Wallace died January 20, 1921. They are buried in Riverside Cemetery at Union City, Michigan. Their son, John David Henry Wallace, attended the University of Michigan and became superintendent of schools in Manistee. He died in 1937.

Entries in the diary were made every day although some have been omitted, particularly those which had to do with her recurring visits at Ma's, and at Mother Kyes', and their visits to her. The energy of this young woman burdened with the care of two small children, one evidently a nursing infant, is almost unbelievable. The range of her farm activities was wide and constitutes a picture of the extreme versatility demanded of a farm woman or man of that day. Her courage and pluck in the absence of her husband are admirable—even her father seemed to depend somewhat on her resources. It should also be noted that her constant going and coming was by way of a team of horses and a lumber wagon over primitive roads, many of them corduroy, bordered by dense woods. Her heart never faltered—if it did, she never confided her loneliness and discouragement to her diary.
August 25 (1862) Bruce started for Dowargac I paid Mr. Martin for harvest work one dollar hoed some of the baggas raked and bound some grass
August 26 Pa and his hired man come hired man finished raking and binding the grass. Pa & I went to Mr. Kyes to get the sheep . . . I sold the sheep to Pa nineteen head for thirty dollars turned nineteen dollars of it on hired money Bruce had hired of Pa and the rest in money eleven dollars . . . Pa and his hired man starts with the sheep and his young cattle for Girard
Aug. 28 I painted in the forenoon went black berrying afternoon
Aug. 29 Choring around fetching water for the leach . . .
Aug. 30 Gathering wood and making soap . . .
Sept. 1 . . . there has been a man and got Bruce’s name age his occupation I painted some . . . I received a letter from Bruce dated 26th I wrote a letter to Bruce
Sept. 3 I went to Coldwater got me a pair of shoes one dollar fifty cents . . . Johnnie a pair of shoes sixty two cents over five yards of calico fifty cents Lucina a pair of shoes one dollar fifty cents come home
Sept. 4 Chored around gathered wood boiling my soap cut out my delane’s dress . . .

* David Kyes was Bruce Wallace’s step-father who lived near the Wallaces in Calhoun County. Both farms were very near the Calhoun-Branch County line.
* The leach was a vessel perforated at the bottom, which held wood ashes through which water percolated, extracting the alkali.
* The lye solution from the leach was boiled with old fat and grease to make soap.
* Coldwater, the county seat of Branch County was about twelve miles from the Wallace farm.
* Lucina was Mary’s sister, twenty years old in 1860, according to the federal census of that year.
* Delaine was a light woolen or woolen-cotton dress fabric.
Sept. 5. Turned hogs and cattle out of the wheat stubble . . . . got a letter from Bruce dated Aug 29th also my paper my breast is worse trying to scatter the cold fear it will gather and break

Sept 6 Sewed on my dress and took care of the baby she is not vary well my breast has got better

Sept. 8 I went to Mr. Kyes got Milton* to come and help lay up the fence I cut corn the forenoon . . . I sewed on my dress some . . . I received a letter from Bruce dated 5th

Sept 9 went to Coldwater bought me a hoop skirt one dollar twenty five cents pair shoes one dollar twenty five cents Johnie some cloth for a suit of clothes one dollar fifty cents stick dress braid ten cents pound salurtus ten cents lent to Pa twenty dollars when I was gone Mr. Kyes come and got thirteen bushels of wheat for seed one dollar eight cents bushel

Sept 10 Our folks come they heard the nineteenth regiment was going to leave Dowagiac we all started went as far as Battle Creek Mr. McCarthy told us that Bruce had gone home we came back home went to Girard

Sept 11 Bruce was sick we intended to have started this afternoon Bruce was not able also it rained most of the afternoon very hard so we stayed to Ma's

Sept 12 We went to Dowagiac10 arrived about five o'clock Bruce was taken with an ague chill on the cars the tavern was crowded so we had to go to a private house stayed all night

* Milton Kyes was a boy of twelve years at this time.

10 As Dowagiac was at least fifty miles from the Wallace home, the family went due north to Battle Creek to take the train on the Michigan Central Railroad.
Sept 13 We all went over to the camp ground the soldiers were formed in line on dress parade the Governor came they marched to their speaking ground the governor delivered a speach I did not go went to the tent with Bruce he was not to go I put a pocket in his overcoat we stayed all night on the camp ground we got a tent for our own folks Bruce got some medicine for his ague Bruce handed me thirty dollars his bounty money.

Sept 14 Sunday Bruce is some better the soldiers were ordered to get ready to march by 4 oclock in the afternoon to the cars they started on the cars about 5 oclock for Ohio we waited until 11 oclock and then started for Marshall.

Sept 15 Arrived to Ma's about 8 oclock this morning I come home.

Sept 16 I gathered wood done chores boiled soap . . . I cut a pole to draw water with . . . I turned Harrisons pigs out of the corn field fixed the fence all around the field.

Sept 17 I gathered wood boiled [soap?] pulled weeds hoed turnips and baggas and got Mr. Harrisons pigs out of the corn two or three times.

Sept 18 I turned the calf in the north corn lot Ellen Wallace and her children come this forenoon afternoon Mrs. Kyes and Carlie Mrs. Wallace her boy Mrs. Keyes her boy Mrs. Rowe her girl was here to tea Mr. Harrisons pigs got in my soap grease in the

\[\text{11 This was Governor Austin Blair.}\]
\[\text{12 Enlistment was stimulated by the payment of bounties. These were at first financed by private citizens, later by the state and federal government.}\]
\[\text{13 This was John Harrison, whose name appears near that of the Wallace's in the 1860 census.}\]
\[\text{14 Most of these women, who attended the tea party, had young}\]
swill waisted it also in the corn 3 or 4 times. I went along the road stoped the fence where I thought a pig could get through.

Sept 19 I lathed some went and borrowed Mr. Rowe's shovel emptied the leach put a barrel of new ashes back in the leach carried the shovel home borrowed his cutter cut corn drove Harrisons pigs out of the corn cut 10 stouts of corn drove the pigs out again drove them home told them they troubled me carried the corn cutter home.

Sept 20 I got the pigs out of the corn drove them home hitched up the horses on the waggon went in the woods got me a load of wood. Mr. Harrison come to see about the fence went around the lot & said he had fixed it so he thought the pigs could not get in the corn he told me if they troubled me again to come and let him know I finished weeding and hoeing baggas and turnips Ellen Wallace come after some pork I let her have a dollars worth she said would endorse it on the note they hold against Bruce the pigs got in the corn again I got them out Ellen helped me drive them home I went to Marthas with Ellen to help her carry the pork I sold Mr. Hitchcock the calf said he would work for it would give me more than one days work.

Sept 21 Sunday I tried to get the pigs out of the corn could not got my clothes all wet with the dew running in the corn I went to get Mr. Rowe to come and get them out he was not home went on to Mr. Harrisons told him Mr Soles himself and his boy come got them.

children. Mrs. Wallace was probably the wife of a relative. Mrs. Justin Keyes had a young son about two years old. Mrs. Holland Rowe, a close neighbor, had a daughter Jane one year old. Mother Keyes' youngest daughter Carlie or Caroline was eleven years old.

* Corn shocks or stooks.
out never put the fence up where they drove them out I went and put it up . . . .

Sept 22 Mr. Tobias come here said Mr. Kyes told him I had some hogs to sell I told him they was over there in the lot he could look at them and see if they suited him He said they were not as fat as he wanted but he would take them wanted me to deliver them to Pine Creek next friday I told him that I had no way to get them there only as I hired someone to get them for me he wanted me to take some money and deliver them there that day I told him I rather not agree to I did not take the money I told him I thought I could get them to Union City cheeper as I thought there would be chances to sell them there as I was in no hurry to sell them he says if I get Mr Kyes to fetch them there I can have them I told him he could he went away I sewed some I went to Mr Kyes he said Mr. Tobias had been there he had agreed to go he said Mr. Tobias left five dollars for me handed me the money I came home got ready started to go to Mas met Ma and Lucina coming through the woods I turned round came back Ma got a letter coming through Union City for me from Bruce dated 18th

Sept 23 Ma and Lucina went home I borrowed Mr. Rowes corn cutter cut some corn

Sept 24 I cut corn most all day I sewed some

Sept 25 Mr. Row come got his corn cutter I made a handle to my cutter cut some corn . . . .

Sept 26 Mr Kyes come got the hogs to take over to Pine Creek to Mr. Tobias I cut some corn Mr Kyes got back about 3 oclock got twenty one dollars seventy

"Pine Creek was a post office in Athens Township, west and north of the farm.
"Union City just across the county line in Branch county was the nearest town, not more than three miles distant."
cents for the hogs besides the five dollars that I had received  Mr Kyes asked me one dollar for getting the hogs there  Mr Kyes was owing Bruce one dollar fifty four cents  I turned it with Mr Kyes the one dollar for driving the hogs fifty four cents for Miltons one days work (which was Sept 8 helped lay up fence)  I got Mr. Harrisons hogs out of the corn

Sept 27  I cut corn the forenoon  afternoon went around the lot  fixed the fence  got ready went to Mas

Sept 28 Sunday  to Mas

Sept 29  Come home  Ma come with me  I drewed a load of wood

Sept 30  I drewed two loads of wood and two of punkinsborrowed Mr Kyes corn cutter  I lathed some broke my door lock

October 1st  I lathed some  Mr Keyes come to see how flour chest was made . . . he said he would lath some for me  Ma told him if I could pay besides money some way as I had no money to pay  he said he would like to get the horse some time . . . . I went to Union City got half gallon kerosene oil twenty five cents  put letter in the office for Bruce  got a door lock fifty cents  Mr Keyes come back worked half day lathing  Mrs Keyes and boy come was here to tea  I cut corn this afternoon  tore my dress and mended it

Oct 2  The water is so low I could not get water enough to water the stock in the well so I settled a barrel about half way of it in the bottom of the well  I have plenty of water now  I lathed some  cut some corn . . . .

Oct 4  Earl Rowe come to work for me for fifty cents a day  I went to mother Kyes got me some cayen pepper come back went to Mrs. Rowes got three
pills come back took them sewed some put the new lock on the door . . . .

Oct 5 Sunday I have had the ague Mrs. Keyes and her little boy called in to see how I was I got up commenced to write a letter to Bruce Mother Keyes called here

Oct 6 I finished the letter sewed some went to Union got me a shillings worth of quinine I got two shoes set on Pol paid two shillings put my letter in the office Earl Rowe worked three quarters of a day today

Oct 8 My folks and myself went to the fair to Coldwater . . . Mr. Kyes paid fifteen cents for me to go in the tent and see the trick horse as they all went in he said he would pay I might pay him some time when I got home Pa borrowed one dollar of me

Oct 13 I went to Union put a letter in the office for Bruce got four pounds sugar fifty cents . . . .

Oct 14 I borrowed Mr Kyes mill Pa and myself cleaned up wheat I boiled soap

Oct 15 Mr. Kyes drew a load of wheat Pa drew a load of sand Mr. Kyes got two dollars and thirty four cents worth of shorts out of my money that he got for the wheat the wheat sold for one dollar a bushel I received seventy dollars for both loads . . . . I stripped sugar cane all day . . . .

Oct 16 . . . Pa and I finished cleaning up the wheat . . . . Pa drew a load of sand I went to Mr. Waterman to see about working up the sugar cane also to see Mr Story about doing my mason work he was not home his wife said she thought he could not come in five or six weeks

"Mary Wallace made five or six more attempts to get a mason before one came November 26."
Oct 17 Mr Kyes bought my colt at twenty dollars . . . . a letter from Bruce dated the 7th

Oct 20 I went to Colwater got my likeness Jonnies and babys taken together to send to bruce . . . .

Oct 21 Went to see about getting a carpenter see Wesfall he was sick Mr Green had so much to do that he could not come he sent me to Mr. Wilsons . . . . his wife said he had so much to do she thought he could not come

Oct 22 Cut and toped a load of sugar cane and took it to Mr. Wattermans mill come home . . . . Mr. Abbott loaded up a load ready to start in the morning

Oct 23 I took the load to mill come back stayed all night to Mother Kyes . . . .

October 24 I come home loaded the remainder of the sugar cane took it to mill . . . . got my molasses over 17 gallons paid him four dollars for making it coming home stoped to mother Kyes got two letters dated 13th and 17th from Bruce come on home I covered the corn crib

Oct 25 Unloaded my molasses loaded up seven bags of chess\(^{19}\) and two bushel of wheat for flour went to Union with my grist . . . .

Oct 28 I dug the early June potatoes buried them for winter . . . . I put a door in the corn crib I husked some corn

Oct 29 I hitched up the horses on the waggon went in the north cornfield husked a load of corn drewed it to the crib unloaded it drewed a load of pumpkins . . . .

\(^{19}\) Chess was a brome grass.
Oct 31. I dug potatoes picked them up. . . . I received a letter from Bruce dated 17th.

November 1st. I finished digging potatoes in the sugar cane. I picked them up and buried them. . . .

Nov 3. . . Ma and myself went and got six hundred and fifty of brick. Paid two dollars ninety cents for them.

Nov 4. . . tried to get a carpenter in the Union. Could not get . . . .

Nov 5. . . I drew a load of wood unloaded it about noon. Pa come fetched a carpenter Mr. Kikendall. The brick also.


Nov 7. I traded Pa the fat pig for his white yearling heifer. The old sow and one pig for a parlor stove and the pipe with it. . . .

Nov 8. I drew a load of wood. . . letter from Bruce dated the 30th.

Nov 10. I lathed some in the forenoon. The afternoon pulled baggas trimmed them. I finished Jonnies apron. Mr. Kikendall broke my chimney top to my lamp.

Nov 11. I went to Union got a safe six shillings and thimble to put in the chimney eighteen cents. Eight pound nails six cents. One paper of stove polish ten cents. . . . went over to Mr. Witheringtons saw mill. Got two hundred feet lath eighty cents.

Nov 12. I pulled baggas. Finished pulling them covered straw and dirt. Pa come about dark fetched me six candles.

Nov 13. . . . Mr. Tucker come to me and said he charged two shillings to much for that thousand feet.
of lath he paid it back . . . . letter from Bruce I sewed some
Nov 14 I pulled some turnips helped load some pumpkins . . . . I settled up with Mr. Kikendall he charged me for six days work one dollar a day Pa was to pay him as he was owing me for borrowed money . . . .
Nov 15 I lathed some I finished my dress skirt mended my dress picked some skoke berries
Nov 17 . . . . I told Hattie I wanted my cow drove away she said Mr. Rowe would drive her away this evening I come back home gathered part of my cabbage
Nov 18 . . . . drewed three loads of wood . . . . went to Mother Kyes borrowed her wheel and reel . . . . come home spun over 3 nots\textsuperscript{20} of yarn gathered some cabbage
Nov 19 I went over to Mr. Rowes to find out the reason my cow did not come home he said he turned her in Mr. Holmes lot and told them to turn her out in the morning said he was afraid they had not said he would go and get her I come home finished gathering the cabbage made it in sourkruit I swept out the new house . . . . I spun over 3 nots of yarn and doubled and twisted over six
Nov 20 . . . . I dug potatoes picked them up I washed my yarn . . . .
Nov 21 . . . . I chopped some wood wound up my yarn set me a knitting work Bruce a pair of socks I dug some potatoes picked them up . . . .

\textsuperscript{20} A knot was 40 threads of yarn. Seven knots made a skein. Alice Morse Earle, \textit{Home Life in Colonial Days}, New York, 1899, p. 200.
Nov 22 I drew five loads of punkins . . .
Nov 23 . . . I wrote a letter to Bruce . . .
Nov 24 I went to Coldwater with ma I got me a fancy evelop thirty cents paid for it I sewed some on Mas collar helped ma paper . . .
Nov 25 . . . I received a letter from Bruce . . . I lathed some covered my potatoe hole deeper in whare the sugar cane was . . . I knit some
Nov 26 Mr. Hudson, the mason came
Nov 27 Mr. Hudson & Alonzo worked here Mr. McKeyes tended them I finished lathing I then helped tend the mason . . . I knit some
Nov 28 . . . I tended mason some Mr. Hudson and Alonzo worked today I kept a fire in the new house . . . I went to Union . . . I got seven three cent stamps for letters 21 cents I received two letters from Bruce there was 3 cents due on one . . . Knit some . . .
Nov 29 . . . I kept fire in the new house I tended mason some I cleaned out the butry Pa and his hired man and myself moved the stove in the new house I cleaned out the kitchen bedsink [sic] and bedroom Mr. Hudson Alonzo Hudson worked today Mr. McKeyes tended them Pa borrowed one hundred shingles of me . . . Mr. Hudson and Alonso Hudson finished the putty cote they charged me 12 dollars . . . I went to Mother Kyes was there to tea I told her I was going to send a box of things to Bruce and if she wanted to send some she could I told her if she had plenty of butter to send some to Bruce as I had not got any

December 1st I went to Mr McKeyes to see of he had any objection my turning the note I had against
him to Mr. Scott toward a note he holds against Bruce he said he did not want me to turn it I went to Mr. Scotts to see him about the note he holds against Bruce I tried to have him take the note Pa handed me that he got towards his steers of Mr. Cornell that he had got of another man Mr. Scott said he thought he would take it if Mr. Cornell would sign his name on it.

End of diary
Mary Austin Wallace with John and Uvena
Mary had this picture taken to send to Bruce.

*Courtesy of Mr. Charles Hughes of Albion, grandson of Bruce and Mary, who has her diary.*