

“FRIENDSHIP, SWEET SOOTHER OF MY CARES!”: WOMEN, RELIGION, AND POWER IN THE DIARY OF SARAH CONNELL AYER

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The diary of Sarah Connell Ayer (1791-1835) reveals the motivations of a woman caught up in the Second Great Awakening that spread across New England in the early nineteenth century. Ayer arrived in Portland in 1811 and immediately sought out a circle of female friends who espoused the same desires as did she. She joined with other church women in challenging the boundaries of Republican Motherhood, and under the veil of the church, helped to minister in the greater Portland society. This female church culture helped women like Ayer get through the many pitfalls of womanhood in the early nineteenth century, including infant mortality, loss of family fortune, and the tensions of public life. This emerging political culture would shortly lead to the temperance, abolition and woman suffrage movements. Author Shannon M. Risk is completing a PhD in history at the University of Maine. She has presented talks on her dissertation, titled “‘In Order to Establish Justice’: The Nineteenth-Century Woman Suffrage Movements of Maine and New Brunswick,” at several conferences and symposiums and has published articles in the Hudson River Valley Review and Khronikos, the University of Maine History Graduate Student Online Journal. She was recipient of the Alice Stewart Fellowship for 2007-2008 and is currently a Fullbright Fellow working in Canada.

ON A WINTER day in 1807, sixteen year-old Sarah Connell confided in her diary; “friendship! Mysterious cement of the soul, I owe thee much; thou has deserved from me, far, far, beyond what I can ever pay.”¹ Sarah was born in 1791, the daughter of Philadelphia ship captain George Connell and Mary Greenleaf Connell. Beginning in 1805, she attended a girl’s academy in Newburyport and then in Andover, Massachusetts, where she first learned the art of friendship, and also where she began the diary that would span the rest of her life. In her girlhood, Sarah could not predict how female companionship would

facilitate her entry into the greater world and instruct her in the domesticity prescribed for early nineteenth-century middle-class women.

In 1810, Sarah's life took on new meaning as she married the young doctor, Samuel Ayer in Hookset, New Hampshire. As she passed from academy to married life, Sarah discovered that friendships meant much more than she had experienced in her school days.² Early friendships with adult women reveal Sarah's search for piety in herself and her friends. Sarah looked beyond her first friendly unions with schoolmates to bond with women in a new way: through religious communion and the promise of everlasting friendship.³

For Sarah, friendship and religion merged into a powerful platform that gave strength, purpose, and identity to her life. Sarah's relations with her aunts reveal the power of religious friendships in Portland. Diary entries show that her requirements for friendship underwent a transformation in these early years. As she grew older, she no longer demanded emotion alone from her female friends, but piety as well. Pious friendships insured the much needed order or "cement" for Sarah's sense of identity and promised a bond beyond death.

Sarah learned at an early age the power of female friendship and the components of a successful union. Through visits to her aunts and other young women of Newburyport, Andover, Concord, and Bow, she learned the elements of a true friendship. Her aunts, however, influenced Sarah mostly through their piety, submissiveness, purity, and patience. Sarah worked to develop these traits as part of her personality and expected the same in the friendships she formed for the rest of her life.⁴

Sarah's favorite aunt, Aunt Newman of Newburyport, taught her much about friendship. She said of her dear relative, "Aunt. N. was the friend of my earliest days, and her faithful bosom has ever been a repository for every secret of my heart. She participated [in] each little sorrow, and shared every joy."⁵ Under Aunt Newman's guidance, Sarah learned the emotional importance of female union.

Another instrumental person in Sarah's life, her Aunt Greenleaf, exemplified these virtues. Sarah dutifully wrote her aunt's dying words in her journal, commenting on Aunt Greenleaf's spent pious, cheerful, submissive, and patient demeanor; and these particular traits would surface again and again as Sarah's ideal of female companionship.⁶

Aunt Eustis provided Sarah with a valuable lesson in piety while Sarah watched her suffer the final agonies of consumption. Sarah repeated her Aunt's potent ideas: "I must look to religion for that consolation which the world denies. O, May her pious advice make an impres-

sion on my heart never to be erased.”⁷ Sarah heeded this advice later on when she witnessed more deaths, and when her own struggles with economic uncertainty challenged her faith.

Sarah’s aunts provided a set of criteria for finding friends her own age. Early on she recorded what she found important in a strong female bond: the comfort of sincere sympathy. When Sarah’s long-time friend Harriot Osgood of Andover visited Newburyport in 1808, Sarah wrote: “I was rejoiced to see her, and a tear of joy, and silent embrace was the only welcome I could give her.” Both lonely, Sarah and Harriot exchanged sympathies. Sarah also praised her friend Abigail’s sympathy and generosity when she brought goods to a poor family. Another entry from the *Weekly Visitant*, a Newburyport paper that catered to her idea of sympathy: “How beneficent [are] the ways of Providence, for having, in the human mind, implanted a sympathy, which if not degenerated by vice and immorality proves a blessing to mankind.” She shared the grief felt by her friend Lydia Kettel when Lydia’s mother died, stating in her diary, “Sarah drops a tear in sympathy with her friend. She participates your sorrows.” Sympathy strengthened her bond with these women.⁸

Sarah’s description of Sophronia Peabody of Newburyport demonstrated her understanding of the ideal friend. She wrote that her friend’s “modest virtues do not immediately unfold themselves to the eye of a stranger but the inward beauties of her mind are conspicuous to her friends. Amiable without affection, modest without prudery, all who know her, love her. She is not beautiful, yet the sweet benevolence expressed in her countenance, makes her an interesting object.” Sophronia, good-natured and altruistic, represented a true friend, and Sarah spent her youth looking for companions that cultivated these qualities. Among like-minded friends, she could enjoy “the feast of reason and the flow of the soul.”⁹

Sarah also encountered some women who showed the undesirable side of female union. In one entry, she wrote, “Caroline is the same trifling, giddy girl she used to be; a pleasant companion, but one that I should never choose for a friend. . . . Narcissa’s vanity is unbounded. Selena is rather gay and thoughtless.” In addition, her existing friends sometimes showed how fragile a bond could be. On a visit to Portland, Sarah found herself shunned for unknown reasons by Arixene Southgate of Scarborough, a former friend from academy who acted “singular” and “inconsistent.” Another example of fickle friendships appeared in an entry in 1809 when Samuel Ayer began courting her. She married Samuel in 1810 in Hookset, New Hampshire, when she was nineteen, and



Portrait of the Reverend Samuel Deane, head of Portland's First Parish Church in the late eighteenth century. Deane was sympathetic to the teachings of George Whitefield and the Second Great Awakening. Ayer belonged to the Second Parish, which was more orthodox in nature, but added an evangelical element following the appointment of the Reverend Edward Payson in the early nineteenth century. *Maine Historical Society Collections*.

moved to Portland where he practiced medicine. Before the marriage, Samuel grew apart from his younger sister, Susan, who blamed Sarah for this lack of brotherly attention. Sarah recorded this as a violation of trust: "I regret having placed so much confidence in Susan. I was greatly deceived in her. I thought her my friend, but I was deceived where I put most dependence, however, I rejoice that I have injured no one but myself, and I will be guarded in the future."¹⁰ Sarah learned from this experience that trust was an important ingredient in a successful friendship.

Careful to protect herself from other such occurrences, Sarah filtered her relations. When she found herself prematurely attached to a Miss Mann of Concord, she told herself: "Trust not too much to appearance,

beware of entering into an intimacy with one whose disposition is still a stranger to you. Be not too much guided by the countenance. Experience has taught you that it is often deceitful, and disappointment and mortification have been the result." Sarah held to her ideas about premature connections and later in life repeated the same thoughts: "can anything be more painful, than to find we have been deceived in a being we have loved, and in whom we had placed the most unbounded confidence[?]" With these ideas firmly planted in the back of her mind, Sarah sought the strength of early friendships in times of loneliness and hardship, regardless of her fears of betrayal. Most important, when seeking a companion, she acknowledged that one must look within before one could expect to find everlasting friendship.¹¹

Aware of her own shortcomings, Sarah tried to improve her disposition in the company of her friends, to "cultivate a good temper," and to be "unoffended with the foibles of friends." Happiness required a good nature. Without moderating her own temper, how could she possibly expect to be sympathetic to the needs of her friends? "I am resolved to meet disappointments with a smile of resignation, and to cultivate a disposition of contentment."¹²

With the wisdom drawn from her past friendships in mind, Sarah connected with like-minded women in Portland as a young wife. Eagerly, she looked for support from these friends during the first tragic years of her marriage. From 1811 to 1815, Sarah gave birth four times, and none of the infants survived. Devastated, she found a community of understanding women to help her through these tough times.¹³

In Portland, Sarah found female companionship in the Second Congregational Church under the guidance of the Reverend Edward Payson, under whose guidance she changed from an idealistic school girl to an enthusiastic missionary. Like Sarah, Payson struggled to define his purpose and perform his duties. He graduated from Harvard College in 1803 at the age of twenty and came to Portland in 1807 with many ideas but without a well defined purpose. For both Payson and Ayer, Portland became a place for self-definition and discovery.¹⁴

Edward Payson arrived in Portland during a period of religious tension. Portland's two existing Congregational parishes exemplified the long-standing schism in New England's Congregational churches. The First Parish, led by Samuel Deane after 1790, was the first Congregational church built in Portland. Deane and his predecessor, the Reverend Smith, believed in the innovations to Congregationalism posed by the Reverend George Whitefield, who led the First Great Awakening in

America in the mid-eighteenth century. Preaching in open fields, Whitefield encouraged other ministers to grant more freedom to their congregations in their interpretations of the scripture. His work encouraged other religious sects, some existing before the awakening such as the Baptists, and others emerging out of the Awakening, such as the Unitarians and the Universalists. Reverends Smith and Deane followed Whitefield's beliefs and invited new ideas into their congregation, and because of this, tension existed in the First Parish. Although not all of the attendants of the First Parish agreed with these liberal teachings, the charisma of the elder Reverend Smith held the body together.

The relative peace that existed in the First Parish ceased after the Revolutionary War, when British ships fired leveled the building. Reverend Smith died soon after the war, which left the congregation with neither a strong leader nor a place to worship. A committee formed to decide whether to rebuild the First Parish or construct a new church, and the underlying disagreements over the church doctrine came to the forefront during these meetings. Those on the committee who sided with the Reverend Deane decided to reconstruct the original church. Those who believed in a more conservative form of worship decided to build a new Congregational church called the Second Parish.¹⁵

The Second Parish, headed by the Reverend Elijah Kellogg, adhered to orthodox Congregationalism. The Reverend Kellogg believed that the other religions—Baptism, Universalism, and Unitarianism—distorted the meaning of the scripture. As Kellogg's church expanded, he looked to young Edward Payson to assume the position of junior clergyman and to continue his powerful teachings. Payson enthusiastically accepted the job and began his work in the Second Parish.¹⁶

However, Edward Payson developed his own version of orthodox Congregationalism. He still observed the original interpretations of the scripture, but he added an evangelical twist. The young reverend developed his beliefs during the Second Great Awakening, a period of regeneration within the Congregationalist faith. Much like George Whitefield and his dissenting followers, those of the Second Great Awakening advocated enthusiasm while preaching their beliefs. The on-going struggle to save people from sin and damnation required high-powered sermons designed to win the sinner back to the word of God. Edward Payson, although firmly planted in "orthodox" Congregationalism, employed techniques originally developed by Whitefield. He integrated emotion into his sermons. Furthermore, he continued his religious teachings in the homes of his congregation. Payson believed that the world was di-

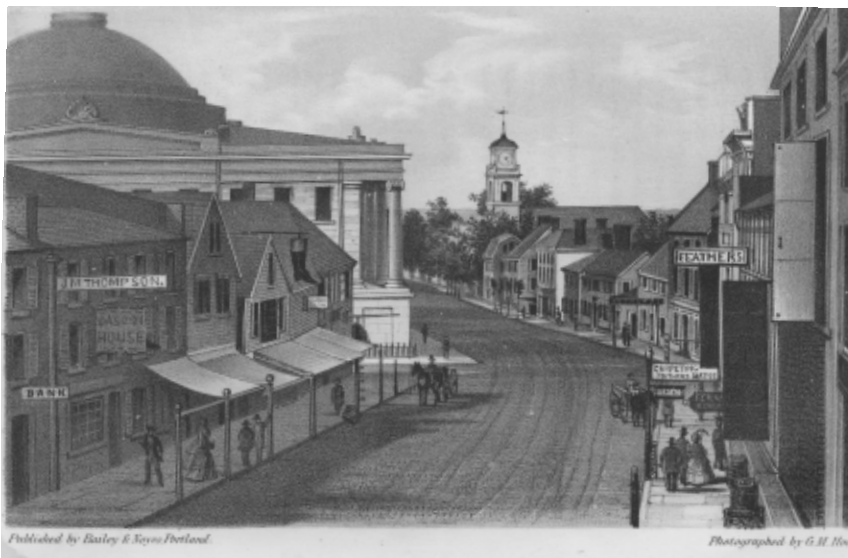


The Second Street Parish Church in Portland was the focal point of Ayer's religious community during her time in the city. *University of Maine Special Collections Department, Fogler Library.*

vided between those who were saved and those who had not yet seen the light. Reverend Payson thought that by uniting those in his parish into a powerful group, more souls could be saved. In this effort, he utilized a potent mix of strict adherence to the scriptures and a charismatic performance at the pulpit.

Payson's pragmatism became a crucial part of his ability to enrapture his congregation. The minister identified conversion as a central component of the faith. According to Payson, a Christian should devote his or her life to spreading the gospel.¹⁷ Historian William Willis, who witnessed Payson's sermons, said of him: "He entered on the duties of his profession with all the ardor of devoted feeling and threw the whole power of his enthusiastic character into the offices of his ministry. Such ardor and enthusiasm, accompanied by genius, could not but win the hearts of his hearers, and there was no hesitation on their part in giving him a call to settle over them."¹⁸ Payson's style, however popular, did not impress the Reverend Kellogg, whose own popularity waned, and as a result Payson's relationship with Reverend Kellogg became troubled.¹⁹ Since Payson held favor with the congregation, Kellogg left the church. Sarah noted the date of this split in 1811 when she remarked "the connection between Mr. Kellogg and Mr. Payson dissolved."

Reverend Payson appealed to the members of the Second Parish for assistance in his crusade to convert Portland. Sarah noted that Payson considered himself a "steward" to his congregation, "and as it is the



This mid-century illustration of Middle Street in Portland captures the quaint urban setting familiar to Ayer and her friends. Illustration from William Willis' *History of Portland*. University of Maine Special Collections Department, Fogler Library.

province of a steward to take of his master's possessions, and dispense them among his dependents, so it is the minister's part to take the word of God, and rightly to divide it, so as to give to each his portion in due season."²⁰ Payson instructed his parish on how be "stewards" themselves in order to propagate their faith to outsiders of the church. Sarah wrote down Payson's advice: "[Christians] should never go anywhere without putting three questions to ourselves. First, is it for the glory of God? Second, is it for the good of my own soul? Third, is it for the good of others?"²¹ Converting outsiders, according to Payson, could be achieved by setting a good example. Payson's stance on this matter emerged from Sarah's careful recording in her diary: "Let your religion be seen in everything you do, make it the great business of your life, your happiness, and let the world be only a secondary object." Payson's congregation listened closely and soon rallied around the young minister's vision.²²

Payson was aware of the collective power of the female part of the congregation. By enlisting women's help, orthodox Congregationalism could be spread throughout the world. Women could encourage and invest in missionaries working abroad or in their own region. News of legends like Mary Lyon and Ann Judson, missionaries to Burma, provided

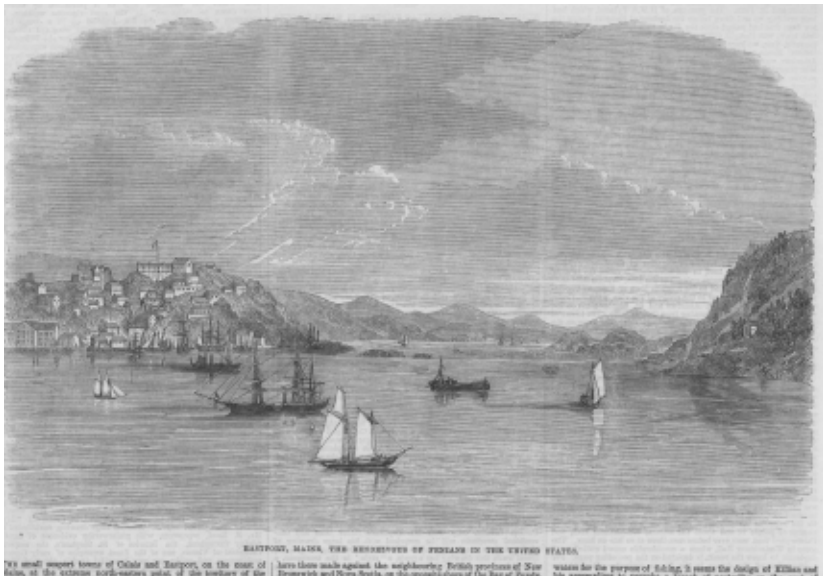
church women with glamorous role models. Sarah mentioned Mary Lyon as a remarkable woman who devoted her life to religious pursuits. There were women who “apparently [lived adventurously] by realizing, not rejecting, their feminine role.”²³ This was the role Sarah and her friends emulated. They could use female behavior, such as emotion and morality, to influence others. Although Sarah could not go to Burma to convert lost souls, she and her female friends could band together and influence society.

By supporting the efforts of the women in the Second Parish, the Reverend Payson intimately positioned himself within women’s lives. Like many other ministers of the early nineteenth century, he used emotional appeals to captivate his female congregation. Payson harnessed the religious energy of women by working with them in missionary and charity work.

The relationship between Payson and the women in the congregation is substantiated by Ann Douglas’ research. Douglas asserts that the connection between ministers and their female constituents had a lot to do with defined masculine and feminine behavioral characteristics.²⁴ Ministers, like women in the early nineteenth century, exhibited sensitivity, sweetness, meekness, gentleness, and delicacy. The ministry had a somewhat feminized image, which often put them on equal footing with women but made them seem inferior when compared to other men. Edward Payson did indeed present these female qualities to his congregation. He used “all the ardor of devoted feeling” to enrapture his parish. Sarah also observed that Payson exhibited great compassion and devotion. These qualities brought him closer to female church members.²⁵

The minister’s involvement in Sarah’s life included religious and personal counseling, daily visiting, and sharing in the participation of benevolent activities. Payson, both as a religious guide and a good friend, could listen to women in the church, reassure them, provide advice, or simply present a kind ear.²⁶ In short, Payson became a sort of surrogate husband to Sarah and other women in his congregation.²⁷

Despite Payson’s good intentions, his intrusion into the lives of Sarah and other women created tension between husband, preacher, and wife. Sarah recorded a stinging example of this tension when she wrote: “Mr. Willis, who has long been a great opposer to religion, to the infinite grief of his worthy wife, was outrageous, and cruelly unjust in his remarks against Mr. Payson, and all his wrath was leveled against him [Payson], whom he considered the author of what he termed his wife’s superstition and enthusiasm. He looks on evening meetings as the bane of order



In the 1820s Samuel Ayer was appointed Surveyor for the Passamaquoddy Bay region and relocated his family to the small town of Eastport. This easternmost town was the a center for international smuggling during the War of 1812, a contested territory during the boundary dispute, and by the middle of the nineteenth century a focal point for the canning industry. *Courtesy of the University of Maine Special Collections Department, Fogler Library.*

and morality. However, he consented that Mrs. Willis should go with us.”²⁸ Sarah took great interest in this dispute, perhaps because she witnessed the same tension with her own husband. At the height of her involvement in the Second Parish activities, Sarah’s diary became filled with descriptions of Reverend Payson and her work with the church. Any mention of Samuel remained secondary.²⁹ Payson appealed to Sarah and the other women because he seemed to represent the best of both male and female worlds.³⁰

After establishing his position in the lives of these women and gaining their friendship, Payson further encouraged his female flock to convert more followers to his form of Christianity. He believed that their status as middle-class women enabled them to assert moral power over the rest of the citizenry. Middle-class women, with whom Sarah aligned herself, had neither too much money nor too little. They had enough wealth to maintain piety, purity, and morality, but not enough to corrupt them. To Payson and others, they seemed the perfect advocates to govern the

morals of society.³¹ As a result of Payson's charisma, energetic sermons, and encouragement, Sarah joined the other women of her congregation and participated in Payson's conversion plans. Her life took on new meaning as she promoted conversion and through this, she defined her identity.

The women of Payson's congregation formed a sisterhood that provided mutual support, empowerment, and spiritual assistance. Sarah and the other women promoted and attended meetings, propagated religion, and worked for the good of the community. At the Marine Bible Society of Portland, which aimed to convert mariners, Sarah and her friends felt gratified to see that their work proved successful.³² This success not only reinforced their desire to promote Christianity and but also reinforced their female solidarity.

Other societies and associations went beyond the conversion. The Female Moral Reform Societies allowed Sarah and her friends to influence men, and act as a force in history.³³ Sarah attended as many meetings as possible while Samuel kept busy with medicine and his duties as a representative. The main groups that captured her interest were female prayer meetings, Female Missionary Society meetings, and the Education Society.³⁴ Although each of these groups interested Sarah, she found that most of her attention revolved around one particular society.

The Maternal Association, founded in Portland in 1815, allowed Sarah to be part of a ground-breaking organization that sought to influence the morals of children. Historian Mary Ryan writes of these meetings in Portland and in other eastern cities as a place where mothers took on the responsibility of looking after the salvation and "formation of character" of their charges. At a Maternal Association meeting, Sarah wrote: "often I had prayed with [the children of the church] and for them, and I felt how gladly I would take them all into the arms of the faith and present them to the compassionate Jesus and ask for each one his blessing." By looking after the spiritual welfare of children associations like these influenced the moral development of early national America.³⁵

Sarah and her friends set out not only to reform others, but also to help one another with more secular challenges. This world of "Love and Ritual," to use historian Carol Smith-Rosenberg's phrase, had all of the qualities that constituted a true friend.³⁶ Gathering together in the evenings to discuss religion, they formed bonds both religious and emotional. This tight-knit female world helped Sarah survive trivial daily events as well as major catastrophes.³⁷

A test of Sarah's confidence in her new-found identity as religious counselor came when her father called her home to spend some time with her dying mother in April 1817. As Sarah prepared to go to Bow, the current residence of her parents, her Portland female friends stayed with her and gave her comfort. But Sarah had to face the death of her mother without the immediate help of these women, relying only on what she learned through the Reverend Payson's careful encouragement. Her rough journey, partly by stagecoach, was exacerbated by pregnancy. Despite her awareness of her physical condition and her distance from her support networks, Sarah focused on saving her mother's soul before she died.³⁸

Despite her mother's religious ambivalence, Sarah felt perfectly capable of exercising religious authority. Mary Connell wavered in her religious opinions.³⁹ As Sarah wrote in her diary in April 1817 "Why am I not engaged more earnestly in prayer for my unbelieving friends! O, if I have any interest at the throne of grace, let me never cease praying for one, dear to me as my own soul. Perhaps God will yet hear and answer my request, and we may walk together in the 'narrow path that leads to life eternal.'" ⁴⁰

Sarah expressed fears that her mother's hopes were "resting on a false foundation," and Mary responded with a "teachable, child-like disposition." Still Sarah worried: "God grant that I may never again be called to witness the last hours of a friend, whom I have reason to fear, has no interest in Christ; whose peace is not made with God, before they are called to a sick bed."⁴¹ Sarah kept up the vigil, reading from the Bible, praying, singing hymns. She "found great comfort in this duty," Sarah wrote as her mother grew weaker. Mary Connell wavered in her spiritual commitment up to the end. At one point, she seemed unsure of her religious convictions, at another, she cried out "glory, glory, glory."⁴² Mary Connell's death renewed Sarah's dedication to saving souls: "When standing by the bedside of a dying friend . . . why put off preparation for death, 'till it stares us in the face! O, may I never rest 'till assured my peace is made with God . . . may I never neglect to warn, plead with, and intreat [sic] all I love to prepare for death, before they are laid upon a sick bed."⁴³ With these words in mind, she focused on her obligation to save her friends from a death directed away from heaven.

Following her mother's death, she gave birth to two children: Sarah, born in 1817; and Samuel, born in 1819. Her friends returned her assistance at the birth of her son, Samuel, in December of 1819.⁴⁴ Sarah's many relocations, the deaths of those close to her, and tumultuous polit-

ical events fragmented her life, but religious friendships provided cohesiveness. Amid the atomization of society, westward migration, religious diversity, and events in her own life, Sarah continued the work of conversion and the construction of her sense of self as a religious guide.⁴⁵ She revealed her life's motto in her diary: "Look upon every day as a blank paper, put into your hands to be filled up; remember, the characters can never be expunged, but must remain through endless ages. Be careful, therefore, to write nothing but what you may read with pleasure a thousand years hence."⁴⁶ Sarah made the most of her religious friendships, her guidance under the Reverend Payson, and her ability to counsel others in her community.

Sarah's strong sense of community was shattered in June 1822 with the news that Samuel had been appointed Surveyor for the Passamaquoddy Bay region. He intended to move his family to Eastport, Maine where he hoped to practice medicine and fulfill the requirements of his new appointment.⁴⁷ Once again, Sarah faced moving away from the carefully constructed networks of friendships and resources that made Portland her home.

Sarah dismally contemplated her move, even though Samuel tried to assist in making the transition easier. She reported that "Mr. Ayer returned from Eastport. He appears pleased with the place and says I shall find many religious friends there. . . . he says that they have a very good Baptist minister." On his visit to Eastport, Samuel attempted to see that his wife could find a similar community to the one that filled her days in Portland. He recognized that Sarah's religious friendships were essential to her happiness and identity.⁴⁸

Sarah packed her belongings and readied herself for the move from Portland to Eastport. As she faced her new challenge, she remembered Portland wistfully in her journal: "I shall leave Portland with regret. Here I have spent the first ten years of my married life, 'tis the birth-place of my children, four of which lie in the graveyard, a spot which I love to resort; and here too I have many religious privileges, that I shall be deprived [of] in Eastport."⁴⁹ The fact that a few women whom Sarah had known in Newburyport now lived in Eastport with their husbands eased this trying move. She pledged to go to Eastport and renew ties with these women and rebuild her network of religious friends—friends that would be with her in this life and the next.⁵⁰

During her years in Portland, Sarah defined herself through participation in religious female community and friendship. Her friends in the Second Parish, including Reverend Payson, offered Sarah friendship and

a sense of moral purpose. She attained a feeling of respect and equality among her “sisters” when she and her companions listened to each other’s counsel, provided support, and united in worship. Most importantly, Sarah found the strength within herself and her religion to cope with difficult events in her life.⁵¹ Sarah emerged from this phase of young adulthood as a sympathetic, emotional, religious, and confident person.

Sarah had a lifetime of friendships ahead of her as she wrote in the first years of her diary: “hope gilds the future, and we look forward with joy to a happy meeting beyond the grave.” To sustain these everlasting friendships she incorporated a belief system based on the teachings of her aunts, her religious leader Edward Payson, and the many women who formed her network of strength. With each successful female union, she clung to the prospect that these friendships would never end. Even the childhood friendships, like her bond with Harriot Osgood of Andover, remained precious to Sarah. Regarding Harriot’s death, Sarah demonstrated her belief that ties of friendship would prevail in the next world: “long have I cherished the hope of once more seeing her in this world.” But Sarah knew that Harriot, along with her aunts and mother, waited for her to join them in Heaven where, perhaps at last, Sarah could find a permanent “sweet serenity.” Sarah outlined this hope when she wrote one spring day, “friendship, sweet soother of my cares! Attend to me as I journey through life, and when the end of my career approaches, smile on my sinking heart, and point where friendship exists beyond the grave.”⁵²

NOTES

1. Shannon M. Risk, “A Search for Sweet Serenity: The Diary of Sarah Connell Ayer, 1805-1835,” M.A. Thesis, University of Maine, 1996, 71; Sarah Connell Ayer, *The Diary of Sarah Connell Ayer* (Portland: Lefavor-Tower Company, 1911), 3.
2. Sarah married Samuel Ayer at age nineteen. Samuel Ayer graduated from Dartmouth College in 1807 and tutored there for two years. For more information about Samuel, his family, and Concord, see Nathaniel Bouton, *The History of Concord, From its First Grant in 1725, to the Organization of the City Government in 1853, with a History of the Ancient Penacooks* (Concord, New Hampshire: Benning W. Sandborn, 1856), 331, 333-336, 356-362, 589-590, 630-631, 730-731. Bouton noted the Ayer family’s involvement in city government, which demonstrated their prominence.
3. Samuel apprenticed as a physician in Philadelphia in the winter of 1810-1811, while

Sarah stayed in the homes of her parents and Samuel's parents. He established his medical practice in Portland in 1811. Samuel also served as representative to the General Court of Massachusetts in 1819. Ayer, *Diary*, 177-178, 194, 376.

4. See Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18 (1966), 152, for an historical analysis of the importance for a woman of the nineteenth century to display piety, submissiveness, purity, and domesticity. These characteristics of women supposedly held the key to happiness and power for a woman.

5. Ayer, *Diary*, 13.

6. Ayer, *Diary*, 218.

7. Ayer, *Diary*, 53.

8. Ayer, *Diary*, 7, 38. Although Sarah addresses her friend Lydia directly in this passage, it is not known whether or not Sarah expected her friend to read her diary when she wrote of sharing sympathy for her or possibly copied from a note she may have written previously to her friend.

9. Ayer, *Diary*, 35, 92. See Sarah Emery, *Reminiscences of a Nonagenarian* (Newburyport: Huse, 1879), 223, for a discussion of Sophronia Peabody and her needlework.

10. Ayer, *Diary*, 21, 128, 144-145.

11. Ayer, *Diary*, 73, 93, 246.

12. Ayer, *Diary*, 7, 38, 62.

13. Sarah focused more on religion and female friendship than she did on descriptions of her family in her diary. The details of her first four pregnancies as well as information about her husband are absent from her diary.

14. William Willis, *The History of Portland, from its First Settlement with Notices of the Neighboring Towns, and of the Changes of the Government in Maine*, part 2 (Portland: Charles Day, 1833), 233-235.

15. Stephen Marini, *Radical Sects of Revolutionary New England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 4; Willis, *History of Portland*, 644-646.

16. Willis, *History of Portland*, 233-235, 647, 659-662.

17. Edward Payson, *Joy in Heaven Over Repenting Sinners, A Discourse Delivered in Hallowell, June 24, 1812, Before the Maine Missionary Society at its Fifth Anniversary* (Hallowell: Goodale and Glazier, 1823).

18. Willis, *History of Portland*, 660; See also Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 87, for a brief description of Edward Payson and his daughter, Elizabeth Prentiss (1818-1878), a successful novelist and religious author.

19. Neither Sarah Conner Ayer nor William Willis described precisely what disagreements existed between Payson and Kellogg.

20. Sarah Connell Ayer, *The Diaries of Sarah Connell Ayer, 1805-1835* (New Hampshire Historical Society, Concord, New Hampshire, Manuscript Sections, #1990-028), vol. 3.

21. Ayer, *Diary*, 213.

22. Ayer, *Diaries*, vol. 3.

23. Ayer, *Diaries*, vol. 3; Douglas, *Feminization*, 106.

24. Douglas, *Feminization*, 90-91, 97. For further discussion of the feminization and accessibility of ministers during the Second Great Awakening, see Keith Melder, "Ladies Bountiful: Organized Women's Benevolence in Early 19th-Century America," *New York History*, 48 (July 1967), 242.

25. Willis, *History of Portland*, 650; Ayer, *Diary*, 200-201, 212, 226-227.

26. Ayer, *Diary*, 202, 213-215, 218, 226.

27. Frances Trollope, a European visitor to America noticed the way clergy listened to their female constituents in a society where she believed all other facets of communication between females and males might not be taken so seriously. Trollope may have been hinting that in many ways, the minister assumed the place of the husband in terms of friendship to a woman. *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1949), 75. For more details on Trollope and her discussion of wives, husbands, and clergymen, see Barbara Welter, "The Feminization of American Religion: 1800-1860," *Clio's Consciousness Raised: New Perspectives on the History of Women*, Mary S. Hartman and Lois Banner, eds. (New York: Octagon Books, 1976), 141.

28. Ayer, *Diary*, 206-207.

29. The conflict between Sarah and Samuel over church matters is addressed more closely in chapter three of my M.A. thesis.

30. Ayer, *Diary*, 210-230.

31. Ayer, *Diaries*, vol. III.

32. See Lois W. Banner, "Religious Benevolence as Social Control: A Critique of an Interpretation," *Journal of American History* 60 (1973), 23-41. Banner asserts that religious leaders promoted voluntary societies, many of which were geared toward women; Ayer, *Diary*, 227.

33. For a more detailed discussion on the Female Moral Reform Society and its meaning for women's status, see Mary P. Ryan, "The Power of Women's Networks: A Case Study of Female Moral Reform in Antebellum America," *Feminist Studies* 5 (Spring 1979), 69; and Mary P. Ryan, "Middle-Class Women and Moral Reform," *Major Problems on the Early Republic, 1787-1848*, Sean Wilentz, ed. (Lexington, Massachusetts: D.C. Heath, 1992), 458-460.

34. Ayer, *Diary*, 204, 211, 213, 215, 226-228.

35. Ayer, *Diary*, 231; Mary Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 89, 101. See also Nancy Cott, *Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1977).

36. Carole Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1985), 60-71. Smith-Rosenberg describes a women's world, which she labels "The Female World of Love and Ritual." From now on, I will refer to this as the female world.

37. Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct*, 60-61, 70.

38. Ayer, *Diaries* III. Sarah wrote, "notwithstanding my present indisposition, I resolved to bear any suffering, so that I could but reach my poor sick mother, and be any comfort to her." Ayer, *Diary*, 219-220, 225. On August 31, 1817, Sarah reported that she gave birth to a daughter whom she named Sarah Connell.

39. Nancy Theriot supports the idea of women's strengthened religious authority in the nineteenth century. She states that "women were active agents in forming and reforming feminine identity and female body experience within historically specific material and discursive conditions...based on the material conditions of their lives, daughters as women formulated a slightly different version of the original script." *Mothers and Daughters in Nineteenth-Century America: The Biosocial Construction of Femininity* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 2.

40. Ayer, *Diaries*, vol. 3.

41. Ayer, *Diaries*, vol. 3.

42. Ayer, *Diaries*, vol. 3.

43. Ayer, *Diaries*, vol. 3.

44. Ayer, *Diary*, 255. This entry is one of many that demonstrates Sarah's difficulties in tending to her diary. Although she gave birth to Samuel on December 19, 1819, she could not report it until March 1821 because she felt too busy to take up her diary.

45. Paul Johnson mirrors Sarah's experiences of using religion to combat the fragmentation of society in his analysis of the city of Rochester, New York. See *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 33.

46. Ayer, *Diaries*, vol. 3.

47. Ayer, *Diary*, 228-229.

48. Ayer, *Diary*, 230.

49. Ayer, *Diary*, 232.

50. Ayer, *Diary*, 236.

51. Barbara Welter, "Cult of True womanhood," 151, defines the religious power Sarah felt by stating that "the constant identification of woman with virtue and with religion reinforced her own belief in her power to overcome obstacles, [with]...her own superior nature and God's own church, whichever it might be, behind her.

52. Ayer, *Diary*, 39, 63, 329. Sarah and Harriot Osgood remained friends via correspondence, but it had been many years since Sarah and Harriot had seen each other.