

Introduction to June – August 1913 Journals

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The year 1913 bookends 46 years of meticulous journaling done by Martha McMillan, years Martha used to live a life that faithfully reveled in the mundane and allowed for the blooming of relationships wherever she went. After many years of marriage, moving from home to home, travelling the states by rail, raising (number) children, taking care of a sizable farm, serving within a local church, burying children, and journaling every piece of the day including the weather, Martha's readers find her here, in June of 1913. Martha is 67 years old. Her children trained and scattered, her husband gone to heaven before her, and nearly no responsibility left compared to what she used to organize, Martha's days grow progressively duller as she succumbs to the sickness that will take her life. Amidst growing old, Martha stays faithful to her community and ages with grace and holds fast to her hope in spending eternity with her Savior, a day she looked forward to with great joy.

Through her chronicling of June, Martha allows the reader to view her directly before the sickness that will kill her takes a firm grip. She tells her readers of who picks the corn and who helps with the children. Martha fills the reader in on the daily goings-on of the farmhouse's day. She tells the readers about a storm that blacked out the church. Martha lists name after name throughout her journal; she is never afraid to repeat the word "and" in between every single name, such as "Aunt Mary and Miss Benline and Rankin and I." Through the use of lists, she records any and everyone who enters her life on any given day. She lists the names of help, children, neighbors, pastors, doctors, and friends. Her lists show the reader the importance of community in Martha's life. In June, Martha gets sick only a couple times; no serious indication

of her imminent death arises during these days. The only eventful episodes include church and a chicken attack. Poor Miss Benline.

With July comes more names, which to the reader presents a difficulty in remembering who's who, but to Martha, her life consisted of these people, she knew each one of them. She discusses who works with the wheat, who comes to dinner, who preached in church, who watches the children while others go to church, and who arrives in town on the train. As the reader gets deeper into the month, Martha's topics seem to have one thing in common: none of them relate to her activity within the house. She tells her audience of the people in her life, but never discusses what she does throughout the day. She writes about the activities of others, as though she merely observes or a servant relates what the other help, family, and friends go about during the day. She does occasionally venture out with Clayton or others, riding into Cedarville in the automobile or taking the train to Kenton, OH. More and more, doctors come to visit for meetings and check ups. Many times she inserts that she spent the day in bed. She tells of Miss Benline going to the drugstore for her. Her numerous treatments begin and the reader watches as Martha declines. She continues to document the people surrounding her. She continues to become progressively sicker. She chronicles the daily weather as though she were a twentieth century meteorologist. As she declines, Miss Benline grows ill too, distracting the reader and maybe even Martha from her own physical state. As she journals and sits in bed all day, she also manages to read *Evangeline* and to go on an occasional walk.

August starts with her 19th treatment and Miss Benline's persistent sickness. She tells of callers, who probably came understanding that Martha was severely sick. On the fifth of August, she begins her journal entry with the words, "This has been an ideal day." The next entry is made by another hand. The new voice addresses the change and reveals that Martha, "her who

for the last 46 years has wielded the pen,” is now in heaven, a day she awaited with joy. The mysterious and unnamed new hand addresses the community that Martha created amidst her life of mundane faithfulness. She tells of how the funeral held many of Martha’s loved ones and cards came from all over the states, where Martha travelled and shared her life with others. From viewing her words, the reader could claim that Martha’s life revolved around relational impact. Because of her words, she still impacts people today, from Cedarville, Ohio to China.

Is it valuable? Well, Martha McMillan is just another woman, who lived in the Midwest. Why should students and professors and librarians transcribe her words? Martha’s description of the mundane tasks of a life puts into perspective the 21st century life. Martha took time to build relationships and community. She valued her family and friends and help; she even invited the mailman over for dinner. She cared for them when they hurt, when they grew sick, or when chickens pecked them. This care for others directly relates to today’s world where many subconsciously pursue relationships for their own benefit, acting as consumers in relationships that only leave them empty and searching for more. Martha saw the value in pouring into people, but Martha looked to God for satisfaction and fulfillment. She knew that placing her hope in people produced a lackluster life accompanied with emptiness, but in Christ, her hope was and is eternal. Martha’s impact on people should speak to the modern day reader and urge them to turn to their neighbors, coworkers, friends, and family and seek out ways to serve them, not for their own benefit, but with a true, deep desire to love others well.