

The Diary of Samuel Rodman 1821-1859 (349 pages in total)

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Samuel Rodman (1792 – 1876) was a New Bedford whaling merchant who later in life expanded his business investments to include manufacturing companies. In 1844 he began his work to create the first cotton steam mill in New Bedford as water power was not available in the town as it was in neighboring Fall River. The mill was unsuccessful but its dissolution brought him into contact with the Shaker cotton mill in Shirley. The following entries from the diary all relate to Rodman's contacts and visits to Shirley. The first entry relates to his difficulties in finding mill operatives for his new mill and having three Shaker girls from Shirley work at his New Bedford mill. Later when he closed the mill he was able to sell the looms to the Phoenix Mill in Shirley by obtaining a share in ownership of the mill. He then became treasurer of the mill and made several visits to Shirley. He was a devout Quaker and these entries show his interest in all of the numerous Christian denominations in Shirley during his visits. It is unknown why his diary entries ended in 1859 but it is surmised that he was distraught over the coming War Between the States.

October 2, 1850 (New Bedford)

Engaged at my accounts and correspondence nearly all day and ev'g till very late. Had a call this morning from Dennis Pratt and three women from the Shaker community at Shirley. The object of the call was for one of the young women who had worked in our factory (*New Bedford Steam Cotton Co.*) to make confession of her delinquency while there in shortening the cuts of cloth, as she said was very common among the weavers, as they were taken from the loom. This she said she had done when she had made bad places near the end to save the trouble of picking it out, and sometimes she had done so when there was no such reason. She seemed to make the confession with a proper sensibility and apparent contrition. The elder lady said it was one of their rules with all who were permitted to remain with them that this confession should be made in all cases. If the individual had the means of making pecuniary restitution she would do it but she had not and they did not think the community bound to apply their own "conservated" to such purposes. The girl said she did not think she had taken more than fifteen or twenty yards. I treated her kindly and was glad that the poor child, who was surrounded by unfavorable influences, had been favored to see and shun the evil which had led her into dishonesty. The Shakers seem like a very sincere, though in some of their opinions a very mistaken people, and such devotion to what they believe to be the truth is deserving of all praise. We may all take a lesson for our greater lukewarmness to the high interests of the Soul.

February 12, 1852 (New Bedford)

Had a call from Alden G. Snell (*manager of New Bedford Steam Cotton Co.*) . He returned yesterday from the Shaker settlement at Shirley where he attempted to introduce our machinery into their mill, but found no encouragement.

March 1, 1852 (New Bedford)

Went to the city election before twelve and then to George Hussey's counting house to decide in regard to the plan of transferring our idle cotton machinery to the Shaker's mill at Shirley, which was finally decide upon, the old or present owners holding one half and to be to that extent interested in the lease of the Shaker mill. A.G. Snell left this afternoon for that place to complete the agreement.

June 17, 1852 (New Bedford)

Forenoon devoted to business as Treasurer of the mill company with Samson Almy, the purchaser of most of our surplus machinery. And to arranging for the waste water of the mill.

July 18, 1852 (New Bedford)

I called at A.G.Snell's after our return. He leaves for Shirley Village in the morning.

August 28, 1852 (New Bedford)

Had a call from D.R. Perry, Jr. this afternoon who arrived today from Shirley.

August 31, 1852 (New Bedford)

Had a call this afternoon from D.R.Perry, Jr. clerk of the Phoenix Cotton Man'g Company to get some advice in relation to the accounts.

September 9, 1852 (New Bedford)

George Hussey called in the afternoon, he having returned home this forenoon from his Shirley jaunt. He is satisfied with the manufacturing prospect at the Shaker mill there.

November 15, 1852 (New Bedford to Shirley)

Took an early breakfast and rode to the railroad to Boston. On arrival there went im'y to the Fitchburg R.R. Station and remained there till the starting of the cars at twelve o'clock. Reached Shirley about two. Went to dine and then to visit the Shaker mill. D.R. Perry has been here a week, giving his attention to the business going on here for the company. Wrote a letter to Lieut.Rosecrans and one to my wife in the ev'g.

November 16, 1852 (Shirley)

Spent the day in looking through the mill and over the premises. The only thing now lacking for moving the machinery to profit appears to be good and skillful operatives in the various departments, and I fear it will take some months to supply this deficiency.

November 18, 1852 (Shirley)

Engaged all day at the factory counting house with the clerk in initiating him in the art of book keeping on my plan, which I consider the most perspicuous and simple that I have ever examined. Ev'g at my lodging.

November 19, 1852 (Shirley)

Engaged as yesterday. Found on going to my lodging on of the Hutchinson family who had come according to his advertisement to give a concert this ev'g in the hall of the hotel. I went in after supper to hear the performers. The pieces were varied, some very touching and others very ludicrous, some pathetic, others lively adapted to the taste of a country village. The auditors appeared to have received the value of the admission fee which was but 12 1/2c. They accompanied their words with the music of the melodeon, which is a wind instrument played with keys, the bellows worked with the feet. It affected me very agreeably.

November 21, 1852 (Shirley)

Walked two miles to attend meeting at the center village. The preacher, Mr. Chandler a Unitarian, gave a good discourse on the text "He doeth all things well". The church and congregation respectable in all points, but the choir very small. Walked back to my lodgings and found the exercise about enough to keep me comfortable from the chilling northwest wind which prevailed. Went with D. R. Perry in the

afternoon to hear Mr. Adams in the village, an "orthodox" Congregationalist. His discourse was less to my taste than the one I heard in the morning. Walked at the close of the meeting with Mr. Perry to the Shaker family, but we saw none of them except at a distance, they probably having objections to intercourse on the Sabbath with any but those of their own strange faith. Wrote to my family in the ev'g. (*Note: Mr. Rodman was age 60 in 1852*)

November 24, 1852 (Shirley)

Spent the forenoon at the factory counting house and at twelve took my seat in the cars and started for home. On getting to Boston at half past two rode to the Providence Station and remained there till four when the train started and reached New Bedford at six o'clock. Found all well at home.

November 25, 1852 Thanksgiving Day (New Bedford)

Rode five miles into the country to see a man with reference to employment at the factory at Shirley which made me late at dinner, having our daughter-elect with us. George Hussey called after dinner to enquire about things at Shirley. Occupied most of the Day and ev'g in relation to the same.

November 27, 1852 (New Bedford)

I called at the rev. Mr. Thomas's to enquire respecting a Scotch woman who is said to be a good weaver. Afterwards sought her out and conditionally engage her to go to Shirley, if she should be so advised by Mr. Thomas.

December 25, 1852 Christmas Day (Shirley)

Busy as usual till very late in the factory office. This being Christmas most of the hands are out of the mill, but the wheel is kept running for the dressers. The roads here are very wet with the thawing snow.

February 28, 1853 (New Bedford to Shirley)

Made preparation for setting off for Shirley. Called to take leave of mother and left in the train soon afterwards. Had a conversation with Gov. Colby in the cars. Got to Boston about one o'clock. Called at A. Patterson & Co's and at the room of Bej'n Worcester and gave directions for a drawing for a cloth stamp for the Shirley mill. Left at four and was at Shirley by about half past six. Took lodgings at E. Fale's and went to the factory office after supper.

March 1, 1853 (Shirley)

Occupied at the factory c'g room till between four and five o'clock when I went with A.G. Snell taking Leonard Taber with us, to the office of the United Shaker Society by appointment to adjust the rent and if possible our claim for losses sustained by the breach of the conditions of the lease of the mill – lack of water power, &c. Had a long interview with Elder Groves, Thomas Holden and Jonas Nutting (Leander Persons and one or two others being present part of the time, but taking no part in the discussion). They gave us supper and we remained till about eleven o'clock when we parted having adjusted all matters excepting our claim for losses to which they would not accede but chose to let us seek our remedy at law. The whole interview was conducted with good temper on both sides.

March 7, 1853 (Shirley)

Occupied with the accounts of the company as for the several days past. William Almy of Boston was here on fifth and sixth day. Went with him through the mill and exhibited the cloth in imitation of the "Utica" sheeting of which they have the selling in Boston. He thought favorably of the mill and its products and would like much to have agency for sales in Boston.

March 11, 1853 (Shirley to New Bedford)

Rose early and went to the factory office and wrote some hours before breakfast. Then returned and

was earnestly employed on the accounts to bring them to the stage to admit of my leaving for home by the mid-day train in which I succeeded and took my place in the cars a little before one o'clock. Arrived at home in the usual time and had the pleasure of finding all well.

April 3, 1853 (New Bedford to Shirley)

Left in the early train for Shirley. Stopped at Canton to see Ellis Ames. Finding nothing to detain me I took a walk in the village and environs and made an inspection of the Canton Cotton Mill which was started by Andrew Robeson (New Bedford) and is now under the management of my nephew William. The latter was not there, but the superintendent showed me over the establishment which is on a light coarse printing cloth is doing extremely well for the owners. Took the mid-day train at twelve and called at A. Patterson & Co's and at the c'g room of Weld and Minot, but found no one in. Arrived at Shirley at six and one-half o'clock and passed the ev'g at the office of the factory.

April 4, 1853 (Shirley)

Engaged at the company accounts, except the hours of meals and sleeping at the Inn whereas heretofore I am made quite comfortable by Mr. and Mrs. Fales. Had an accidental interview with Elder Groves and Nutting and Parsons in the street who showed a desire to have an amicable adjustment of our differences but without making any propositions.

April 6, 1853 (Shirley)

Continued my attention to the Shirley accounts till noon and then proceeded to take the train to Boston. This being Fast Day the mills are stopped and business in Boston is generally suspended.

April 30, 1853 (New Bedford)

Called early at brother William's respecting the proposed modification of the lease from the United Society of Shakers at Shirley and it was concluded to ask the opinion of David Whitman.

May 10, 1853 (New Bedford to Shirley)

Left in the morning for Shirley. On getting to Boston called at Almy Patterson & Co's and at B. Worcester's room, taking Oak Hall in my way to the Fitchburg R.R. at twelve. Left and was at Shirley about two. Repaired to the factory office after dinner and looked over the mill and walked down the race way where the men were at work to widen the same at twenty feet and to build a new dam, crossing the meadow to enlarge the pond and give better control of the water.

May 11 to May 28, 1853 Shirley

I was employed with only the necessary intermissions for meals and sleep on the books and accounts of the store and factory, making some new facilities for carrying out the plan of keeping note of the stock in its details, and writing up the store accounts which involve much detail and daily accurate attention to keep the correct knowledge of the accounts of the operatives whose trade is very much in driblets. On each Sabbath I walked to the central town to attend Divine Service at the Unitarian Church where I heard profitable discourses – on the first from a Mr. Butts of Stowe and on the second from Mr. Chandler. During the intermissions I walked in different direction to get some knowledge of the surrounding country which affords many delightful views. On the fifteenth after a late dinner I left my lodgings at the Inn to call at A.G.Snell's and go to meeting with him in the ev'g but finding people moving toward the m'g house I postponed my call and went to the school house where the Baptists, with whom A.G.Snell's is connected, hold their meetings, but I found that the service there was over having been held at five o'clock instead of seven as I supposed. I therefore went to the adjacent Congregational M'g House where a prayer meeting was to be held and after its close called at A.G.Snell's though rather late. Found the family in distress at the illness of the baby of three months with

convulsion that day taken. On the sixth day of the next week (the twentieth had an interview with the Shakers on the proposed modification of the factory lease and it was agreed that we should (Both parties) take the opinion of Squire Hoare of Concord as to the legal remedy which the Company has for the loss they have sustained by back water in the wheel, which it is supposed was chiefly owing to the raising of the dam at Page's mill on the Nashua about two miles below the race, the Company having commenced proceedings against the Shakers under the guaranty given in the lease. On the seventh day, the twenty first, A.G. Snell and I on the one part and Elder Grove and Jonas Nutting on the other part took the cars to Concord and had a conference with Squire Hoare. He satisfied Snell and me that our remedy must first be sought from Page and in the event of failing here our remedy must be sought of the Shakers. After the interview we walked together round that quiet town and as far as Ralph Waldo Emerson's on the southeastern verge near the Lexington Road, by which the British marched to destroy the warlike stores which were deposited there at the breaking out of the Revolutionary War. We returned to Shirley in the mid-day train and I resumed my attention to the accounts which I continued with little interruption till the afternoon of sixth day the twenty-seventh which was chiefly devoted to the occasion of the interment of Alden's (A.G.Snell) child which died on the fourth. Mr. Jennings of Fitchburg conducted the religious solemnities in a very agreeable manner. I returned from the cemetery and took tea with the family. Had an interview afterward at the office and then at A.G.Snell's house with Elder Grove and J. Nutting touching the proposed modification of the lease, which was finally agreed upon and they were to have the same put in writing for our signatures, after which it should be submitted to our attorneys in Boston the following day in the afternoon. I returned to the office and spent the remainder of the evening there until midnight, and the next forenoon was prepared to leave for home. Took my seat in the cars at half past twelve and arrived at Boston a little after two. Called at Griswold's office with the Shakers and he and Abbot of Lowell considered the provision of our instrument. I failed to have the condition respecting the dam of Page's mill made definitely, say from twelve to seventeen inches which was the understanding on coming to the oral agreement the evening before. Jonas acting under the advice of Abbot herein, but on the strong presumption that it would have no practical effect detrimental to our mill I waived the point and took the half past four train for home whither I arrived in good time and had the pleasure of finding all as well as usual.

August 9, 1853 (New Bedford to Shirley)

Took the morning train for Boston. Attended to some errands there and then joined the mid-day train for Fitchburg and left it for Shirley about two o'clock. Took lodgings at Edward Fales' Inn and went to the factory after dinner. The new dam is completed in good style, and I anticipate no further trouble for lack of water or excess of it, unless in extraordinary freshets in the Nashua River, the race way being now widened and secured to twenty feet which is double the original width. The dam at the upper reservoir is in process of creation which with that made last summer will when full, it is estimated, give a water surface of one thousand acres which is doubtless amply sufficient for the present mills and probably much in excess.

August 10 the September 2, 1853 (Shirley)

devoted myself to the accounts of the manufacturing company assiduously on week days and evenings. On first days I walked to the middle town (two miles) to attend the Unitarian meeting. On the two first Sabbaths I heard the minister of the parish, Mr. Chandler, and on the last Mr. Hill of Worcester who gave two of the most impressive and eloquent discourses that I have had the privilege of hearing. The first was on the passage of the Lord's Prayer "Thy Kingdom Come" and the second "But the end is not yet". I called by invitation at the Hon. Mr. Parker's near the meeting house in the intermission and partook of some of his fine fruit. Peaches, pears and apples do well in the locality. The Shirley apple has a very fine flavor with unusual mellowness. Returned to the Inn after the second service and dined and

then called at Mr. Snell's and took Dwight (the company's clerk) and rode to the paper mill to make a personal observation of the dam which is alleged by the Shakers to be the cause of our inability to run speed last winter. On returning to the village I went to the Congregational ev'g meeting where several prayers and exhortations were being made by the minister and the congregation which showed sincerity and earnestness in the Sacred Cause, but which were marred by what appeared to be great theological errors. In addition to the c'g house duties which occupied most of my time since my arrival an additional inducement to remain a day or two later was to get further information relative to the alleged change in the paper mill dam. Left in the mid-day train and reached home in the usual time and found all well.

October 12, 1854 (New Bedford)

I was at a conference with the Trustees of the Shirley Shakers with A.G.Snell and T.C.Allen at D.R.Perry's house touching the modification of the lease to exonerate them (the Shakers) from relaying and repairs of the floors of the mill leased to the Phoenix Cotton Man'g Co'y by submitting to competent referees the amount which should be paid by the United Society of Shakers to the Company for the assumption of the duty and for the damages and losses which they had sustained on account of the neglect to repair seasonably after notice of the deficiencies which caused the settling of the shafting and stopping of the mill. After a long conference, from four to eight o'clock, the proposition was agreed to and four referees, two on each side, agreed upon, they to choose a fifth.

February 11 to March 11, 1855 (New Bedford and Shirley)

I set off for Shirley on the eleventh in the m'g train. Stopped at Jamaica Plain at my niece Eliz'h Weld's. This is the first time that I have been at their residence, which is a very pleasant one, particularly in summer. It is quite of a rural character, but with neighbors of wealth and refinement who seek in the rural districts surrounding Boston that space and air which the dense population of the great city will not permit them to enjoy there. My time did not permit my staying but a fraction of an hour and I took leave of my niece and was soon at the metropolis. Called at Almy Patterson & Co's and repaired to the Fitchburg R.R. at twelve o'clock when I found that a new arrangement since I had last taken the midday train would oblige me to remain in Boston or vicinity till four o'clock. As I had nothing special to take my time in Boston I went to East Boston and went through the flour mill there. The head miller was very obliging in showing me the mill and explaining the arrangements. (*Note: the former New Bedford Steam Cotton Mill building was in the process of being converted to the New Bedford Flour Mill opening January 1856, hence Mr. Rodman's interest in this mill*). After examining the mill I walked westward to the shipyard of Donald McKey (*sic*) where the Great Republic was built, probably a mile beyond the flour mill, passing numerous intervening ship yards and wharves and returning through the main street one or two removes from the water. Recrossed the same ferry by which I left Boston and again repaired to the railroad station and arrived at Shirley Village soon after six o'clock. After tea I went to the factory office where I begun and continued my labors on the accounts with only the necessary intermissions till I left on fourth day, the seventh instant, for home. ...My sojourn at Shirley had the usual incidents. I went to the middle town on two first days and heard good sermons from Mr. Chandler. Saw sundry persons at the Inn as usual, among them a Mr. Adams of West Townsend who has a flour mill successfully in operation, the firm being Adams and Bowers. There was a dancing entertainment and school exhibition, but my evening engagements at the office were not interrupted by these village commotions.

July 9 to 22, 1855 (New Bedford and Shirley)

I pursued my usual avocations and paid some attention to the Bridge Case in the early part of the week, when my attention was suddenly called to an apprehended emergency at Shirley from exposure of the clerk to small pox and S. Potter Jr. was engaged to go with me on fifth day to the mill to supply his place in case he had left or should leave to avoid spreading the contagion. We left in the morning cars.

November 7, 1855 (Shirley to New Bedford)

Arrived home from my visit to the mill at Shirley in time to vote the Whig ticket.

July 7 to July 20, 1856 (New Bedford to Shirley)

Left home on fifth day in time to avail of the Fairhaven (MA) train at eleven o'clock for Shirley. Arrived at Boston soon after one o'clock and attended to some items and made calls at the offices of two of my friends and used the remaining leisure time walking about the wharves till near starting hour (four P.M.) of the rail road to Shirley. I met my brother-in-law George Hussey at the station. Left the cars at six P.M. and George and myself walked up the stream to the broken reservoir dam, marking the ravages of the recent flood which prostrated all obstructions to its torrent, carrying away the fork factory and some less important buildings and undermining and breaking down others in part, demolishing all the dams below and the five roads and bridges crossing the stream, making the late blooming and sparkling valley with its busy spindles a scene of desolation. After supper I continued my exploration down the stream to the lowest point that I could go dryshod amid the smooth rubble stones which had been swept down from the dams and roads filling the tailrace of the Phoenix Mill by the breaking away of the west embankment to the depth of six feet for a long space. This was the damage which I did not expect to find, and its reparation will probably be the heaviest part of the expense on the Phoenix Mill privilege. I applied myself to the duties of my station as Treasurer of the company, except the time required for repose, refreshment, and devotion. On the first day, the thirteenth, I walked to the middle town where I attended the two services of the Unitarian Church which were delivered two excellent sermons by the Rev. Mr. Brown – earnest, frank, and scriptural. In the intermission I attended the Sabbath School exercises and accepted the kind invitation of old Mrs. Whitney and her son and grandson, who is the leader of the School, to call at their house quite near the Church where I was regaled by a plate of excellent cherries. Had a lovely walk going and returning. Wrote to my family after dinner and on the approach of twilight took a walk through the Shaker village and far beyond to the south. Got home by a splendid moonlight, which lent its peculiar charm to the lovely scenery now arrayed in the deep luxuriant vegetation of summer in this fertile region, where on the seventeenth and eighteenth the thermometer ranged from ninety-seven to one hundred twenty at the highest points (in the shade and the sunshine respectively. *(Note: Mr. Rodman was an amateur meteorologist and kept weather readings in New Bedford from 1812 through his son's recordings through 1905. They were the oldest continuous weather record in the United States as of 1927).* I continued my office duties till near noon on seventh day (the nineteenth) and then left my lodgings and took the cars to Boston.

July 19 to August 15, 1858 (New Bedford to Shirley)

On third day, the twenty-seventh, I went to Boston and thence to Shirley where I remained busily occupied with my duties as Treasurer of the Phoenix Mill Company till sixth day of the following week. On the first day which I spent there I attended the Universalist meeting and heard two good discourses and prayers from their litany. I passed the rest of the day in looking over some volume of the "Rose of Sharon" which I borrowed from Mrs. Edgerton, the mother of Miss E. Mayo the editress, a young woman of extraordinary talents and virtues whom I have before noticed in connection with my early visits to the place. I left Shirley on sixth day ev'g.

November 22 to December 14, 1858 (New Bedford to Shirley)

On second day I set off in the morning train for Boston via Fairhaven. About six inches of light snow which had fallen in the night retarded the speed of the cars so that I was too late to take the benefit of the eleven o'clock train for Fitchburg and Shirley. ...Took the cars at half past four for Shirley and was there in due time. Took up my quarters at the Inn, now owned by and kept by Henry Edgerton, a brother of the late highly gifted and amiable Mrs. Mayo. I found the appointments of the house better than ever before, which made my home there very satisfactory. My time was chiefly spent at the office

of the Phoenix Cotton Manufacturing Co'y in attending my duties as Treasurer. The change of clerks (D.R.Perry leaving for the south to give his time and services to the cotton mills in Georgia owned by his family and relations; the successor Nath'l Tobey, has been about a month under instruction) required some of my time and would have had more if my engagements at home had not obliged me to leave for home on third day, the thirteenth. The supply of water is too much reduce to allow the full complement of machinery to run all the time, which is serious fact at this cold season when the springs are liable to be arrested by ice. I attended meetings twice at the services of the Universalists and once at each of the other houses, to wit, Orthodox (so called) Congregationalist's and the Baptist's. I left at half past twelve P.M. for home where I arrived about half past six o'clock.

January 17 to January 23, 1859 (New Bedford to Shirley)

Engaged busily through the week to get my business in order to leave on second day to attend the annual meeting of the Pocasset Manufacturing Co'y at Fall River (MA) and to make a visit to the mill at Shirley to prepare the accounts for the annual meeting of that Co'y now near at hand.

January 24 to March 17, 1859 (New Bedford to Shirley)

...Arrived well at Shirley about half past nine A.M. and repaired to the Inn, now a very comfortable and satisfactory home under the keepership and ownership of Henry Edgerton, the brother of the late lovely and good and talented Mrs. Mayo. As might be expected from the influence of such excellence in a sister, he has the intellectual tastes and refinement of feelings which make him an agreeable companion on our daily meetings. Mrs. Edgerton has equal merit in her department, so that I could not wish to be better suited in a home at Shirley, where being installed I went to the mill premises and to my duties in the office where I was industriously, first days excepted, till the seventeenth of third month. The change of clerks which took place on the day that I left Shirley on my previous visit in the twelfth month and the unsatisfactory state in which some of the accounts were left greatly enhanced my labor in preparing for the biennial settlement of the accounts of the company, the trouble and losses which were entailed by the imprudence of the Agent and the prostration of the cotton manufacturing business in 1857-58 having prevented the adjustment at the end of 1857. I left Shirley on the afternoon of the fifth day, third month seventeenth.....The weather was very pleasant for winter at Shirley. There was good sleighing nearly all the time and for a month or more previous. The walking was sometimes very icy and at other times very wet from the partial thaws and dissolving recent snows, while here at home rains and mud have predominated. On the day that I arrived at Shirley they had in the ev'g a firemen's supper and ball at the Inn, and on the ev'g of the day that I left there a village ball was to come off. Mrs. Charles Edgerton, sister of Mrs. H.E. was taken sick on the first occasion and detained under the doctor's care most of the time of my stay, with her husband and little boy Fred'k. I made a call on them the first day before I left and had an introduction to his mother who with an unmarried daughter have rooms in the same house. I was gratified at this incident, as I have always had a wish to see the old lady since I read on my earlier visits the memoirs of her admirable daughter. During my stay at Shirley my days and evenings were given to the books and accounts of the company, except of first days when I attended one or more of the meetings for Divine Worship in the village and spent the remainder of the time reading at home, Mr. Edgerton's library affording interesting works. The weather was moderate for the climate, and the sleighing good except for the last few days.