

# THE DIARY OF MARY ANN NORRIS 1818-1838\*

SUSAN FLEWWELING NORRIS

## Section 5: Religion

Religion played an important part in the lives of the Cornwallis farmers. With little outside communication, the community was closely knit, and the church offered companionship as well as religion to its members. The young people used to walk or ride to church in groups, and one can imagine them gathering after the service to discuss the week's activities. For the girls it was an opportunity to display their best bonnets and gowns, and for the young men a pleasant change from week-day labor.

The conditions of church-going were very different from today. Sometimes it rained or stormed so hard that even Robert Norris could not get to the church; one storm shook so much of the church plaster down that the next service had to be cancelled. Another Sunday, on her return from church, Mary Ann had to rush into a neighbour's house for fear of shrinking her dress in the rain. Today we should think it very strange to arrive in church and find no minister, but to Mary Ann it was a casual occurrence, and she merely mentions her disappointment or that of the congregation. When her father suffered from gout, it was not always possible to find someone to take his services, and even after he was succeeded by Mr. Campbell, there were occasions when no service was held.

Sometimes Bishop John Inglis came to Cornwallis, and one can imagine the whole village turning out to hear him. Mary Ann describes a "very imposing and solemn ceremony" at which the bishop ordained "four young Clergymen Priests". On his visits to the parish, the bishop was entertained by the Norris family, as when he arrived unexpectedly on August 8, 1826, with his wife and family. Mary Ann afterwards wrote that, since it was a very rainy afternoon, they were two hours late for dinner. Because of Robert Norris' ill health, there were often visiting ministers in the Norris home, among whom were a Mr. Haden, whom Mary Ann considered "a very odd man", and a Mr. Waller, in whom she took an unusual interest. She confided in her diary that she thought Mr. Walker "a most

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excellent young man," and when he came to fetch her across the Cornwallis river she considered it a deep mark of friendship. The young clergyman spent the greater part of 1827 substituting for Robert Norris, and when he left the community in September of that year Mary Ann was deeply grieved.

There was continual coming and going between St. John's in Cornwallis and other churches in neighbouring districts. Robert Norris took services at Horton and Mary Ann tells of riding across the ice of the Cornwallis River to attend church there. Once she and seven others walked to the Horton Church; she also attended services in Habitant and rode to Horton Corner to attend service at that place.

Among his religious duties, Robert Norris was called on many times to perform the marriage ceremony. When he married couples in his home, his daughter took an interest that is reflected in Mary Ann's diary. There was a couple named Caleb Dodge and Mary Ann Parsons, who aroused the Norris family from their beds and were married with due ceremony an hour or so later. Another couple Robert Norris refused to marry without their fathers' leave, so next morning they returned with the necessary permission and the ceremony took place. A certain Mr. Cosset asked Robert Norris to marry him to Miss Famicha Gesner and Mary Ann accompanied her father to the wedding. She enjoyed the celebrations very much and did not arrive home until nearly four o'clock the next morning. She also went with her father to the marriage of Abraham Gesner, who was later to achieve fame as geologist and inventor of kerosene oil. Of this wedding she wrote: "Everything was very pleasant and conducted very well . . . the bride performed her part remarkably [sic] well". Mary Ann and Catharine once attended a 'second day wedding,' which was a dance held in honor of the bride and groom on the day following their marriage.

In sharp contrast to happy wedding ceremonies were the customs and rites connected with funerals, and here the clergyman also had great responsibilities. Preparations for funerals were more personal at that period than today, since there were no undertakers. At the death of a friend or neighbour, Mary Ann Norris often assisted in making mourning clothes for the bereaved family. She would purchase black cloth at Ritchie's store and help in making up the "mourning" and even in such unhappy duties as making grave caps and shrouds She was always

most generous and sympathetic when called to assist in these sad tasks.

After Robert Norris was relieved of his ministry by Mr. Campbell in 1830, Mary Ann continued her strong connections with the church. She had the honor of being godmother to one of Mr. Campbell's children, and after the ceremony was treated to cake and wine at the minister's home. At the same time it is interesting to note that she attended other churches as well as the Church of England. In Cornwallis she occasionally went to Presbyterian meeting, but her attitude was somewhat condescending. For example, she wrote: "Went to Prespeterian [sic] Meeting this morning as there was not any Church". Nevertheless she thought the Presbyterian minister, Mr. Struthers, "a very pleasant agreeable man" and highly approved his sermons. While in St. John she attended services at Trinity Church, at the Presbyterian "Kirk", and at the Roman Catholic chapel. After one service at Trinity, she wrote that Mr. Gray preached "a most excellent Sermon upon the impropriety of Theatrical amusements." In Halifax she frequently went to St. Paul's and St. Matthews, and also mentions attending St. George's and the Baptist meeting. The latter is surprising since the Baptists were dangerously close to the "New Light" movement, of which Robert Norris highly disapproved. That Mary Ann shared his aversion is shown by the following entry in her diary on Sept. 24, 1822: "Charlotte Boyle arrived here today; we were not as much pleased to see her as we should have been if she had not come with a party of new lights". Apart from this dislike of the New Light movement, it may be said that Robert Norris' daughter was quite broad-minded in her attitude to other churches.

As she grew older, Mary Ann grew more devout and faithfully copied the minister's text into her diary each Sunday. She and her cousin Mary Prescott started a Sunday school in Cornwallis, and attended it faithfully from May to October each year. It was closed during the winter months, when small children would soon have been buried in the snow drifts that blocked the country roads. There are still a few people in the district of Starr's Point who remember Mary Ann Norris as an elderly and eccentric member of the church. One of her eccentricities was to stand up in church and count the number in the congregation, checking carefully who they were. On one such occasion, when the church door opened, a man called out: "Don't get up and look Miss Norris, it is only . . . ." With her death,

however, the church lost a good and faithful member who had contributed many years of constant service to the cause of her religion.

#### Section 6: Transportation

It is not easy to visualize conditions of travelling in Nova Scotia a hundred and twenty-five years ago. At the opening of our period, in 1818, there were only two roads that would admit of a regular coach service in the whole colony. One of these from Halifax to Pictou, the other from Halifax to Windsor and beyond to the Halfway River near Hantsport.<sup>1</sup> Other roads were chiefly bridle paths or woodland trails, the best of which became a sea of mud and ruts in rainy weather. Travellers usually went on horseback or on foot, and the hardships were so great that many shunned overland travel entirely, preferring a longer journey by sea.<sup>1</sup>

Mary Ann Norris makes some enlightening comments on the roads in her county. Her usual description of them is "very bad", especially in the spring, when they were likely to become "dismal" or "intolerable". At this season Robert Norris often set out for church alone to spare his family the hazards of muddy holes and washouts. Occasionally when the weather was good, people could travel in comparative comfort. One of these pleasant interludes was in January of '37, when Mary Ann wrote: "We have had about ten days of uncommon mild weather, and the travelling is excellant. [sic]."

There were many weaknesses in the government's supervision of roads, among them the system of "statute labor". This was a tax on proprietors payable in labor instead of money. We find, for instance, James Allison calling on Robert Norris to get his hired man George to work on the highway. Such workers were inclined to be lazy, since their work was measured in time spent rather than amount accomplished, and the roads suffered in consequence.<sup>2</sup>

Young people did much more walking at this period than today. On a Sunday when the walking was good the whole congregation of Cornwallis might walk to church, and even when the roads were bad people often walked rather than stay at home. During one of the latter periods, Mary Ann wrote as follows:

I went down to uncles to spend the day . . . George Widden walked home with me but we had a terrable walk. I lost my Golwshoe (galoshes) off twice in the mud.

1. R. D. Evans. *Transportation and Communication in Nova Scotia, 1815-1850*, pp. 4,5 (unpublished M. A. thesis in Public Archives of Nova Scotia.)

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 13-15.

Horseback-riding was also very common in this age, especially when the roads were bad. It seems to have been as common for women to ride as men, and sometimes they travelled long distances on horseback. Mary Ann herself rode twenty-eight miles in one day on a pleasure trip, though she was very tired when she reached home.

Sometimes there were accidents with runaway horses and broken down gigs or waggons. Mary Ann had several harrowing experiences of this kind. One occurred in the winter of '35 when she was returning home from Horton with her servant John, young Robert Merritt, and a Mr. and Mrs. Rand. She writes:

we unfortunately met with an accident. The horse fell down and broke a shaft, and then ran away with us, and we were in great danger.

Less dangerous but more embarrassing was an accident that she describes as follows:

Spent this evening at Mr. Allison . . . Mr. and Mrs. Campbell politely offered to bring me home, and we unfortunately were all upset into the dytch at our gate.

A two-wheeled gig was more easily upset than the four-wheel wagon, which also became popular in Kings County during this period.<sup>1</sup> In 1825 Robert Norris bought a wagon that proved useful in transporting the family to church. After Catharine moved to St. John, she wrote of having a bad fall out of a wagon, which left her "much bruised." Another four-wheeled vehicle was the phaeton, a light open carriage usually beyond the means of country people. Charles Prescott possessed the only phaeton in Cornwallis.

In winter time sleighs and snowshoes were used for travelling. One overnight guest at the Norris home set out for Horton on snowshoes, another visitor arrived "almost frozen" in the middle of January. Whenever snow was on the ground, the white landscape would reflect a colorful parade of fast-moving sleighs. Not so attractive, however, was the scene described by Mary Ann Norris on March 19, 1833, when she and two young Allison's were thrown from a sleigh to a wet and muddy road. They returned to Allison's with spirits as well as clothing dampened.

Stage coach travel developed greatly during this period. In 1828, the Western Stage Company started a line of coaches between Halifax and Annapolis,<sup>1</sup> but the company received a setback the next year when a stage barn was burnt at Kentville.

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1. Evans, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

Mary Ann Norris heard of the fire on the morning of April 1, when she wrote: "Four of the stage Horses and the barn containing them were burnt." No one knew the cause of the fire, which had broken out about four o'clock in the morning and consumed everything in the barn. Besides the horses, the loss included two tons of hay and the covered sleighs that ran between Halifax and Kentville.<sup>1</sup>

The length of time required for short journeys is shown by Mary Ann's trips to Windsor, Chester, Halifax and St. John. On a trip to Windsor in 1824 she left Cornwallis at nine in the morning and reached her destination at four in the afternoon, having travelled about twenty-four miles. She tells of a trip to Chester in 1835 that involved two overnight stops. The first she spent at Horton, starting out at nine the next morning with four other passengers. Of that day's progress, she wrote:

We arrived at Parmers about two o'clock and remained there three hours waiting for Gilderd. When he came Mr. Chipman left us and returned to Horton. Mr. Parker was with Gilderd and I went on in the Gig with him, and Joseph Widden Mrs. Barss and Emily Chipman in the waggon, it was just dark when we got to Golderds The Waggon broak down and the rest did not get in until nearly ten o'clock. Mrs Barss was very wet and much fatigued. She had to carry her infant.

The next morning the whole party proceeded in a drizzling rain arriving at Chester at twelve noon.

Mary Ann's first trip to St. John was a fortnight after Catharine's wedding, when she accompanied her sister and brother-in-law and Miss Merritt to New Brunswick. On November 25, 1825, they crossed the Cornwallis River and spent the first night at Dewolf's in Horton. Of the next day's events she wrote as follows:

Left Mr Dewolf's about twelve o'clock sailed from Mud Bridge on board the Schooner Friendship about two o'clock got into Parrsborough about seven in the evening got a very comfortable Supper and went to bed for a short time about twelve in the night Captain Lockart sent the boat on Shore fore us and we once more trusted ourselves on the watery element resigning ourselves wholly to the protection of the Almighty.

Of the voyage from Parrsborough to St. John Mary Ann wrote:

The wind though light was favourable and we had a delightful day we were none of us sick enough to require much assistance but [I] was obliged to leave the Cabin and lay upon deck

1. *Novascotian*, April 2, 1829.

until dark when we all decended into the Cabin and turned into our birth[s] . . . we remained until about thre o'clock on Monday morning when the boat was Lowred and we got into it and were safely landed at the extreme end of the Town after a very pleasant passage of about 36 hours

These were the pioneer days of steamship travel. On May 12, 1826, while visiting in St. John, Mary Ann wrote: "Got up very early and took a walk with Mr. Merritt to see the steam boat off." This is probably a reference to the steamer *St. John*, which in this year made the first trip across the Bay of Fundy by steam power.<sup>1</sup> Mary Ann herself did not travel by steam until the summer of '33, when she left Annapolis on the morning of August 6 and arrived in St. John the same day about 3.30 p.m.

Before the stage coach line was extended to Kentville, the journey from Cornwallis to Halifax was very tedious. Robert Norris and Mary Ann made this journey in September, 1827, stopping the first night at Dewolf's in Horton, the second at a place called "Survey's" and the third at "Bookman's". These may have been either homes of friends or wayside inns on the Windsor road. On the morning of the fourth day, the Norrises breakfasted in Halifax, having spent thirty-six hours in travelling some seventy miles. The opening of the Western Stage lines in June of '28 greatly shortened the trip to Halifax. After this Mary Ann would stay all night at Kentville, then take the stage next morning and arrive in Halifax the same evening.

Considering the many disadvantages of travelling in this age, it is remarkable to find Mary Ann making quite frequent visits to St. John and Halifax. Could she have seen the amazing strides to be made in transportation during the next century, she might have given more details about the trials of stage and waggon travel; as it was, she accepted conditions as she found them, perhaps feeling that a new era of travel in comfort was in the making.

#### Section 7: Events of Interest

Occasionally Mary Ann remarks on some notable event, outside her native province. In January of '37 for example, she heard of a terrible fire in St. John. This fire had started at Peter's Wharf and spread up both sides of Water Street and Prince William Street, destroying 115 houses and most of the business section of the city.<sup>2</sup> The hardships endured by those left home-

1. *Canada and its Provinces*, X, 561.

2. George Stewart, Jr., *Story of the Great Fire in St. John*, p. 16.

less in the midst of a severe winter were remembered for many years after the catastrophe. It is miraculous, however, that the whole town was not demolished, for these were the days of voluntary fire companies with only a few hoses and bucket brigades to fight the flames.

A year and a half later, on June 28, 1838, we come to the coronation of Queen Victoria. All Nova Scotia joined in the celebrations to honor the beautiful nineteen-year-old sovereign and Mary Ann Norris was among the holiday-makers. She happened to be visiting in Windsor at the time, and in the evening she joined the enthusiastic crowd who watched a grand display of fire works from the Fort Hill. Windsor's celebrations could not compare with those of Halifax, however. There the guns began to fire at four o'clock in the morning, and the city was awakened to the tune of a bugler piping the national anthem.<sup>1</sup> Flags were everywhere, and church bells pealed while throngs of people watched the grand procession through the main streets and an exhibition of sports on the common. The day ended with a huge display of fireworks playing over the town, while citizens made merry at Government House, where Her Majesty's health was freely drunk in "bumpers of Champagne."<sup>1</sup>

Besides noting such important events as the coronation, Mary Ann Norris frequently remarks on local happenings. At this period Supreme Court trials created much interest in the county and men would come from some distance to listen eagerly to the proceedings.<sup>2</sup> Thus the county was agog when the first murder case in fifty years came before the court in the spring session of 1826.<sup>1</sup> The accused was a colored man named Labban Powell, convicted of murdering an old man of eighty years. The chief evidence against Powell was furnished by his own son. Following the jury's verdict of "Guilty" Judge Brenton Halliburton pronounced the death sentence, and in words of a spectator there was "scarcely a dry eye in the crowded court".<sup>3</sup> Among those who followed the case was Mary Ann Norris who wrote on July 4 that "poor unfortunate Powell was executed today."

Less sensational but of more lasting interest was the opening of the Kentville Hotel. Mary Ann went through the new hotel in October of '29, but it was not opened to stage-coach travellers till August of the next year. The 21st of that month being the

1. *Novascotian*, July 5, 1838.

2. Eaton, *op. cit.*, P. 231.

3. *Novascotian*, June 22, and July 13, 1826; *Acadian Recorder*, June 24, 1826.

King's birthday, a merry party met at the hotel to enjoy Mrs. Watts' excellent cooking and wines. No less than fifteen toasts were given, beginning with the King and Queen and ending with "Our next merry meeting."<sup>1</sup>

Occasionally a travelling circus visited Kings County, creating much excitement especially among the children. In September of '25 a "GRAND CARAVAN OF LIVING ANIMALS" made a great sensation in Halifax, where they were exhibited opposite Boyle's country market. It was the largest circus that had ever travelled in Nova Scotia and included such rare attractions as an "African Ribbed-Nose Baboon" and a "Famous Dancing Monkey from the Island of Borneo".<sup>2</sup> After showing in Halifax the caravan started on the road, arriving at Kentville (still known as Horton Corner) early in October. The Norris family went all together to see the show, and Mary later recounted her impressions as follows:

Father, Mother, Catherine, and myself went to the Corner to see a collection of wild beasts that was exhibited there among which was the Lion, the Cammell, the Tigor and Tigress, the Leopard and several other animals I was much pleased with the Lion and an old Monkey nursing its young.

Another source of excitement was the occasional visits of lieutenant-governors at the Hon. Charles Prescott's residence, famous for its hospitality. On one of these visits, Robert Norris accompanied his brother-in-law to meet Sir James Kempt, and one can imagine the many interested eyes that must have followed the official suite as it wound up the narrow road of the village to Acacia Grove. The most exciting visit was in the summer of '23, when Lord Dalhousie, Sir James Kempt and all their suite arrived to visit Charles Prescott. That night a gala dinner was served at Acacia Grove, and among the guests were Lydia and Robert Norris. They also had the honor of having Captain York, one of the governor's party, as an overnight guest, and next morning Charles Prescott brought Lord Dalhousie himself to call at the Norris home. One would expect Mary Ann to be quite overawed by such an important personage, but she records these events quite casually, giving no hint of her personal feelings. After a brief visit at Acacia Grove, the official party proceeded on their tour of the western counties,<sup>3</sup> but memories of their visit lingered many months after their departure.

1. *Nova Scotian*, Sept. 9, 1830, pp 283 (adv.) 286.

2. *Acadian Recorder*, Sept. 24, 1825, p. 3.

3. *Acadian Recorder*, July 12, 1823.

Among other events that caught Mary Ann's interest were a trip to Canard to watch the militia parade; the tragic death of Mrs. Burbidge, who shocked the entire neighbourhood by drowning herself in a well; the auction of furniture that followed Mrs. Burbidge's death; the election of 1830, when Mary Ann regretted William Campbell's defeat by John Morton; and an unpleasant adventure at Mr. Allison's that resulted in a black man being sent to jail for "disorderly conduct." These are but a few of the chequered incidents that punctuated the daily life of Cornwallis, some bringing happiness, others sorrow, and all soon forgotten but for the chance comments in the diary of the minister's daughter.

#### Section 8: Recreation and Amusements

Perhaps the most striking thing about the Norris diary is the constant whirl of social life unfolded in its pages. There was constant coming and going, tea-drinking and parties, games and dances, picnics and quilting parties—in fact hardly a day passed when Mary Ann did not tell of some social event in the community. Most common of all was calling and drinking tea. Sometimes there were breakfast guests or morning callers, and nearly always in the afternoon there was a round of outside calls or a number of visitors in the Norris home. Mary Ann writes of a typical day of social activity as follows:

Miss Walker dined with us in the morning Mr John Lawson, James Whidden, Mrs, and [Mr] Starr, Mrs Elias Burbidge, Miss Forsyth and William Walker called her[e] Miss Forsyth dined with us Catherine Robert and Martha [Prescott] spent the day with us and had the little Whiddens and Margaret and George Allison to drink tea with them Mrs Elias and Mrs Henry Burbidge drank tea with Mamma Miss Walker and myself went down to Uncles to spend the evening . . . we played two pools of Commerce and then danced a country dance. I danced with James Allison it was twelve o'clock [when we got home?]

Not all days were so packed with activity but many were, especially in Mary Ann's younger days. Sunday was a particularly good day for visiting, since the men were free from labor in the fields and the women comparatively free from housework. Mary Ann considered twelve callers "a tolerable number" for a Sunday. Often the round of week-day calls included visits to sick people, brides, and new-born babies.

Not only older people indulged in tea-drinking; often there were mixed tea parties among the young people of the village. In the early 1820's, Mary Ann and Catharine sometimes had

gentlemen callers, among whom were John Prescott, John Allison, and David Whidden. These three were inclined to be boisterous, and once they disguised themselves and went around the neighbourhood as Spaniards. According to Mary Ann's account, "John P[rescott] looked very bad," and no doubt gave the neighbours a good scare.

There were frequently overnight guests in the Norris home, sometimes a neighbour waylaid by the weather, sometimes friends or relatives from farther afield. Among the visitors were Fairbanks cousins from Halifax, the Kings and Emersons from Windsor, the Spurrs from Bridgetown, the Buskirks from Aylesford, and the Merritts from St. John. Mary Ann made return visits to these friends and relatives, the length of her stay depending on the distance travelled; and there were also visits to Kentville, Horton, and Canard, where she had many friends. One can picture her driving a horse and buggy along the rough country roads, stopping first at one house, then another, and perhaps being caught short by darkness, being persuaded to stay overnight at the last stopping-place.

There were other amusements as well as visiting. The young people loved to walk along the elm-skirted roads and fields of Cornwallis, sometimes arriving at Starr's Point and exploring the adjoining beach, sometimes following along the dykes that skirted the marshland, dividing it like a jig-saw puzzle. Long walks made a pleasant interlude in the busy lives of the people; and on any summer evening, one might have seen small groups of young people strolling along the country lanes as the last shadows stretched across the farms and meadows. Riding was also popular, sometimes on horseback, sometimes in a gig or waggon. There were all-day excursions when large groups rode to Indian Point, Baxter's Harbour, or the falls near Kentville. Mary Ann had a very good time at one of these outings when she went on a picnic with the Prescotts and others to see the falls.

The young people of Cornwallis played many different kinds of games, among them chess, solitaire, whist, piquett, and draughts. As a young girl, Mary Ann spent many evenings playing chess with her Uncle Charles or with James Allison; after one such evening she wrote gleefully: "I beat Mr. Jimmy one game of Chess and so did Kate." Many of the games played now sound unfamiliar, as when the Norrisses entertained thirteen guests by playing "how do you like it," "what is my thought like," "cross questions and answers" and "here is a Box". There were three gambling games played with cards, called "specula-

tion," "loo", and "commerce". Today it would be considered quite irregular for a minister's daughter to gamble her money, but Mary Ann thought nothing of losing a few shillings this way. We find her playing "Commerce" at Mr. Allison's with "all the youngsters in the neighbourhood" and winning six cents; and drinking tea at Mrs. Whidden's with some of the neighbours, then losing fifty-six cents. She had better luck gambling on a lottery ticket, for which she paid \$4.00 and received five in return. What Robert Norris thought of these proceedings Mary Ann does not say, but it is significant that her gambling activities cease abruptly after 1823.

The young people also loved to dance, and sometimes country dances were carried on far into the night. Young people drove to these parties from all the surrounding districts, and music was supplied by the violin and tambourine. It must have made a colorful picture to see the graceful movements of the quadrilles as partners advanced and retreated and whirled about the floor, bright-colored gowns contrasting with sombre frock-coats, and the whole scene thrown into sharp relief as candlelight reflected on the dancing figures. Mary Ann was among the gay dancers of the '20's and sometimes she did not arrive home till two or three o'clock in the morning. One can imagine sleighs full of Cornwallis young people returning across snow-covered roads after a party in Horton or Kentville, laughing and singing as sleigh-bells jingled and the fields gleamed under the stars. On arriving home, Mary Ann would take out her diary and write a few quick lines while bright pictures of the evening's merriment flashed across her mind. However, the damp chill of her room would send her quickly to bed, and a few hours later her dreams would be shattered as she rose with the sun to begin her daily duties.

There were many gatherings in Cornwallis where work and play were combined, particularly the sewing and quilting parties, which Mary Ann often attended. There were also husking frolics, raising frolics and piling frolics in many Kings County communities,<sup>1</sup> but Mary Ann does not mention attending any of these, perhaps because they sometimes became boisterous when rum flowed freely among the workers. Another form of recreation was singing. Mary Ann tells of being invited to Allison's to meet "the singers", and of going to Mr. Gesner's

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1. Eaton, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

to hear the choir sing on a Sunday afternoon. She was very much pleased with the latter and thought they performed very well.

Could we turn the clock back to a Christmas day in the 1820's or '30's, we would be very much disappointed by the lack of celebration. There were no cards or Christmas trees, no decorations and rarely any presents. Mary Ann marked the day by going to church, and in her younger days the Prescotts dined with the Norrises at a large family dinner. After the death of her parents Christmas was usually a lonely time for Mary Ann, but the year 1837 was an exception. She spent this Christmas in Halifax, and after St. Paul's service she went to her Uncle Fairbanks' home, where a family party of twenty-four sat down to dinner. Several more arrived in the evening, but Mary Ann gives no account of their entertainment. Only once was she given a Christmas present: this was in 1835, when she received "a very handsome Christmas box" from her favorite nephew Robert. The box contained a "very neat bible and prayer book", and Mary Ann was deeply touched and very much pleased with her present.

She tells of one New Year's Eve party in her own home. All the single people in the neighbourhood were invited, and all had a very good time. One set sang and danced in the kitchen, where they were finally joined by the rest of the party and ended by dancing several quadrilles all in high spirits. Mary Ann was not so pleased by the celebrations of another New Year's Eve, when one of the windows of the Norris kitchen was broken. Of this she wrote: "Some of the foolish boys in firing out the old and in the new year had fired into it."

New Year's dinner was eaten at Acacia Grove, where, besides the Norris family, there were generally other friends and relatives. On the first day of 1823 there was a very gay party after dinner at the Prescotts which Mary Ann describes as follows:

we played Lue until near twelve we then went into the Dining room and danced a Quadrill after that we got something to eat from thence we went into the drawing room and had a country dance it was past two o'clock when we got home . . .

By and large, it appears that there was more social life in a community of a century and a quarter ago than there would be in a similar community today. This is easily accounted for when one thinks of the numerous forms of recreation that have been

introduced since the early 1800's: moving pictures, radio, automobile, even the airplane, are each a part of a trend away from the closely knit community life that was typical of the age in which Mary Ann Norris lived. These and many other forms of recreation are taken for granted today, but it is evident from the Norris diary that not knowing what they missed, people could and did have a very happy time without them.

#### Conclusion

In conclusion, it is interesting to note that the author of the Norris diary died on June 13, 1880, and her grave may still be seen half hidden among the brambles in the old Fox Hill burying ground of Cornwallis. Not far away stands Acacia Grove, the home that Charles Prescott made famous for its hospitality and beauty more than a century and a quarter ago. The old residence has been restored to its former loveliness by a direct descendant of its builder, Miss Mary Allison Prescott, and today stands as a worthy memorial of the age in which Mary Ann Norris lived.