

Outline #9  
Everyday Life After the Revolution:  
Film: *A Midwife's Tale*

Overview. The film/documentary looks at the life of Martha Ballard (a midwife and healer) and her family. They lived in a small town in Maine along the Kennebec River during the three decades after the American Revolution. The film is based on Ballard's diary and historian Laurel Ulrich's book about Ballard, and it includes recreations of key events in the town of Kennebec as well as discussions of how Ulrich used Ballard's diary and other sources to recreate what life was like in that place and time.

Consider the following questions as you watch. We will discuss these questions afterward.

What were some of Martha Ballard's daily activities?

Why was there tension between Martha Ballard and Dr. Page?

What were some of the typical activities of Martha's daughters?

How did Ephraim Ballard (Martha's husband) make a living? Why was his work dangerous?

Were the Ballards' activities typical or atypical of rural Americans at that time?

How did people in the film see premarital pregnancy? How did Martha determine who the fathers of the children of unwed mothers were? Why was that important, and what do you think about that?

What did the Ballards think about what the film described as a growing emphasis on rights and a decrease in "deference" shown to those people of higher social status? Why did they feel that way, do you think?

Was social order in the community largely shaped by informal institutions, such as family and friends, or through formal institutions like courts and lawsuits? Why?

In what ways do you think that life in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century was similar to life in 21<sup>st</sup> century America? How was it different?