

The Maynard Jacket by Ross W. Beales, Jr.

N.B. *John Maynard*, Capt. *Maynards* Grandson, came with a present of Beef and Sewet; but he especially brought from his Grandmother 2 and 1/2 Yards of black, home-made Cloth, to make me a Jacket: it is of fine Wool, and is well wrought — a worthy Token of her Goodness! May God return it in Spiritual Blessings in heavenly Things in Christ Jesus! (Jan. 7, 1756)

Over the years the Reverend Ebenezer Parkman of Westborough and his family received a wide range of tangible tokens of appreciation and respect from his parishioners: the raw, processed, and finished products of the dairy, garden, field, and pasture; errands to Boston; labor on their farm and in their household; discounts on wages and prices. Parkman conscientiously recorded these gifts in his diary, sometimes with an appropriate expression of gratitude.

In the case of the presents from the Maynards, Parkman's entry bears special scrutiny. He began with a typical identification: John Maynard is Captain John Maynard's grandson, not Hephzibah Maynard's — just as women were usually identified in the diary as "Mrs.," "wife of," "widow of," or "daughter of." He then mentioned the beef and suet, the product of the captain's side of the world: the pastures where cattle grazed, the boys who tended the cattle, and the knives that men wielded in butchering. At this point, the product of the men's work — the beef and suet — disappeared from the diarist's record, entering into the domain of women's work and later appearing, without remark, at meals and in candle sticks.

This was not the case, however, with the cloth that John Maynard brought from his grandmother. This was a special gift, not for Parkman's family but for him: he noted the length of the cloth (two and half yards); its color (black); the place of its production (home-made); its purpose (a jacket); its quality (fine — a testament to the spinster's skill); the material (wool); and the skill of its donor ("well wrought"). This was indeed "a worthy Token of her Goodness!" And, one might suggest, a worthy token for his goodness.

Fourteen months later, Mary Nurse was at the Parkman home, "making me a black Jacket, the Cloth of which was given by Hephzibah Maynard last Fall was 12 Month" (Apr. 22, 1757). There is no record of the jacket's appearance (other than its color) or of the occasions when Parkman wore it. Did Hephzibah Maynard take pride in seeing the minister in a jacket made from her fine wool cloth, and did Parkman make a point of wearing it for her?

Parkman's next reference to the jacket reveals the strong and lasting association between donor and recipient. Almost three years after Hephzibah Maynard's gift and a year and a half after Mary Nurse made the jacket, Parkman carried the "Maynard Jacket to Lt. Woods to be dyed" (Dec. 1, 1758). Unlike other articles of clothing that Parkman identified by color or material, this was the *Maynard* jacket. But had he been wearing it? The wool cloth was black when he received it; was its color uneven and therefore in need of further attention before he wore it, or had it been wearing unevenly? Whatever the case, Lt. Woods, "the Clothier," also respected a man of the cloth and "gave me the dying of my black Jacket" (Mar. 22, 1759).

The last reference to the Maynard jacket is similarly ambiguous. More than eight months after sending the Maynard jacket to be dyed by Lt. Woods, “Miss Betty Johnson here to make up a Black Jacket for me — the Maynard Cloth Jacket having been new dyed, and now turned” (Aug. 30, 1759). Was Betty Johnson fashioning a new jacket from the “new dyed” Maynard jacket after it was “turned” (that is, inside out).

In following the few records of Hephzibah Maynard’s home-made cloth, one enters part way into a complex world of textiles and clothing. Lt. Woods’ role as clothier appears obvious, but the women’s roles are less clear. Parkman specifically mentions Woods’ calling: he is a clothier. But what about the women? Was Mary Nurse or Betty Johnson a tailor? Quite probably not: their tailoring was most likely one dimension but not central to their identities. That said, it is nonetheless true that the women who worked on the Maynard jacket were but two of nearly thirty individuals who did tailoring work for the Parkmans: women and men; residents of Westborough, nearby towns, and Boston; and itinerants.

Nor is it likely that Captain Maynard’s wife was a weaver, but she did weave. Her gift to Parkman was the product not merely of her loom but of the myriad steps leading to the loom: the raising of sheep (or the purchase of wool) and the annual shearing, washing, carding, and spinning. And what about her loom? There is nothing to suggest its location or size, how long Hephzibah Maynard had it, or what else she did with it. But Parkman’s language is again suggestive. Hephzibah Maynard’s cloth was of “fine wool” and “well wrought.” She was clearly an accomplished weaver, and Parkman’s appreciative description of her work was unique — that is, among the twenty-two individuals from whom the Parkmans bought woven materials, none was honored with the language that described Hephzibah Maynard’s gift.

Hephzibah Maynard died some eighteen months after her gift to Parkman. “She was 70 Years old last January — a woman of remarkable Diligence and Skill in Family Affairs; and very compassionate and bountifull to the Poor; a Very Serviceable person in the Neighbourhood, and gave ready Assistance to all who Sought to her. She was in a peculiar Manner liberal and helpful to Me and Mine at all times” (Oct. 20, 1757). Not only did he commemorate her in the privacy of his diary, but the next Sunday, his sermon, “Occasioned by the Death of Mrs. Hephzibah Maynard,” was on Prov. 31:10, “Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies.”¹

¹Parkman Family Papers, Box 1, Folder 5. For a digital image of the sermon, see: <https://congregationallibrary.quartexcollections.com/Documents/Detail/ebenezer-parkman-sermon-proverbs-3110-1757/110340> (accessed Sept. 29, 2022).