Anne’s Childhood

If this book were about Abraham Lincoln, you might read about what his favorite snack was and how he loved to wrestle. If this book were about Helen Keller, you might read about her train trip to visit an eye doctor in Maryland. But this book is about Anne Hutchinson, and we don’t know much about Anne’s childhood. We definitely don’t know her favorite snack.

In fact, we don’t even know her birthday!

We do know that Anne was born in a quiet village called Alford in the county of Lincolnshire, England, in 1591. That was more than four hundred years ago! In those days, the government didn’t issue birth certificates. However, each church kept records of babies who were baptized in that church. Historians know from studying the records of St. Wilfrid’s Church in Alford that on July 20, 1591, Anne’s parents, Francis and Bridget Marbury, brought Anne there to be baptized. Babies were usually baptized when they were about three days old, so Anne’s birthday was probably on or around July 17. But we don’t know for sure.

baptized: brought into the Christian community
Changing Days

During Anne Hutchinson’s lifetime, England still followed the Julian Calendar even though in 1582 a large part of Europe had adopted the Gregorian Calendar. The Gregorian Calendar differed by ten days at that time. Therefore, Anne Hutchinson’s baptism occurred on what would be July 30 on today’s calendar.

Alford was a typical English village. Long before Anne was born, people had come to this lovely spot where a dirt road crossed a river. Over time, they had built about seventy thatched-roof houses. There were also some shops, including a textile shop that sold cloth, and of course the lovely stone church. Some of the houses in the village were very small, while others were larger.

The Marbury family was neither poor nor wealthy, so we think that their house was medium-sized. It probably had three rooms. The Marbury family kept farm animals like chickens, pigs, sheep, and cows. They grew fruits, vegetables, herbs, and grain in a large garden.

In those days, people often made things they needed themselves. As a little girl, Anne learned from her mother how to do all the important household tasks that helped a family thrive. She learned how to spin thread from wool or flax and how to weave it into cloth. She learned how

flax: plant often grown for its fiber
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to make clothes for the family and how to mend them if they ripped. She learned how to preserve the fruits and vegetables that her family grew in their garden. It would be hundreds of years before refrigerators and freezers were invented, so Anne learned to dry and pickle fruits and vegetables to use throughout the year. She learned to make cheese and butter from milk.

Anne, like other girls, had to learn these tasks because families were very large, and everyone had to pitch in to get the day’s work done. And someday Anne would grow up, marry, and have children of her own. She would need to be able to run her own household.

Anne learned some important lessons from her mother that not every girl learned. Anne and her mother’s
special task was collecting herbs and using them to make medicines like teas, tisanes, and cordials to help sick people. There weren’t very many doctors at the time, so most women had to know how to treat simple illnesses themselves. Anne’s mother not only knew the common remedies but also had more advanced knowledge. She served as a midwife to women in the village. (A midwife is someone who helps mothers give birth to babies.) Anne learned these skills from her mother. So Anne was a well-known healer and midwife long before she was a well-known religious leader.

But Anne’s childhood was different from the childhoods of many other young girls of her time in one really important way: Anne knew how to read.

**tisanes:** liquids created by leaving herbs in water for a period of time