

## Sevilla Jones and Henry Sargent – Love and Murder in New Boston

by Dan Rothman

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The inscription on New Boston's most notorious gravestone reads:

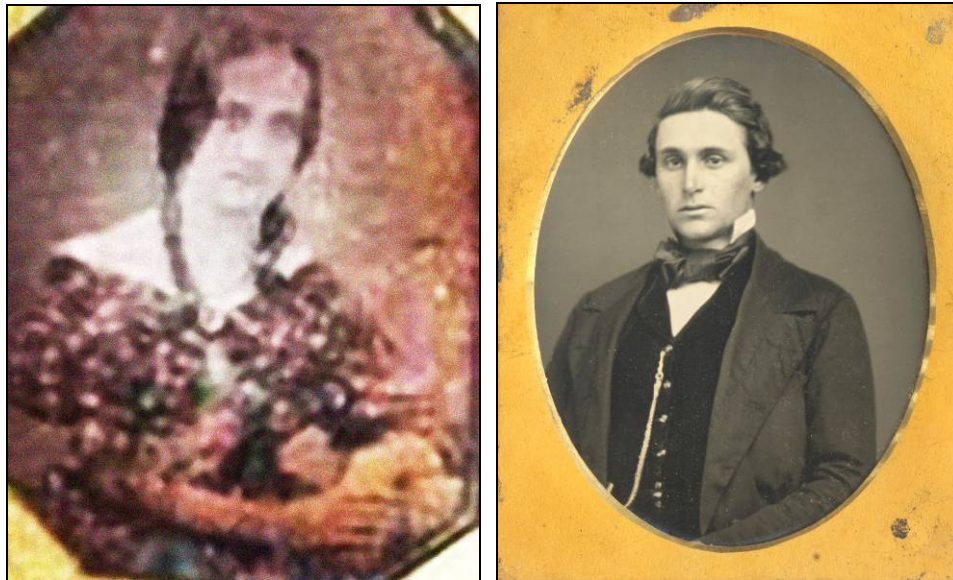
SEVILLA, daughter of George and Sarah JONES.  
Murdered by HENRY N. SARGENT, January 13, 1854.  
[At the age of] 17 years and 9 months.  
*Thus fell this lovely blooming daughter  
By the revengeful hand - a malicious Henry  
When on her way to school he met her  
And with a six self-cocked pistol shot her.*

One winter morning in 1854, Sevilla Jones was walking to Schoolhouse #3 near Joe English Hill with her younger brother Plummer. They were approached by Henry Sargent, a 23-year-old woodcutter whose family lived near the Jones family. Henry loved Sevilla, and he believed that she had “given him encouragement.” However, he had a rival in another young man, named Bartlett.

According to a long, rambling note written in his diary, Henry believed that Bartlett’s mother had conspired with Sevilla’s mother to convince the girl to prefer Bartlett. “She proved false, by bad advice,” he wrote. (The complete text of Henry’s letter appears later in this document.)

Henry used an Allen & Thurber pepperbox revolver to shoot Sevilla four times, killing her instantly. He then shot himself, with less immediate success. It has been said that a doctor was fetched, but this doctor was so angry with Henry that he wouldn’t treat Henry’s wound. Henry died hours later.

As for the curious epitaph on the gravestone – some say that it was written by Bartlett’s mother.



*Are these photographs of Sevilla and Henry?*

The above photographs are attached to entries for Sevilla and Henry in the “Find A Grave” database for the New Boston cemetery <https://www.findagrave.com/cemetery/1857909>. The photographs were uploaded in 2004 by a Florida man named Herbert Rickard. I contacted Herbert in 2011 to determine the source of the pictures. He replied: “A scanned copy of the photo in question was sent to me from a fellow who told me he did volunteer work for the New Boston Historical Society. He told me the photo was in the collection.”

Herbert wrote that the original high-resolution copy of Sevilla's portrait disappeared when FindAGrave migrated its files to a new server. Herbert's own computer crashed twice between 2004 and 2011, and Herbert lost his images and the contact information for his New Boston source.

In 2011 I could find no one at the New Boston Historical Society who remembered Herbert Rickard or any photographs of Sevilla and Henry. I've searched the Historical Society computers, file cabinets, and boxes of photographs, with no success.

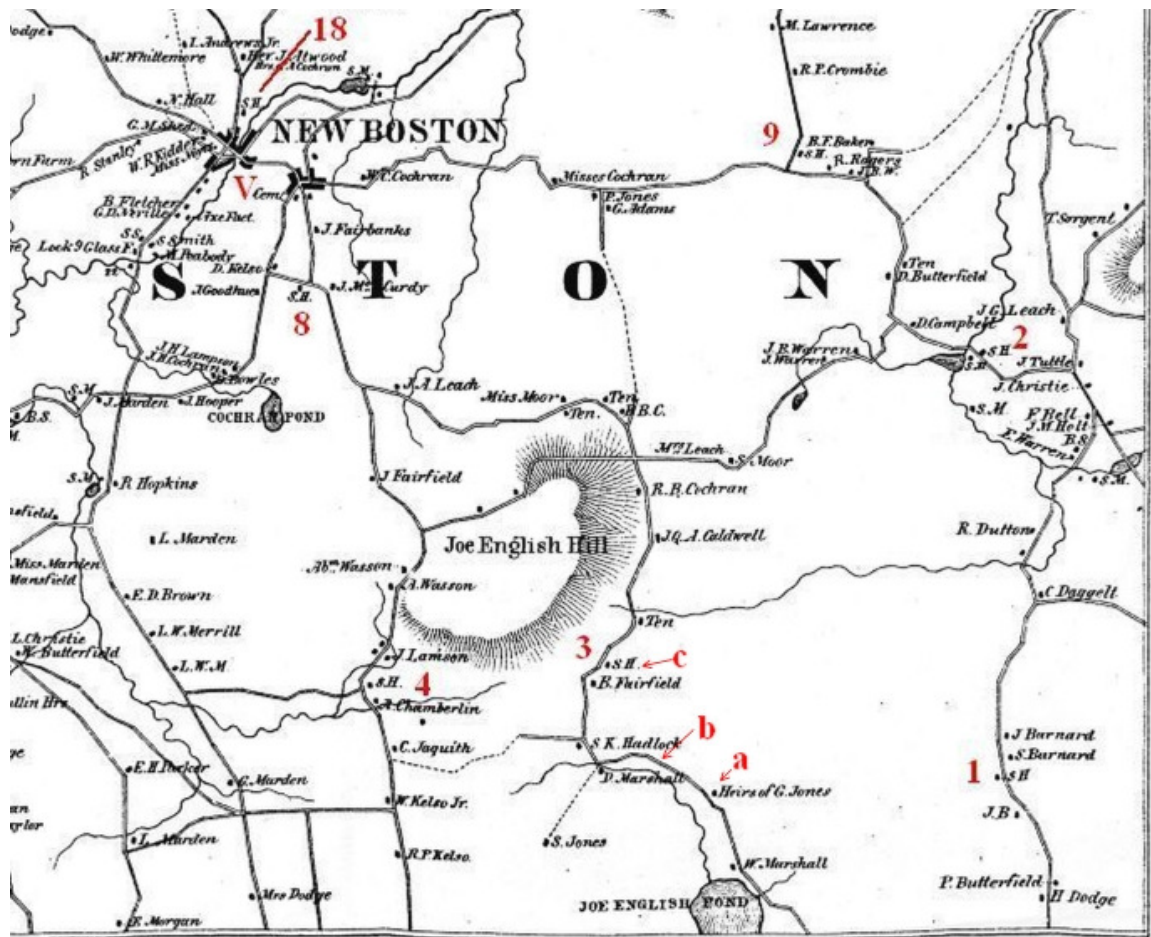
We sometimes find items in the Historical Society collection which are mislabeled, and I have always been doubtful about these two portraits. The oldest photographs in our collection date from the Civil War (1861-1865). How likely is it that two young people in New Boston had their portraits made prior to 1854?

Not very likely, I thought, but in 2018 I re-read Henry Sargent's last letter, written to Mrs. Jones, Sevilla's mother. I noticed this text: "[Sevilla] said that any time I would come up, she would give back all that I ever gave her. I shan't come for them. I can tell you what they are, and you may give them to some of my folks, if you please."

Henry's list included: a gold heart on a chain, "One red Bible, cost me a dollar," and – most interesting! – two miniatures, about which Henry wrote, "I suppose you ought to have hers, although I paid for both."

Question: Are the FindAGrave images copies of Henry's two miniatures? (I don't know the answer, yet.)

### Sevilla's Last Day



In the 1800s, New Boston had as many as eighteen one-room schoolhouses, some of which are shown on the 1858 map above.

Sevilla and Plummer Jones were on their way from their home (a), past the Sargent house (b), to Schoolhouse #3 (c), which was at the base of Joe English Hill.

In 1854, Henry Sargent was living in the house of Allen Leach (exact location unknown), not at home with his mother. Several Leach houses are shown on the map, north and east of Joe English Hill.

The Jones and Sargent houses and Schoolhouse #3 are all gone today. Nor may you visit their cellar holes, as the 3,000 acre New Boston Air Force Station is off-limits to civilians.

1850 Census – New Boston, NH

137/146	George Jones	49	M	Framer
	Joseph "	36	f	
	Thomas "	15	M	Laborer
	Plummer "	11	M	
	Sevilla "	14	f	
	Rebecca "	1	f	
138/147	Charlotte Sargent	51	f	
	Leppitt Windsor	70	f	
	Samuel "	27	M	Laborer
	Almira "	25	f	
	Frank "	23	M	Framer
	Joseph "	19	M	Laborer
	Henry "	17	M	
	Charlotte "	12	f	

The 1850 Census shows the Jones family as neighbors of the Sargents.

Sevilla was 14 in 1850, and Henry was listed as 17, which is incorrect – he was 20 when the census was taken in September of 1850.

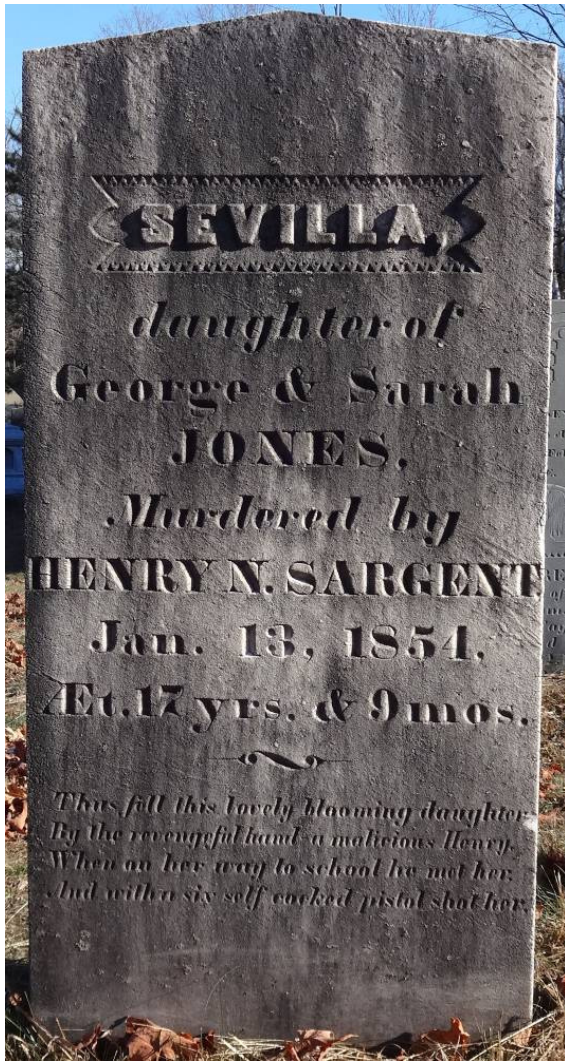
George Jones died in October 1853, a few months before his daughter Sevilla.

I wondered if Sevilla (age 17 ¾ in January 1854) was an older student or a young school teacher. The March 1854 report of the School Committee tells us that Miss Sarah Fairfield was the teacher:

DISTRICT No. 3. No Summer School.

WINTER SCHOOL. Miss Sarah Fairfield, teacher. This has been a backward school for several years; but few of the parents take much interest; consequently the attendance is very irregular. But the teacher was assiduous and successful in her labors. Those scholars that attended made a fine improvement. The school house is decidedly bad.





Henry wrote in his notebook:

“If I kill the girl that I love so dearly, please bury her by my side, both of us in one day. She proved false, by bad advice. Let this be a warning to all young lovers. If you want a wife, take her when she says ‘Yes’, or you may be sorry. Some may think I have done wrong, but I studied upon it, and thought that I should be love-snapped if I lived, and should see anyone else go with her, and I well know that the girl would not believe anything I said, so she will never know how well I loved her.

“I never should have got so tied up with her if she had not given me encouragement, time and again. Until Mr. Bartlett’s folks went up there, they never could get her. Cussed be the folks that lied to the girl... the world ought to know that they ruined me, once happy.”

Who was Mrs. Bartlett, who conspired with Mrs. Jones against Henry Sargent? I don’t know for sure, but I have a suspect.

In 1854, Anar Bartlett (1802-1884) was a 52-year-old widow living in New Boston, who had a son Ebenezer Bartlett (1835-1915), about a year older than Sevilla. Were Anar and Eben the Bartletts mentioned in Henry’s letter?

The 1860 census shows Anar Bartlett living with Eben and Eben’s wife Abbie. When Abbie died in 1914, she had been married to Eben for almost sixty years.

Henry wanted to be buried by Sevilla’s side, which did not happen. Sevilla was buried between her father George and her brother Plummer, who died in 1864. Henry is buried down the hill, near the main gates to the cemetery.

In 2018. Justine Paradis, a producer for New Hampshire Public Radio, contacted the Historical Society about the Sevilla & Henry story for NHPR's "Word of Mouth" program. Justine is an indefatigable researcher, and she found several interesting documents pertaining to Sevilla's gravestone. These were notes in the *Observant Citizen*, a column in the Manchester N.H. *Daily Union*, written 51 years after Sevilla's death.

Mont Vernon, July 11, 1905

Dear Observant Citizen: I saw in the Daily Union the verses that are on my sister's gravestone in New Boston cemetery, Servilla Jones, who was killed by Henry Sargent on her way to school near Joe English Hill. Mr. King wishing to know the author of the verses. I will inform him that it was Conrad St. Dennis. It was in the year 1854, the 18th [sic] of January, and I have the paper, the Daily Mirror, that was printed at that time, which tells all about the tragedy. Sargent sat up the night before, making his will and laying his plans to meet Servilla on her way to school. It is a very sad story and I am the sister of Servilla Jones. Mrs. Elnora Winn.

Elnora Jones Winn was the youngest sister of Sevilla, not quite 3 years old when Sevilla died.

All that we know about Conrad St. Dennis is that he is the author of a one-page poem titled, "*Henry and Servilla: or, The Death Bridal, being a graphic account of the New Boston Tragedy,*" published five days after Sevilla's death. It includes, "He took the maiden by the hand / 'You shall be mine,' he said / Then drew a pistol from his breast / And shot her through the head!"

I have read "The Death Bridal" several times – it doesn't get better with re-reading – and I don't see any similarity between the St. Dennis poem and the epitaph on Sevilla's gravestone. Elnora's letter to the Observant Citizen was in response to an inquiry about "The Death Bridal"; I don't believe she meant to refer to the gravestone epitaph.

– July 13 1905 - Mrs. W.H.B. in Goffstown—writes that "I think William Butterfield of New Boston composed the inscription and a Mrs. Bartlett prepared the verse. I will try to learn if I am correct."

I believe that "the inscription" refers to the text on the gravestone: "Sevilla Jones... murdered by Henry Sargent" and "the verse" begins: "Thus fell this lovely blooming daughter."

I wondered who William Butterfield was, and what his connection to the Jones family might be. I learned that William was a 50-year-old farmer married to Hannah Averill of Mont Vernon. I expect that the Jones family and the Averills were close friends; after Sevilla died, no fewer than three of Sevilla's siblings married a niece or nephew of Hannah Averill Butterfield.

-- July 14 1905 - the Observant Citizen writes:

"The gravestone over Servilla Jones at New Boston, the girl whose tragic death was recalled in the poem printed Saturday, was made in Nashua by the late Moses Davis, whose business is still conducted by his son, Albert A. Davis. The inscription stated that Servilla Jones was murdered by Henry M. Sargent, giving the dates and parentage, and then goes on to declare:

Thus Fell This Lovely, Blooming Daughter,  
By a Malicious Hand, a Revengeful Henry.  
When on Her Way to School He Met Her,  
And With a Six, Self-Cocked Pistol Shot Her."

The Observant Citizen is under obligations to E. Storey Clement, gate tender at the city station, Nashua, for the epitaph and facts, herein contained. Mr. Davis's shop was then in the building now occupied by the Hotel Windsor. The inscription on the stone was ordered by the mother of the murdered girl. Mr. Davis strongly advised her to leave off or modify the epitaph, suggesting that the future might change her feelings, but she insisted, and on the penalty of having the job done elsewhere he performed the work.

*Note:* Sevilla's name is spelled "Servilla" in many newspaper stories; I wonder if this reflects a New Hampshire pronunciation of her name? Her name is spelled "Sevilla" without an "r" on her gravestone.



## The Allen Pepper-box Revolver



“And with a six self-cocked pistol shot her.”

I suspect that a word is missing from the phrase “six self-cocked pistol” in Sevilla’s gravestone epitaph. “Six barreled” or “six shot” would make more sense.

“Self-cocked” means that the gun could be fired repeatedly just by squeezing the trigger; there was no need to thumb the gun’s hammer before each shot.

Mark Twain wrote in *Roughing It* (1872):

“George Bemis wore in his belt an old original ‘Allen’ revolver, such as irreverent people called a ‘pepper-box.’ It was a cheerful weapon—the ‘Allen.’ Sometimes all its six barrels would go off at once, and then there was no safe place in all the region round about, but behind it.”

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## Henry’s Last Letter

The complete text of Henry Sargent’s letter was published in the (Manchester) Union Democrat on January 14, 1854, and in the New York Times on January 30, 1854.

I thank Justine Paradis for the following transcription of the Union Democrat article:

### **Terrible Tragedy in New Boston** Murder and Suicide

One of the most dreadful tragedies which has ever occurred in this vicinity took place at New Boston last week. We are indebted to the *Daily Mirror* for the details, which, as the editor, with commendable enterprise, personally gathered, are doubtless nearly correct.

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The most heartrending event that has taken place in our vicinity since the Parker murder, with one exception, occurred at New Boston, fourteen miles from this city, yesterday, the 13th inst.

Henry N. Sargent, a young man 23 years old, met Miss Servilla Jones, a young lady only 17 years old, with whom he was ardently in love, but his love was not reciprocated, on her way to school in New Boston, about nine o’clock in the morning, yesterday, and shot her dead, and put a rifle ball through his own head, so that he expired in about six hours.

We spent most of last night in visiting the spot where this awful tragedy occurred and in learning the causes which led to such a mournful result, and are able to give the following particulars: Mrs. Charlotte

*Sevilla Jones & Henry Sargent*

Sargent, formerly of Goffstown and mother of Henry, lived about 1-3 of a mile from Servilla's mother whose husband died last October, leaving an estate worth \$8000 and seven children. Mrs. Sargent is a widow and has now three sons and two daughters.

Henry was a wood-cutter in winter, and worked out on farms and building roads at other seasons of the year. He was tall, athletic and hardy, and oftentimes camped out in the woods for months together, cooking his own food and living like "timber-kings." About a year ago he became enamored with Servilla, and as neighbors say, for a while she was pleased with his attentions, but through outward influences was induced to treat him coldly. Upon that subject, that of marrying her, from that moment, he has been insane; it has been his only, great engrossing idea. He said last summer that if she did not marry him he would murder her. Last week he asked the Sexton of the town if he could dig a grave for him this week. The day before this sad event he told one of his friends that he wanted to have him attend his funeral on the next Sabbath. It seems that he had calculated this deliberately.

Last week he went to Boston and got, as is supposed, the pistols which he used. His absence and strange actions within a few weeks past, created fears among a few friends that he would commit suicide. Last Monday he went to Milford, and after his absence his mother found a bottle in his cupboard that she thought had had laudanum in it from the smell. She was alarmed and someone was sent after him, and when found he appeared as usual. Last Thursday he came to New Boston village, a distance of about four miles, and hired a man, at an extra price, to bring him to Manchester and back before dark. While the man was getting ready Sargent went to the Post-Office and took out a letter, returned to the hotel and sat on a bunk out doors a long time, apparently disturbed by its contents. When informed that the horse would soon be ready, he said that he should not go, as he had received a letter. He spent that night at the house of Mr. Allen Leach, about 1 1-2 miles from New Boston village, on the road to his mother's, and 2 1-2 miles from her. The mothers of the two unfortunates live 1-3 of a mile apart. Sargent set up in his chamber till one o'clock at night writing and came down to warm his feet before retiring. He ate a good breakfast the next morning, (yesterday) and left it for his mother's. He knew that Servilla would come to school on that road, and he calculated to meet her. The schoolhouse is partway down a long and steep hill. Some hundred rods beyond it he met her, and she said, "Good morning Henry;" he made no remark, but took hold of her right arm with his left hand, and with his right instantly drew a self-cocking, six-barreled, Allen's revolver and discharged it several times into the side of her head, and she fell lifeless. Instantly he put one of the Allen's one-barreled rifle pistols perpendicular to the side of his head, a little above the ear, and discharged it, and the ball passed through his head and he fell by her side senseless. Her brother, 15 years old, was nearby and some smaller children; and they were terribly frightened so that before they had got the news to the nearest house, two men came along and found them as above described. He could but just breathe, and it was not supposed that he would survive many minutes, but he continued alive about six hours longer.

The blood of each one made a deep hole in the snow, some six inches in diameter and four feet from each other. By the clear moonlight we beheld the blood washed snow, right in sight of the homes made desolate, bereft of a sister and brother, as dear to those mourners, who last night was one of waking, as is brother or sister to anyone who reads this. The mother of Henry heard the reports of the pistol, five in number, as she says, and instantly flashed up on her mind, "Henry has killed himself." Two of the barrels of the pistol with which he shot her were loaded when found, and it is supposed that he fired at her four times, and reserved the rifle pistol for his own destruction. A razor was found in his pocket. He had determined to make death sure, doubtless, and in case of failure of the pistol to cut his own throat. We called at the house of his mother at 1 1-2 o'clock, last night, and though the lights were gone, no sleep had come to that sad and mourning household. We saw his lifeless form; his face bore no indication of malice in his last hour, but rather of joy with having died by the side of the only one he could ever love. How bitter the tears, how poignant the grief of that family!

Though near the house where Servilla lay a corpse in the house of her mother, we had no heart to enter another abode of sorrow. What may be the painfully bitter sorrowings of that family, those only have lost a lovely daughter or affectionate sister are able to judge.

The cause of this strange event we will let the record tell. We remarked that Sargent wrote till one o'clock the night before he died. In his pocket was found the following in a small memorandum book, only

altered in spelling, and a few particulars:--on each cover, "Please look this book through," and on the inside it commenced,

"Jan 11th, 1854. Here I make my will.—I Henry N. Sargent, give all that I have to Joseph M. Sargent, after my death,

Henry N Sargent."

You will find my notes about my person, or in my pocket book. I have twenty-seven dollars in it. Look on the 10th page. (On the 10th page the bills were found as described.)

If I kill the girl that I love so dearly, please bury her by my side, both of us in one day. She proved false by bad advice. Let this be a warning to all young lovers. If you want a wife, take her when she says "Yes," or you may be sorry. Some may think I have done wrong, but I studied upon it, and thought that I should be love-snapped if I lived, and should see anyone else go with her, and I well know that the girl would not believe anything that I said, so she will never know how well I loved her. I never should have got so tied up with her if she had not given me encouragement, time and again. Until Mr. Bartlett's folks went up there, they never could get her. Cussed be the folks that lied to the girl. Folks or the world ought to know that they ruined me, once happy. I blame Servilla's mother for coaxing me to go with her daughter, Servilla. Even after I first rode with her, there was nothing good enough for me until now, and turned my bitterest enemy, by a fools advice. I never talked with Mr. Jones about love affairs, but depend upon it, he is best of them all. He used me like a man. My folks plagued me some at first, but not anything to hurt. Mr. Jones told me to let them work, and Mrs. Jones said that she gave my mother a real talking to. Now ain't this coaxing and then turning right against me for nothing, only a few stories which everyone knows will fly if a fellow goes with any girl?

Now friends, don't take my death hard, for you know that I am better off in hell, than I am here for the world to laugh at. Mother, why do you cry? You ought to think that your son Henry is better dead, than a poor love sick fellow which you see about stores and places and shops. I have seen them time and time and helped make fun of them. Now I think of it. But as I have said, the world will not have Henry N. Sargent for a laughing post. I tell you I am as strong in mind as I ever was. I know that I ain't fit to die, but what can I do? You must pray for me, all of you. Brother and sister. I should not be so strong in mind if I didn't think of taking my love along with me. I may grow nervous and miss my aim, but I hope not. I write the most of this with tears on my cheeks. Joseph, I want you should see that we, I mean Servilla and myself, are buried side by side. Mrs. Jones, will you grant our bodies this decent and Christian burial?—for I know that she has loved me if she don't yet—and put on our gravestones what we died for.

I am most frozen and cannot write so any one can read. You must copy it off, if you do anything with it. Let Henry say what he will about love, he got caught at last. I used to think that love would never hurt me.

Mrs. Jones, I am willing to forgive you for the wrongs you have done me. I am well aware that I make you trouble, by taking Servilla away from you, but I can't help it. She belongs to me, and you know it. You made the match, and you and others broke it. They who are made to go together, will go in time. You must not take this too hard—only bear in mind, never get a young man fettered in love and then turn against him. You know that you wanted me to go with her. You may think me young to advise you, but I am going to let you know that you did very wrong to say so much about my going with Servilla. – you have trusted me with her time and again, and when we came home you appeared very pleasant, treated me with the best. You cannot deny this. You had a large apple you would give it to me. And now see what you brought me—from a happy boy to the grave.

I told you the time that you and I had the talk, that you was doing wrong, and you said that I only wanted property, and you would not believe anything that I said. I said that I could get property if I had Servilla, and you said she was too young, and I told you that I would wait for her, and I told you to say what made the change, and why you should treat me so. You burst out crying and said that Servilla says she would never live happy. And says I to her then you don't want me, and she says just as mother says. I then turned to you, and you was wiping your eyes.---when the boys came in, and B. I believe, but won't be sure about him, and I staid half

*Sevilla Jones & Henry Sargent*



an hour or so and got up and was about to go when I had a chance to tell you to think of it, and you cannot count the times I called it to my mind—I hear the clock strike every hour almost—and some of you have answered my letter after a while, but I saw in a few minutes that Servilla Jones never composed that letter, and you freed your mind enough, Mrs. Jones. Is this right? You say that Servilla says that I dare not tell her my faults. I told all that I know, and if she will not hear, what can I do. I went to her school, and talked with her, and she said but little, and that was the best way for her. She said that any time I would come up, she would give back all that I ever gave her. I shan't come for them. I can tell you what they are, and you may give them to some of my folks, if you please. One red bible, cost me a dollar; one gold pencil and cord and gold heart on one cord; one red pocket book, or porte monnaie; two miniatures, or, I suppose, you ought to have hers, although I paid for both. But I make you a present of it.—Remember that you killed us both. Servilla would never have turned against me without your consent. Something else. One gold dollar; one gold ring, or two, I forgot which, and another lot of small stuff, rather too small for a dead man to look up.

I fear that you may go crazy, on this, but you are not so much to blame, as some others. They are the ones that ought to go crazy—here they almost ruined two pretty families. It is of no use for them to deny this. But seeing that I, Henry N. Sargent have gone from this hard world and still harder people, and took along with me one that I love more than tongue or pen can tell—Servilla Jones—I am not afraid to say, who I think made the disturbance. I think and know, that Bartlett's folks made their part, for I have seen enough when I have been there to convince me, and they will prosper accordingly. I should like to ask her if she thinks that she will get to Heaven, where she [p]lots so much on going. I can see her through. Think of this, ye men and women who meddle with other young folks' love affairs. Do you feel any better than you would if I and she had lived and been happy? You will try to say, that had nothing to do with it, but your old age was not quite quick enough for this boy, and Servilla told me you did not speak well of me, nor any of the folks. I always used you well, for what I know. Good bye, hypocrites.

All people take warning by this, and avoid the strings of love as you would the angel of death.

Please read this to them all, and you will accommodate me, HENRY N. SARGENT.

Mother, don't mourn for me, for it will do no good. You just think of it, and you will see that I did right, and the best thing that I could do. Stay at home and live easy. Good bye.

Daniel, you are over at Milford, I suppose and it is a chance if you see me alive again. Do the best you can. You will settle with Joseph, and about that wood lot, - and give him something.

John and Edward, what shall I put on your page? Don't mourn for me Elmira, but pray for me. You help Joseph read this, for I wrote It in my room, last night, without fire, and I set up all night. Give my love to Franklin and Charlotte. Good bye, all. I trust that you will read this to them.