

Benjamin Hawley's Diary – Chester County

1775

[April]

Seventh Day. Cold. Draw'd wood. Jane 2 weeks.

First Day. Clouds & cold wind, hard frost. Some spots of snow. Went to Bradford. Expenses 3.

Second Day. Clear & cold wind. Come home. Called at Osborns for 2 bushels of malt 12s.

Third Day. Cloudy. Some small snow & rain.

Fourth Day. Clear, flying clouds & high winds. Harrow'd the flax ground.

Fifth Day. Cold, N.wind, hard frost. Dolen cutting wood. I went to Mill w/ Rye. Bot a gallon of molasses 2s.

Sixth Day. d, Sow'd the flax & furrowed some for corn. Dolen cutting wood.

Seventh Day. A fine day, like spring. Went to Mill w/ 2 ½ bushels of wheat. Paid Dolen 6s for 3 days work.

First Day. d, but coll E-ly wind. Went to Rachel Seals for ointment for my wife. P.M. Rachel Seal came here. Jane 3 weeks.

Second Day. Cloudy, cold E-ly wind. I went to Mill w/ 2 ½ bushels of wheat.

1. Why does Benjamin Hawley refer to the days as "First Day, Second Day...?"
 - a. Benjamin Hawley was a member of the religious sect called Quakers. They referred to themselves as "Friends." They did not believe in using names of months and days that came from pagan deities, so they used a simple numbering method to separate the months and days. Sunday became "First Day," while January was "First Month."

2. What do you notice about every entry that Benjamin made in his diary? What was the most important thing that he focused on every day? Why do you think that is?
 - a. Benjamin never failed to note what the weather was like that day. In a time before weathermen, colonial farmers depended on things like almanacs to predict the weather. Any colonial farmer who could afford one had an almanac, which was a book printed every year that contained information about weather forecasts, planting dates, tide tables and astronomical data like the times of the rising and setting sun. Benjamin is making similar notes in his own diary that he can save for next year, to try to plan his activities.
3. Judging by Benjamin Hawley's entries into his diary for April, what were his most important jobs? Why would he spend so much time doing this work?
 - a. Benjamin "draw'd", cut and split wood. In a time when wood was needed for almost everything from fires (for light, warmth and cooking) to building barns and fences, the Hawley family would have constantly needed wood. Benjamin also spent time "drawing dung," which meant dragging manure from the animal area to the fields. This was in preparation for the planting season, when the fertilizer would be needed.
 - b. Benjamin "harrow'd the flax ground." After plowing, fields must be harrowed to break up big clumps of soil and smooth the surface for planting.
 - c. Benjamin sowed, or planted, his flax. Flax was essential to farmers in order to produce linen fabric, from which they could make their clothing.
4. Benjamin visited the Mill twice in January. What did he take with him? What does that tell you about what Benjamin did for a living?
 - a. He took rye to the Mill to be ground into flour. This means that Benjamin grew rye on his farm, and also grew wheat (which he takes to the Mill in other months.) Wheat was a very valuable crop, since it grew well in southeastern Pennsylvania but was difficult to grow in many places around the world. Benjamin likely sold most of his wheat but kept his rye for his own personal use.

- b. He took 2 ½ bushels of wheat to the Mill. Since his next entry indicates that he paid Dolen, his farmhand, we can assume that he sold the wheat to the Miller and did not have it ground into flour for his own use.
- 5. What did Benjamin buy in January, at the Mill and from others? Why do you think he had to buy these things?
 - a. Benjamin bought:
 - i. 2 bushels of malt.
 - ii. One gallon of molasses.
- 6. What are some words that are unfamiliar to you? Look them up in the dictionary. Which definitions do you think are correct for what Benjamin was saying?
 - a. “draw’d” meaning to pull or move something.
 - b. “malt,” meaning cereal grains (like wheat or rye) that have been allowed to germinate, then dried. Malt is used for making beer, whiskey and malted vinegar.
 - c. “bushel,” meaning a unit of dry measurement, typically equals about 60 pounds of grain seeds.