

Benjamin Hawley's Diary – Chester County

1775

[February]

Fourth Day. A fine Day. I went to Concord Meeting. Dolen splitting rails.

Fifth Day. d' Draw'd rails. Dolen splitting cherry. Bot a heifer calf.

Sixth Day. d' very warm. Draw'd some dung. Dolen d'. Daughter Mary came here.

Seventh Day. Cloudy. I went to Abrahams. Had 10 lb. of Butter. Not paid. Daughter Mary went home.

First Day. A fine day. Hard frost. I went to Concord Meeting. Hannah 4 weeks.

Second Day. d'd' cloudy. Ploughing for corn.

Third Day. A fine warm day. Plowing for flax.

Fourth Day. Cloudy, warm mist of rain. I went to monthly meeting.

Fifth Day. Cloudy all day. N.W. wind. Plowing & fencing.

Sixth Day. Cloudy N.E.ly wind & snowing & turned to rain.

Seventh Day. Cloudy the snow gone. Split 11 rails. I went to Trimbles, had 2 qt. of cordial 2s, 2 lb. of nails 1s 8, an oz. of snuff 8d. 4s 4 not paid. Hannah went away and I paid her 15 for 5 weeks. Rebehah came.

First Day. The ground cover'd with snow. Hannah 5 weeks; yesterday I went to Birmingham.

Second Day. Very cold, hard frost. Went to Quarterly meeting.

Third Day. Hazy, hard frost. Fencing about the wheat.

Fourth Day. d' at d'.

Fifth Day. More moderate. Finished the wheat fence.

Sixth Day. Frost & clouds like for rain. Went to Abrahams. Paid 8s 4 for 10 lb. of Butter.

Seventh Day. A fine day for plowing. Son Wm. & wife came to visit us. Rebehah 1 week.

First Day. d'd' I went to Concord Meeting. Lent Daniel Bailiff 1s.

Second Day. Some rain last night. Clear fine day. Plowing.

Third Day. d'd' I went to the Mill. Bot 2 Bushels of shorts 2s, 6 lb. of sugar 3s 9, Ground 1 ½ bushels of Rye; Paid 4s 5. Had the irons sharpened.

Fourth Day. d'd' Drest 3 1/16 of Flax, burnt the Brush.

Fifth Day. d'd', very warm. I went to Abraham's. Cleaned the flax seed.

Sixth Day. S-ly wind & rain all day. A great land flood. Cutting straw.

Seventh Day. Cool N.W. wind. Draw'd rails. Jane Jeffries came here.

First Day. Hard frost & cool day. At home. Jane went home. Rebekah 2 weeks.

Second Day. Hard frost, cloudy, cold S'ly wind. Drest 2 lb. 6 oz. of flax. I went to Trimble for a gallon of molasses 2s 6, two qt. of rum 1s 6, halpen of cam chese 10.

Third Day. Some clouds, moderate. Th' grubbing. Draw'd some wood & rails.

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. What kinds of activities did Benjamin and his family do in February?
    - a. Split rails. These rails would have been used to repair or build fencing around the farm.
    - b. "Ploughed," or plowed, the fields in order to plant corn and flax in the months to follow.
    - c. Put a fence around the wheat. This would have been wheat he planted in September, and would harvest in June. He had to fence it to keep the sheep and other animals from eating it.
    - d. He has his "irons sharpened." This probably means the iron blades of his plow, which had to be sharp in order to cut through the dirt, roots and sod in his fields.
    - e. He "drest" the flax. Flax is a plant used to make linen cloth. "Dressing" the flax means the process used to free the flax "fibers" from the stem of the plant. This is the step before spinning it into thread.
    - f. Cleaned the flax seed. This likely would have been eaten by Benjamin, so he cleaned it to remove any dirt, fungus or bugs that might be on the seed.
    - g. Cut straw, grown in pastures and used for bedding for the animals.
    - h. Did some "grubbing." This means he cleared the ground of roots and stumps, probably in preparation for planting in fields.
  4. What kinds of items did Benjamin sell in February?
    - a. He took 1 ½ bushels of rye to the mill, part to sell and part to have ground and keep for himself.
  5. What kinds of items did Benjamin buy in February?
    - a. A heifer calf (young female cow.)
    - b. Ten pounds of butter.

- c. Two quarts of cordial (a sweet alcoholic drink, or a drink of heavy fruit juice mixed with water), two pounds of nails, and an ounce of snuff.
  - d. Ten more pounds of butter.
  - e. Two bushels of shorts (the coarse, less valuable flour filled with bran that could not be sold to people; likely for animal feed), six pounds of sugar, and “ground” 1 ½ bushels of rye. This means that instead of trading the rye to the miller for other products, he probably kept some, gave the rest to the miller, and got a discount on the other things he purchased.
  - f. One gallon of molasses, two quarts of rum, a “halpen of cam chese.”
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. “3s 9” means an amount of currency, or money. The small “s” means shilling, which was a coin worth 12 pennies. When you put 3s 9” it means *three shillings, nine pence*. “Pence,” like “pennies,” is plural for penny.
  - b. “draw’ d” meaning to pull or move something.
  - c. “bushel” meaning a unit of dry measurement often used in agriculture. With wheat and rye, it means roughly 60 pounds of grain.
  - d. “shorts” meaning the byproduct of flour milling. The “shorts” consists of the bran, wheat germ, and some bits of flour that weren’t considered fit for human consumption. Benjamin was likely buying the shorts for his animals.
  - e. “Plowing” and “ploughing” means digging and turning over the soil in preparation for planting.