

Benjamin Hawley's Diary – Chester County

1775

January – The 1st of the 1st month. First Day. At home all day. Jane 13

Second Day. A fine day. Posting for Jones.

Third Day. d' warm finished posting for Jones. Mullen thrashing Rye.

Fourth Day. A fine day. The snow wastes some. Winnowed the Rye almost 10 bushels.

Fifth Day. A fine warm morning. I went to Robert Johnstons & to Son Wm. Bot at the new store 2 qt. of Rum 2s 2.

Sixth Day. d' Cold. Went to Wm. Jones. Carried his Books & made out the assessors act.

Seventh Day. A fine day. Had the horse shoed behind. Jane went to father and Hannah came here in her room. I went to Bradford.

First Day. d' hard frost Jane 14 weeks. At home all day.

Second Day. A fine day & snow settles & wastes some. About a rack.

Third Day. d' Some clouds warm, the snow wastes. Some about d'.

Fourth Day. Clear frost. I went to Concord Meeting. About rack warm.

Fifth Day. Cloudy – warm – some rain last night. I went to Mill w / 4 Bushels of Rye. Bot 1 bu. of Bran 1s 6. P.M. Clear'd cold wind. Finished the rack.

Sixth Day. Clear & hard frost & windy. Put up the Rack. Let Dolen have 1s 4 of meal 4 6.

Seventh Day. A fine day. Made a trough for the cow. Dolen cutting wood. John came home.

First Day. A fine warm day. The snow wastes fast. Went to Birmingham meeting & to abrahams. Hannah Jeffries 1 week.

Second Day. dd' Dolen cutting the white oak about the slead.

Third Day. d' warm, the snow mostly gone except drifts. Dolen cutting wood. Tallowed 4 for the wood he cut. He is ½ in my dept. Finished the slead.

Fourth Day. Cloudy. Began to snow the ground cover'd again. The snow that fell this day gone before night. Cutting & splitting wood.

Fifth Day. Cloudy & snowing last night & this morning. Like to be deep. I went to Mill. Bot 1 bush of Bran 1s 6, Six lbs. of sugar 3s 9, 1 gallon of molasses 2s 6, snuff 8d Total 8s 5.

Sixth Day. A fin' clear day. Sharp frost, nothing material, the snow wastes some.

Seventh Day. d, Making a mall. John went to B.

First Day. d' d' at home all day. Hannah went to Concord. Hannah 2 week.

Second Day. The snow mostly gone. Draw'd some wood. P.M. cloudy like for rain.

Third Day. Hazy. Draw'd all the white oak. P.M. Caleb Brinton divided the fence.

Fourth Day. Some clouds. I went to Meeting. P.M. Split some wood.

Fifth Day. A fine day. Draw'd some wood.

Sixth Day. d'd' I went to Mill with 6 Bushels of wheat. Bot 4 Bushels of Bran 6s, 2 Gallons of molasses 5s, 1 lt. of coffee 1s 2; Total cash 12s 2.

Seventh Day. Cloudy Rain & snowing together.

First Day. Clear frost. I went to Concord. Hannah 3 weeks.

Second Day. d' hard frost. Drawing dung. I went to Sharpless for hops 1s, vinigar 1s.

Third Day. Some clouds. Drawing dung.

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 January, what were his most important jobs? Why would he spend so much time doing this work?
 - a. For most of the month, 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 also spent time “thrashing,” or threshing, rye (meaning to shake rye seeds off of the stalk), as well as winnowing rye. To winnow rye is to sift the small dry parts of the rye plant from the seeds, which would be ground into flour.
 - c. Benjamin made a trough for the cow.
 - d. Benjamin and Dolen made a sled out of white oak. Sleds were pulled by oxen or horses and could be used to move anything from firewood to manure.
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. Benjamin took bushels of rye and wheat to the Mill, which tells us that he was primarily a wheat farmer. Southeastern Pennsylvania was known as the

breadbasket of the colonies, so it is not surprising that Benjamin mostly grew wheat. He took six bushels of rye and six bushels of wheat to the Mill to have it ground into flour. Usually the farmer would either sell the wheat to the miller for cash, or pay the miller to grind it into flour the farmer could use at home. In this case, it appears that Benjamin traded his wheat for other things he needed (many millers also ran general stores.)

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. Two quarts of Rum from Robert Johnston.
 - ii. One bushel of bran from the Mill.
 - iii. One bushel of bran, six pounds of sugar, one gallon of molasses and snuff from the Mill.
 - iv. Four bushels of bran, two gallons of molasses, one liter of coffee from the Mill.
 - v. Hops and "vinigar" from "Sharpless," presumably another farmer.
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. "bran" meaning the hull of a wheat or rye berry; the part that contains the most fiber and is usually sifted out during flour milling. Was often used for animal feed.
 - c. "thrashing" or "threshing" meaning to beat upon the head of a stalk of wheat or rye to shake loose the seeds.
 - d. "winnowing" meaning to toss the threshed seeds and chaff (dry bits that stick to the seeds), letting the wind blow away the much lighter chaff, leaving the seeds.
 - e. "bushel" meaning a unit of dry measurement often used in agriculture. With wheat and rye, it means roughly 60 pounds of grain.
 - f. "trough" meaning a tub from which animals eat and drink.
 - g. "mall," meaning either a grassy area set with shade trees, set aside as a place to relax or walk, or a paved or grassy strip between two roadways.
 - h. "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.

i.

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