

Eating Locally in Colonial Tredyffrin and Easttown

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William Penn and others encouraged colonists to come here. One inducement was the great number of food plants already growing in Pennsylvania.

*Fruits that grow natural in the Countries are Strawberries, Cranberries, Huckleberries, Blackberries, Medlara, Grapes, Plumbs, Hickery-Nuts, Walnuts, Mulberries, Chestnuts, Hassel-nuts, &c.*¹

Their enthusiastic publications also included esculents that flourished, or might flourish, when planted by settlers.

*Garden Fruits groweth well, as Cabbages, Coleworts, Colliflowers, Sparagrass, Carrots, Parsneps, Turnups, Oynions, Cowcumbers Pumkins, Water-Mellons, Musk-Mellons, Squashes, Potatoes, Currants, Gooseberries, Roses, Carnations, Tulips Garden-Herbs, Flowers, Seeds, Fruits &c. for such as grow in England certainly will grow here.*²

Native Americans were not the only residents of the area. The Dutch, Swedes, and Finns had been living here for several generations before Penn's colonists arrived.

In addition to grains, fruits, and vegetables, people raised and ate meat: beef, pork, and mutton. The first two were also shipped to other parts of the world. Butter and cheese were also produced, for use at home and shipped abroad.³ "Tame Fowls, as Chickens, Hens, Geese, Ducks, Turkeys, &c. are large, and very plentiful all over this Country."⁴

Once enough food had been produced for the family, the surplus could have been bartered in the neighborhood and/or sold in the city markets. There were two market days in Philadelphia, ordained by William Penn: Wednesday and Saturday. During the hot days of summer, markets were held daily.

There are references to food crops in 18th-century farmers' diaries. In addition to grains, some plants were grown in both kitchen and truck gardens: beans; cabbages; carrots; coleworts; lettuce; melons of various kinds; peas; potatoes; squash; turnips.

Foods produced and gathered during the growing season were enjoyed fresh; they could be eaten raw or cooked. We think of lettuce as a fresh salad green, but it was sometimes cooked then. It was also critically important for foods to be put by for out-of-season use.

There were a number of ways preservation could be done. Sometimes, it was enough to set things in a cool, dry place until they were wanted. Pumpkins and heirloom apples will last as late as Easter if so kept. Root cellars kept carrots, potatoes, turnips, and more. Shelves in the cellar could hold pickles and sweet preserves along with barrels of ale, beer, cider, and more. Meat could be smoked and left hanging in the smoke-house until wanted or kept in salt or brine in the cellar. By the winter solstice, the house would have been crammed with food, to be used until production began again in the spring.

Busy housewives probably used one-pot meals often, accompanied by bread, cheese, pickles, and beer or cider. Receipts for such one-pot dishes were not necessary, but some were set down in printed materials that have survived. They are not easy to find; here are two examples:



Clarissa Dillon in 18th century garb at her November 2014 TEHS presentation. Photo courtesy John O. Senior

1-1/2 lbs of beef, mutton or pork cut into small pieces
 1/2 pt. peas
 3 sliced turnips
 3 potatoes - cut very small
 1 or 2 onions or a few leeks

Put into kettle with 3 qt and 1 pt water. Let boil gently on slow fire about 2-1/2 hours. Then thicken with 1/2 lb of ground rice and a 1/2 of a 1/4 lb of oatmeal (or a 1/2 lb of oatmeal and no rice). Boil for 1/4 hour after the thickening is put in, stirring it all the time. Season with salt, ground pepper, or pounded ginger to taste.

N.B. If turnips or potatoes are not to be had, carrots, parsnips or Jerusalem artichokes or any other garden stuff will do. Sufficient for 3-4 persons without bread or drink. ⁵

IV. Cut into very small bits, 2 lb beef, mutton, or pork out of the tub; or hung beef, freshened in water; and put them in a pot with 6 quarts water. Boil slow near three hours; or rather stew till tender. Add 1/4 lb carrots or parsnips, and 1/2 lb turnips, all sliced small. Sometimes instead of them, a few potatoes sliced: also add some greens, cabbage, celery, Spinach, parsley, and two ounces onions or leeks. Thicken with a pint of oatmeal (or a quart, to make it very thick). Boil all well together, and season with pepper, or ground ginger and salt. It will serve a family of six, for a day. Or it may be thickened with any kind of meal; or barley, beans, peas or rice. ⁶

Flexibility based on availability of ingredients provided some variety, but if these were the dinners for the cold months, the monotony was probably wearisome.

Cookbooks are not the best place to go when looking for dishes of the ordinary people. Although not necessarily complicated or expensive to prepare, many dishes in such books call for purchased ingredients, like sugar and spices; they may also require more time to prepare than a busy housewife could spare. An example of the latter factor was raisins. We think of raisins as simple to use: sprinkle a few on oatmeal at breakfast, tuck a small box in a child's lunchbox, and so forth. This is possible because today, raisins have no seeds; they are dried Thompson Seedless Grapes. In the colonial period, grapes had three seeds in each. Most receipts that called for raisins specified "stoned" or "seeded" raisins. These are usually unavailable today, but if you can buy grapes with seeds, you can make your own raisins with seeds: just hang the bunches of grapes in an airy, shady, cool place until they have dried into raisins. To use in period receipts: use an awl, large needle, or bodkin to open each raisin; remove the three seeds, and proceed to the next raisin. Because they are so sticky inside, the cook has to wash hands and awl frequently. Receipts that called for half a pound of "stoned raisins" were calling for more of a housewife's time than we might expect. It would have been a good task for children--except that they might eat the raisins after stoning them. An alternative was using currants; these were dried tiny grapes, dried and imported for sale.

Printed cookbooks also provided directions for items not available here, so they are not appropriate sources unless corroborated by local sources. Pickling samphire would not have been possible in the "world of William Penn" because the plant is only found on rocks overhanging salt water. While growing, this fleshy plant is constantly in contact with the salty air and will not thrive without it. If people in Pennsylvania wanted pickled samphire, they purchased it as an import from Philadelphia merchants.



Examples of home-made food items shown
 Clarissa Dillon shown at her November 2014 TEHS
 presentation. Above: home-made raisins. Below:
 Pickled samphire. Photos courtesy John O. Senior



Hand-written manuscripts are more helpful for local receipts, but may lead a reader astray. An early manuscript collection of receipts contains direction: “For Sauce for Larks take grated bread and fry in browned Butter with a little pepper and Salt let it be Crisp and Serve in a Cup.”⁷ Because all of the receipts, except for two added at the end, are in the same handwriting, the collection may have been prepared for a bride. In a very different source, there was the comment that there were no larks here.⁸ This statement was made by a man who had spent several years here. Audubon’s *Birds of America* contained pictures of the Brown Lark, the Horned Lark, and the Shore Lark, but not the Meadow Lark of England.⁹

Meals mentioned in diaries or correspondence are more reliable. Usually such meals are described by women, and if in letters, for women. Here are examples.

[18 June 1794] ...about 11. came Sally, Nancy” and their 3 Children, their Maids, Anna and Betsy—Joe Gibs also—they din’d with us, on good Beef Stakes, neats tongue, veal broth for the Children, and Goosberry tarts...¹⁰

[9 July 1792] ...I din’d by myself, on cold leg lamb, bacon, egggs and beans, ‘tis not the first time I have din’d Sola...¹¹

[11 Aug. 1796] Mother, Tommy and Becky, Johnny and me with our dear boy dined at Morris’s in honor of my wedding day [10th inst. the date], that she much wished spent there. We had an English dinner, fish, roast beef, plum pudding and pies, all very good, which indeed everything is always here, for Bill is provider and I call him a little of an epicure. At three o’clock we ate a fine watermelon.¹²

That anniversary dinner menu sounds like an English Christmas dinner. To us, it sounds too heavy for a Philadelphia dinner in August!

Dealing specifically with food production and consumption in Tredyffrin and Easttown Townships is challenging. To date, I have not found receipt books, account books, correspondence, or newspaper articles that mention food items in these two parts of Chester County. However, there is a splendid resource that provides much information: “A Register of Damages...”¹³ Residents of Chester County were able to appear before an authorized official and present a list of items taken or destroyed by the British after the Battle of Brandywine. Claimants provided their own value for items; these varied widely and will not be considered here. Some entries are unclear. Grains by the bushel had been harvested, threshed, and winnowed; grains “in the sheaf” had been cut and bundled, ready for further processing. Grains by the acre had not been cut but we don’t know how they had been destroyed. No references to setting fire to fields have been found; perhaps traffic through fields was responsible. Here are the food losses.

Tredyffrin		Easttown
Wheat		
Adam Gruber	John Willson	Andrew Steel
William Dewes	Jacob Frick	David Jones
Adam Guider ?	Samuel Richards	
John David	Isaac DaVis	
Abel Rees	Christian Workhisor	
Mary Howel	John Brown	
Samuel Jones		
Flour		
John Rowlands	David Willson	Michael Ringers
John Havard		
Bread		
Samuel Havard		Andrew Steel
		Whitehead Leatherby
		Benjamin Jones
Oats		
William Dawes	John Willson	Martin Davis
John Havard	Samuel Richards	Andrew Steel
Adam Gruber	Christian Workhisor	Lewis Morris

Tredyffrin		Easttown
Oats (cont’d)		
Abel Rees	John Brown	David Jones
Jacob Frick	Samuel Havard	Benjamin Jones
Rye		
John Havard	Mary Howel	Christopher Rues
Willian Dewes	Christian Workhisor	
John Brown	Abel Rees	
Samuel Jones		
Indian Corn/Maize		
Adam Guider ?	Jacob Frick	
Adam Gruber	Christian Workhisor	
Abel Rees	Samuel Havard	
Mary Howel	David Willson	
Barley		
Abel Rees		
Buckwheat		
Abel Rees	Christian Workhisor	
John Willson	John Brown	
Samuel Jones		

Tredyffrin		Easttown
Meal		
Samuel Havard		
Potatoes		
John Havard	Jacob Frick	Christopher Rues
Adam Gruber	Christian Workhisor	Judith Ruses
Abel Rees	John Brown	Whitehead Leatherby
Mary Howel	Samuel Havard	
John Willson	Samuel Jones	
Cabbage		
William Currie	Abel Rees	
	Thomas Waters	
Turnips		
Samuel Havard		
Pumpkins		
John Havard		
Onions		
Samuel Havard		
“Garden Truck”		
		Mary Nichols
Beef/Animals		
John Willson	Nicholas Finderlander	
William Dewes	John Havard	
Abel Rees	Mary Howel	
Samuel Jones	David Willson	
Veal/Animals		
Jacob Frick		
Pork/Animals		
William Dewes	William Currie	David Jones
John DaVis	David Willson	
Abel Rees	Isaac Griffith	
Mary Howel	Christian Workhisor	
David Havard	John Brown	
Jacob Frick	Samuel Havard	
Samuel Jones		
Butter & Cheese		
John Havard b/c	Mary Howel b/c	Andrew Steel b/c
Samuel Havard b/c	William Currie b/c	Mary Nichols b/c
		Whitehead Leatherby b
		Benjamin Jones b/c
Poultry (chickens, geese, turkeys, ducks)		
John Havard c,g,t	Abel Rees c,t	Christopher Rues c,t
Thomas Watters c	Jacob Brown c,t	David Jones g
Christian Workhisor c		Whitehead Leatherby g
Samuel Jones “poultry”		David Jones “poultry”

Tredyffrin		Easttown
“Meat”		
		Andrew Steel
		Mary Nichols
Lard		
Samuel Havard		
Cider		
		Andrew Steel
		Whitehead Leatherby
		Benjamin Jones
Whiskey		
Mary Howel		
Metheglin		
Samuel Havard		
Honey		
John Havard	John Brown	
Fruit Trees (apple, peach)		
Abel Rees	Christian Workhisor ¹⁴	

Editor's Note: The Reparations portion of the 18th Century Tredyffrin section of the Society's website contains more information on this subject. Also noted is the alternate spelling “Workizer” for “Workhisor.”

The items taken would have been available in Tredyffrin and Easttown households for one-pot meals similar to those described earlier. In addition to the removal of so much food by the British after Brandywine, residents also had to deal with marauding American troops spending the winter at Valley Forge. Although General Washington often commanded his troops to refrain from taking foodstuffs from area residents, the lack of supplies sent men out to find things to eat outside of camp.

[December] We had nothing to eat for two or three days previous, except what the trees of the fields and forests afforded us. ¹⁵

[18 December 1777] ... We had neither Bread nor Meat 'till just before night when we had some fresh Beef, without any Bread or flour. The Beef would have answered to have made Minc'd Pie if it could have been made tender Enough, but it seem'd Mr. Commissary did not intend that we Shou'd keep a Day of rejoicing--but however we Sent out a Scout for some fowls and by Night he Return'd with one Dozn: we distributed five of them among our fellow sufferers 3 we Roasted two we boild and Borrowed a few Potatoes upon these we Supp'd without any Bread or anything Stronger than water to drink.

[19 December 1777] ...We took the Remains of two Days allowance of Beef, being a shin and two fowls we had left, of these we made a broth upon which We breakfasted with half a loaf of Bread we had made a tollerable Breakfast, if there had been Enough. ¹⁶

We can understand why the soldiers robbed the residents but we don't know how the residents survived the winter and early spring, with so much gone. We can speculate.

Sometimes, people assume that there were plenty of animals, like deer, to fill the void left by the domestic animals taken. However, over-hunting and destruction of habitat had decimated some native animal populations.

[by 1760] Deer, among the quadrupeds, and wild turkeys, among the winged tribes, were formerly very plentiful, but now scarce, &c. ¹⁷

The British had confiscated any guns found, so hunting would have been a challenge. Snares 'could have caught small animals like rabbits and stones, aimed with force and accuracy, could have brought down birds and squirrels. It was far too late to get hibernating animals, like turtles and frogs, and possibly for fishing as well.



Exhibits from Clarissa Dillon's November 2014 TEHS presentation: (left) balony sausages from Newlin Grist Mill; salt pork; (center) turnip, potatoes, heirloom carrots from Massey garden; and (right) two manuscripts. *Photo courtesy John O. Senior*

With so much food available, from farms, it seems unlikely that the British troops would have spent much time foraging in the wild. The hungry residents, on the other hand, could have gathered nuts, like hickory and black walnuts, and perhaps fruits like apples and peaches that had naturalized themselves over the years. Although there were many fruit-bearing plants in the area, their fruits had come and gone: strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, huckleberries, and elderberries. The poke berries that look so juicy and inviting are poisonous and would have been ignored. Poke shoots are edible, but only in April when under a foot high.

There were plants in the wild; a number had come with the colonists and could be foraged. Dandelions keep self-sowing until the killing frost; the same is true of docks. Burdock stalks and yellow wood sorrel could be eaten raw or cooked. Stinging nettles are a useful pot-herb; mallows, eaten sparingly because of their medicinal qualities could also be added to the pot. Goldenrod flowers and the red fuzzy sumach berries can be steeped for a tea. The plants used fresh would not have lasted beyond the killing frost, but would have helped until then.

Jerusalem artichokes, a native, produces underground tubers; these could have been harvested and used like potatoes. If a family had vinegar, tubers could have been kept in that, extending the period of usefulness.

In cases where grain in the field had been rendered unharvestable because of traffic or other destructive activities, gleaning in the Biblical sense could have retrieved usable kernels. This would have been a good activity for children.

A Chester County farmer recorded the following on 5 August 1778:

*“...the Cow came back that the Soldiers took Yesterday but not the Bull they came to Day & took a Mare & Colt”*¹⁸

He claimed nothing taken from him on the “Register of Damages,” perhaps because he was a Quaker. After the battle, he continued his usual farming activities: picking and pressing apples, harvesting and processing grains, potatoes, turnips, etc.¹⁹ His experience may have been similar to those of others in the area. If so, he and they would have been in a position to share with those who had lost so much.

For those in the Valley Forge area, there is another resource for us. It was decided to establish a camp market, with fixed prices for the suppliers.

fresh pork	hogs lard	sourkraut
roasting pork	cheese	apples
mutton	sausages	dried apples
veal	eggs	indian meal
fat turkey	rough skinned potatoes
fat goose	Spanish skinned potatoes	vinegar
fat ducks	turnips	new milk
fat fowls	cabbage
fresh butter	onions	cider
firkin butter	beans	small beer ²⁰

There were three locations for this market: the east side of Schuylkill on Mondays and Thursdays; at the North Bridge on Tuesdays and Fridays; and at the Adjutant General’s office on Wednesdays and Saturdays.²¹

This list of provisions tells us what food items were available, but we don’t know precisely where they came from or how they had been secured from foragers.

For residents in Philadelphia, the markets were poorly supplied. People noted the scarcity and high prices:

*“...poor Beef is now sold for 3/ p lb. Veal 4/~ Butter 7/6 ... Flour what little there is, at 3£ p [--] ...”*²²

[23 October 1777] ... we shall suffer for want of bread, not a barrel of good flour to be bought at any price, & the bakers say they have not more than will serve them 10 days, nor one mill within the lines to get more, except Masters who only grinds what people send. Then, scarcely any meat in market, nor [a] pound of butter or an egg at any price; a very small quarter of pork weighing about 8 or 10 pounds cost me 22/6, & a pound of sausage 2/6. Sometimes by walking down to the ferry you may get a pound or two of butter that is brought over by stealth, but if you get it as a favor you must pay a silver dollar.²³

From 29 October to 31 January 1778, the diarist recorded food scarcities and high prices in Philadelphia.

...very little ordinary poor beef & some pork at one place at 2/6 a pound, & potatoes at 10 per bushel. Everything almost is gone of the vegetable kind, plundered ... cows, hogs, fowls & everything gone ... Butchers obliged to kill fine milch cows for meat, mutton or veal not even heard of ... poor beef at 2/6 a pound; a very ordinary shin of beef cost me 5/. One woman gave 7 hard dollars for a quarter of pork, common fowls 15 a couple, neither eggs nor butter at any price ... Ordinary sour flour sold at £3 a hundred ... & no prospect of any amendment, ...

[6 December 1777] Potatoes are 15 a bushel, butter a dollar & 10 a pound, common Fresh butter 3/9 a pound cheese the same price, mutton 4, turkey 20, geese 12, very small fowls 7/6. Flour £5 a hundred, & what is to be bought of that very ordinary.

*[31 January 1778] ...30 shillings for a middling turkey, 15 shillings for a couple of fowls, 3/6 for mutton, 2/6 for veal....*²⁴

Where did the items at the city markets come from? Were they part of the depredations? Not everything was taken by the marauders in September 1777. There were repeated forays into the countryside, as attested to by the Chester County farmers. Results of these raids could have been “held until needed” in Philadelphia. For example, the British officer quartered in Elizabeth Drinker’s house had “...2 Horses and 2[?] Cows which are to be put in our Stable...” and two days later he had “...3 Horses 3 Cows 2 Sheep and 2 Turkeys with several Fowls, in our Stable, ...”²⁵

Residents of Tredyffrin and Easttown raised, processed, and ate foods like those found throughout Chester County. Philadelphia residents acquired such foods at the market. After the Battle of Brandywine, many people had to face the approaching winter with little of what they had grown or raised, preserved and prepared against the time when gardens, fields, and orchards lay dormant. Although there are references to foods not taken, we cannot know how much was available. For rural and urban residents, including the British military, it would be a long, cold, and above all, a hungry winter and spring.

Endnotes

1. Thomas Budd. *Good Order Established in Pennsilvania...* ([Philadelphia: William Bradford] 1695; facsimile reprint by Readex Microprint Corporation, no city, 1966), pp. 6-7. Cf. Gabriel Thomas *Historical and Geographical account of... Pensilvania...* (London: Printed for...A. Baldwin... 1698; facsimile reprint by UMI Books on Demand, Ann Arbor, MI, 1997), pp. 16-17.
2. Budd, op. cit., p. 7; cf. Thomas, op. cit., pp. 20-21.
3. Budd, op. cit., pp. 9-10.
4. Thomas, op. cit., p. 23.
5. Dr James Stonehouse, M.D., ["Receipts"] *Northampton Mercury*, 1757; quoted in Clarissa F. Dillon, "A Most Comfortable Dinner..." (self-published, 1994), p. 5.
6. J. B. Bordley, *Essays and Notes on Husbandry and Rural Affairs* (Philadelphia: Budd and Bartram, 1799), p. 17; quoted in Dillon, op. cit., p. 17.
7. Undated manuscript in collection at Stenton, Germantown, PA, #23.
8. *The Infortunate...* 2nd ed., ed. by Susan E. Klepp and Billy G. Smith (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), p. 56.
9. John James Audubon, *The Birds of America* [orig. pub. 1837-1840] (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1941), pl. 200; the Sky Lark was "...introduced to Vancouver Island in the early 1900s, is resident there on open slopes and fields." *Field Guide to the Birds of North America*, 3rd ed. (Washington, DC: National Geographic Society, n.d.), p. 320.
10. *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, ed. by Elaine Forman Crane (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), p. 566.
11. Ibid., p. 702; quoted in Clarissa F. Dillon, *SO SERVE IT UP...* (Mansfield, OH: BookMasters Inc., 1999), pp. 59-65.
12. "Extracts from the Diary of Ann Warder," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, vol. 17, p. 461; quoted in Dillon *SO SERVE IT UP...*, Op. cit., pp. 67-72.
13. "A Register of Damages..." (Unpublished manuscript/typescript in The Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA).
14. Ibid., pp. 170-196 and pp. 240-246.
15. Joseph Plumb Martin *Private Yankee Doodle*, ed. by George E. Scheer. (no city, Eastern Acorn Press, 1962), p. 100.
16. "From Saratoga to Valley Forge..." Ed. by Joseph Lee Boyle, *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. CXXI, No.3, pp. 257-258.
17. Robert Proud, *The History of Pennsylvania...* in 2 vols (Philadelphia: Printed ...by Zachariah Poulson, Junior... 1798), Vol. II, p. 263.
18. Benjamin Hawley, "Diary Chester County 1769-1782." (Unpublished manuscript/typescript in The Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA), p. 185.
19. Ibid., pp. 170- 179.
20. Jacqueline Thibaut, "The Fatal Crisis..." in "The Valley Forge Report," Vol. II in Valley Forge National Historical Park, Valley Forge, PA), footnote 13 , p. 508.
21. *Valley Forge Orderly Book of General George Weedon* (reprint by New York Times & Arno Press, Inc., 1971) , pp. 228-229; quoted in Dillon , *SO SERVE IT UP...* op. cit., pp. 146-147.



The kitchen garden, with new edges and ready for winter, at the 1696 Thomas Massey House in Broomall. 2012.
Photo courtesy of Clarissa Dillon.

22. Drinker, op. cit., p. 253.
23. Sarah Logan Fisher, "A Diary of Trifling Occurrences..." *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. LXXXII, p. 454.
24. Ibid., p. 455; p. 453 ; p. 461.
25. Drinker, op. cit., p. 271; p. 272.

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Clarissa Dillon turning the soil in the spring—
beginning a new growing season at the
1696 Thomas Massey House in Broomall.
Photo courtesy of Clarissa Dillon.