

DIARIES OF SILVANUS SEELY (19 DEC. 1743 O.S. - 17 APR. 1821)

12 May 1768 - 17 March 1821

30 volumes

I. 12 May 1768-31 Dec. 1772

Gap of 5 1/2 years

II. 2 May 1778-6 Aug. 1780. Also letters to and from other New Jersey officers, 1777, concerning the strengthening of the post at Elizabeth-Town

III. 7 Aug. 1780-22 May 1783

IV. 23 May 1783-26 Oct. 1785

V. 27 Oct. 1785-5 June 1788

VI. 6 June 1788-10 Oct. 1790

VII. 10 Oct. 1790-3 Dec. 1792

VIII. 4 Dec. 1792-26 May 1795. Break 9 Sept. 1794-3 Feb. 1795, trip to the Western Country, in separate journal, No. 28.

IX. 27 May 1795-9 July 1797. Break 25 Aug. 1796-9 Jan. 1797, tour to the Western Country, in separate journal, No. 29.

X. 10 July 1797-22 July 1799

XI. 30 July 1799-21 Apr. 1801. Break 15 Sept. 1800-2 Dec. 1800, tour to the Lackawaxen Country, separate journal, No. 30.

XII. 21 Apr. 1801-31 Dec. 1802

XIII. 1 Jan. 1803-29 Aug. 1804

XIV. 1 Sept. 1804-2 Dec. 1805

XV. 3 Dec. 1805-30 Apr. 1807

XVI. 1 May 1807-31 Aug. 1808

XVII. 1 Sept. 1808-3 July 1809

XVIII. 3 July 1809-31 Dec. 1810

XIX. 1 Jan. 1811-11 June 1812

XX. 12 June 1812-20 Feb. 1813

but not formally educated, man of his period and locality.

Since his family was a large one and his business associates quite numerous, Seely's diaries furnish a great deal of information about people in the two localities where he spent the last forty years of his life -- Chatham, New Jersey, and Wayne County, Pennsylvania. Using a simple code, he entered in his diary many of his innermost thoughts and recorded details of surreptitious meeting with several "charmers" in the neighborhood, of secret or questionable business deals, and even his dreams when he was emotionally disturbed. Though he was actively at work until a month before his death at the age of seventy-eight, he was often ill; medical historians would be interested in his medical treatments and self-dosing. During the summer of 1782 he took the cure at "the springs", where he spent an unusual amount of time making entries in his diary. Here he recorded details of the social life at the springs -- bathing, singing, conversation, flirting -- as well as his own mental and emotional confusion as reflected in recurring nightmares, which he attempted to analyze.

The last entry is dated 17 March 1821. Following this entry, in another hand, is the notation that Seely died on 17 April and was buried two days later with Masonic rites at Bethany, the county seat. For the first time, the courthouse bell was tolled for his funeral.

- XXI. 21 Feb. 1813-11 Dec. 1813
- XXII. 12 Dec. 1813-11 Sept. 1814
- XXIII. 12 Sept. 1814-9 Oct. 1816
- XXIV. 17 Oct. 1816-14 Nov. 1818
- XXV. 15 Nov. 1818-10 Nov. 1819
- XXVI. 11 Nov. 1819-20 Nov. 1820
- XXVII. 21 Nov. 1820-17 March 1821
- XXVIII. 9 Sept. 1794-3 Feb. 1795. Journey to Western Country
- XXIX. 25 Aug. 1796-9 Jan. 1797. Journal on tour to Western Country
- XXX. 15 Sept. 1800-2 Dec. 1800. Journal of tour to Beach Woods

CODE

1 - r
 2 - c
 3 - e
 4 - u
 5 - i
 6 - l
 7 - n
 8 - p
 9 - a

g - d
 h - h
 o - o
 y - y
 t - t
 m - m

Other consonants are written uncoded; consequently, the letters g, d, a, and o are easily confused, as are b and t.

Seely's spelling is phonetic and he made occasional errors when composing in code; however, he was remarkably consistent and the code is easy to read.

The most prominent character in the "code story" is the wife of a neighbor, Dr. Ball; she appears as "my charmer" or "my jewel."

in 1791, and the death of Washington.

The economic historian and the student of local history, however, will find the Seely diaries a mine of information. His business activities were varied and extensive. On his farms he raised hay, wheat, corn, rye and potatoes as money crops and bred horses, cattle, swine and sheep. At Chatham he maintained a typical country store, and although his business ledgers are not included in his papers, the diaries contain many details concerning his merchandising activities. The important parts of each day's entry are business records, with a careful notation of the exact amount of each expenditure and usually with some indication of whether the price was high or low.

Throughout the period of the diaries Seely made frequent trips for supplies all over New Jersey and in western Pennsylvania, notably to Philadelphia. On these trips he noted travel conditions and all expenses; estimated business prospects for merchants, artisans and agricultural laborers in the places where he stopped; described the soil and vegetation in unsettled areas; and commented on social customs and sights novel to his experience.

The two journals of his trips to "the Western Country" in the winters of 1794-95 and 1796-97, when he went as far as Cincinnati, are spirited travelogues. When he was threatened with bankruptcy in 1801, he left New Jersey and went to Wayne County, Pennsylvania, where he cleared land for a new farm, built a house and sawmill, and again developed a thriving business in trade, lumber and milling. Volumes 12-27 of the diary describe life in this area, which had recently been opened to settlement.

Seely's spelling was highly phonetic; his diaries would be useful, therefore, to philologists because his speech is typical of the literate,

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Silvanus Seely was a Revolutionary Colonel in New Jersey's Morris County Militia, a farmer and merchant in western New Jersey and eastern Pennsylvania. The diary is complete except for a gap of five years after the first volume, from 31 December 1772 to 2 May 1778. The last three volumes of the thirty are devoted to special journeys to the West: No. 28, 9 September 1794-3 February 1795, to and from Kentucky; No. 29, 25 August 1796-9 January 1797, to the Western Country [Kentucky]; No. 30, 15 September 1800-2 December 1800, to Beach Woods [Lackawaxen country in northeast Pennsylvania].

The critical period in his military career was the latter part of the year 1779, when he commanded the State Regiment at Elizabeth-Town. His trial by courtmartial, on charges of illegal trade with the enemy, was held on 27 April 1780. After acquittal, on 5 May, he wrote: "I cannot help remarking that I felt very heavy when I was cald to answer guilty or not guilty altho I knew my innocence. Good God how must the guilty feele." There is little in the diaries to add to our knowledge of the war beyond a brief description of the battle of Monmouth and occasional references to the movement of the British forces in New Jersey. Seely mentions Arnold's treason, for example, but there is no reference to Yorktown.

The diaries contain little of value to the political historian, for there are few comments on events of national significance beyond brief mention of the Pennsylvania and New Jersey mutinies of January 1781, Sinclair's defeat

*These diaries are in some degree in case
and are valuable for local history (Wayne County)
Keep these notes! Aug 1881*

SEELY'S LIFE AT JANE MILLS, WAYNE COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA, 1801-1821,

AS REVEALED IN HIS MANUSCRIPT DIARY, VOLUMES 12-27

In the spring of 1801 at the age of fifty-seven, Seely moved to the northeast Pennsylvania frontier and began a new life. The last few years in Chatham had been filled with financial difficulties, both in collecting debts and paying bills. His brother Samuel, son-in-law Miller, other relatives and neighbors "gave up to their creditors," but Silvanus tried to avoid bankruptcy by going to a new country.

During the preceding fall he had made a preliminary trip to the Lackawaxen country, where his brother Joshua had already established himself and where Silvanus had a land claim on the west branch of the river. With the help of Brother Joshua and various neighbors who were willing to work by the day, he opened the road to his lands and built a sawmill and log cabin. In his diary he recorded the details of the construction. On 15 September 1800 they leveled the mill seat, which had a fourteen-foot fall; the dam was to extend fifty feet across the creek and to be raised four feet, four inches. On the 26th they started cutting logs for the dam and on the 30th laid the first log of the foundation. By the middle of October they were putting in the floor, and on 19 November raised the mill, which was named Jane Mills in honor of Mrs. Seely. Silvanus described the day as follows:

About 9 the hands began to geather and about 10 we raids the first bent and about 12 the heaviest middle bent and about 4 we put on the last cock termant beame and without any bad axadent Blessed be my gracious god for the favor and Blessed be his name for giving me an oppertunity of saying that I had a mill raids of my oane a thing that I have long wished for. They all set down and pertook of a repast we had provided for them, to the number of about 24 little and big They all went away apparently sober and I believe thare was not more then $2\frac{1}{2}$ gallon of spirit drank all together I askd them to come and

assist me in raising the penstock and a house on Tuesday which they seemed willing to do.

All this time they had been living in tents. The following week a log house twenty feet by sixteen was raised, as planned, and Seely then returned to New Jersey for the winter.

After setting his business affairs in order and bidding neighbors farewell, Seely left Chatham in April, 1801, accompanied by three young men — his son George and two employees, Moses Samson and Samuel Stevens. They had two ox-drawn wagons loaded with hay, tools and trading goods from the Chatham store. On the eighth day they arrived at Jane Mills, "cut out" a door in the log cabin and were happy to find undamaged the supplies which had been sent on by sled a month earlier. Hard work began immediately: clearing brush, working on the mill race, cutting and hauling logs, building fence, planting a vegetable garden and peach orchard. By the middle of the summer the sawmill was in operation and Stevens, who was a skilled worker with tools of all kinds, had set up a forge. From time to time Seely was able to pay fifty cents a day for the services of a neighbor to help with the milling work. In especially hard times, on the other hand, he "let" Stevens and Moses to more prosperous neighbors for short terms of employment.

For a month the men did their own cooking; then a Mrs. Duffey came to keep house for them. Often during the first year provisions were barely adequate. Seely purchased venison, beef and pork, potatoes and other staples and sold such merchandise as cloth, whiskey, sugar and tea. The men fished nearly every afternoon, usually catching enough trout for supper, but did relatively little hunting. They were all ill from time to time. Seely suffered from rheumatism, sore eyes, boils, headaches and dysentery, and he did not sleep well because he had "not been used to lie hard lately." His son George "had fits" all during the period of the diaries. Frequent accidents interfered with the work — burned heels,

sprained ankles, strained backs — but they all escaped serious injury. Seely bore the hardships with whatever fortitude he could summons from close reliance upon Providence. For example, on 3 April 1802 after finding a rundlet recently lost, he wrote in his diary:

...my hart feeles thankfull to my great and gracious god for it as we were in great need of it and why should I ever dispare of being held up by his gracious hand when I have had so many Instances of his goodness to me and espetially at this place. O: my god make me willing to live here senc it is thy will for I know that thy ways are best.

Sometimes the precarious food supply included only potatoes. But neighbors who were better hunters shared their game and Seely was able to borrow provisions when he had no money to pay for them.

In spite of difficulties the work prospered and Seely's business activities expanded steadily. The second spring there was enough lumber on hand to warrant a trip by raft down the Lackawaxen and the Delaware to market at Pond Eddy and Milford. In 1804 he was raising cows and hogs for market, and by 1810 had a grist mill in operation. During the winter of 1805-1806 his wife joined him and he added upstairs rooms to the house and dug a well. Other relatives moved into the neighborhood, and at the end of a decade life at Jane Mills was secure and settled. The Seelys attended church and school at Bethany, where Silvanus transacted a steadily increasing amount of business. (For some unstated reason, in 1819-20 he was doing all his banking at Welksborough [Wilkes-Barre?]) Land titles for himself and other members of his family occupied a great deal of his attention, but he did not get a patent for the Jane Mills tract until 1820.

After his seventieth birthday, Seely was able to delegate the more strenuous work to his sons and employees. He continued to tend mill, work in the garden, and make daily entries in his journal, ~~however~~, until March, 1821, a month before his death.