

## AN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FARMER AND PIONEER: Sylvanus Seely's Early Life in Pennsylvania

BY THEODORE THAYER\*

**T**WILIGHT was setting in when Sylvanus Seely left off planting corn and started for home. To have corn in the ground by the 12th of May (the year was 1768) was gratifying. As the young pioneer plodded his way homeward he was thinking of how on the morrow, providing the weather remained fair, he would with the help of his force of eight good men finish planting the corn, sow the hemp, and do some plowing.

The Seely farm lay near Sinking Spring, some ten miles west of Reading in the county of Berks, Pennsylvania. Known as the largest and best-stocked farm in Cumru Township, it was owned by Jonas Seely, a veteran Indian fighter and for many years county treasurer and judge of the Court of Quarter Sessions. Public duties coupled with private concerns, including land speculation, took Judge Seely away from home much of the time. Consequently, he turned over the management of the farm to his nephew Sylvanus, eldest son of his brother Christopher.

Sylvanus Seely, now twenty-eight, was born near Suffern, New York, where the family lived until he was about nine or ten. Sometime before the outbreak of the French and Indian War, the Seely brothers, Jonas, Samuel, and Christopher, moved with their families to Pennsylvania where they acquired land and settled down.

Nothing much can be learned of Sylvanus Seely's life before he began keeping a diary in 1768.<sup>1</sup> It was, however, about the time of his majority that he took for a wife Jane Williamson, a

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Reading girl. Children began arriving for the young couple, but how many there were in 1768 remains uncertain, although two, Hannah and Phyllis, are mentioned in the diary. As for Jenny (as Jane was called), she was a devoted spouse, thrifty and diligent—compensation enough it would seem for any lack of femininity. In any case, in those days, Sylvanus seemed too preoccupied in running the farm and in getting ahead in the world to give much thought on how his wife compared with more comely women.

Jonas Seely's farm of 700 acres, consisting of meadows and upland with much of it still covered with virgin forest, was located north of the present borough of Sinking Spring.<sup>2</sup> Naturally, the best soil was found in the lowlands where a meandering stream offered water for irrigation and power for a sawmill. On the farm the Seelys customarily kept eight or ten horses, a like number of cows, and fifteen or twenty sheep. In contrast, few farms in Cumru township had more than 100 acres, with but two or three horses, a cow or two, and five or six sheep.

The Seelys were a closely knit family following the paths and vicissitudes of frontier life. Jonas's large farmhouse was quite capable, it seems, of sheltering the families of the three brothers. But precisely how many were living there in 1768 remains unknown. Jonas's wife died that year, causing him thereafter to have less reason for staying at home. Uncle Samuel, however, was often there using it as his headquarters in a constant coming and going while pursuing his business interests. Christopher, who was a carpenter, may have occupied part of the house with his wife and unmarried sons. Sylvanus, too, was either living there or in a nearby house when he began to keep a diary.

Sylvanus had always been very close to "Daddy," as he affectionately called his father. Together, one may presume, they had turned out during the French and Indian War, when Sylvanus was fifteen, to help defend the settlements. Part of the time, no doubt, they were with Jonas, who commanded a company garrisoning the Reading Court House which was used as a fort and a place to house refugees. The entire countryside was in a state of panic from fear of the Indians. Reading was full of refugees who had abandoned their homes and most of their belongings to seek

<sup>2</sup>I also wish to thank Jacob R. Bowers, Earl Frankhouser, Wayne E. Homan, Irving C. Hanners, and Dr. Arthur Graeff for their kindness in the endeavor to locate the Seely farm.

safety in town. So great was the fright on the frontier that Jonas complained that he was unable to raise more than twenty or thirty men and boys for his company. Most of the recruits, however, were quite fearless and all were expert shots with the rifle. Indians respected men like these, but they were too few to prevent the savages from infiltrating deep into the settlements, burning and murdering as they went.

During these turbulent days, there can be little doubt that Sylvanus had the opportunity of seeing the renowned Benjamin Franklin when he came to Reading as commander of the provincial militia to confer with Uncle Jonas and Conrad Weiser on problems of defending the frontier. The last service Sylvanus saw in the Indian wars came in 1764, just four years before our story opens, when Pontiac sent his warriors against the towns and forts on the frontier and Jonas Seely was colonel of the local militia.

As general manager of the farm, it was up to Sylvanus to make the decisions and do the bossing. Sylvanus, a rather good-looking man with the cut of a backwoodsman—tall, spare, and rugged—was rightly fitted for his role. From childhood, judging by his ways, he must have been a go-getter and leader—traits already put to good use on the farm. Each morning he assigned work for his brothers: Abe, Ike, and Lue. There was another brother, Samuel, who during the Revolution became an officer for the New Jersey Blues, but since his name does not appear at this time, it may be assumed that he was with his father rather than helping on the farm. Besides his brothers, the work force consisted of their two Negro slaves. One of these may have been Prince, who appears later in the diary when the Seelys lived at Chatham, New Jersey. At this time, however, Sylvanus attached no names to his slaves. Besides his brothers and the slaves, there were often hired hands on the farm and not infrequently a man or two with a team from a neighboring farm trading work with the Seelys. At times, with a force of at least nine or ten men, the whole farm seemed a beehive of activity.

In his diary Sylvanus noted the more important happenings of his little world. After planting the corn and hemp, the men turned to splitting rails and fencing the upper meadow. The next day they hauled wood for cooking fuel for the great fireplace that dominated the kitchen. Meanwhile, one of the boys plowed for buckwheat.

When this work was finished, the Seelys hauled stone and made mortar for a house for Sylvanus. While the house was going up, some of the men burned brush on newly cleared land. Then it rained and everyone took a holiday.

Sylvanus took note, too, of the happenings beyond the borders of the farm. Sally White, he recorded, went to Stitestown and returned two days later.<sup>3</sup> Of greater significance than the doings of Sally White or other neighbors, were the activities of Uncle Samuel. Early in June this noted frontiersman and former iron-master left the farm to lay out a road through the wilderness between Reading and Shamokin (Sunbury). It was a difficult assignment in that it took all summer before the job was finished.

To replenish the woodpile for the summer's cooking, the Seelys were again carting wood when they returned from their day off. They found time, too, to haul wood for neighbor Gilham and for Nicholas Scull, surveyor and local tavernkeeper. Shortly thereafter, Sylvanus made a trip to "the furnace" where he bought a new plow.<sup>4</sup> Work on the farm now slackened a bit before the haying began, so Sylvanus went to Reading. While there, he obligingly bought a pair of shoes for his neighbor, Polly Russell.

Quite understandably, Sylvanus enjoyed his trips to town. Located on the Schuylkill River, Reading was the second largest inland town of Pennsylvania, surpassed only by Lancaster. Its market center, known as Penn Square, was a busy place, especially in the morning when farmers swarmed in from miles around. One of the chief attractions on the Square was the White Store, kept until his death in 1760 by Conrad Weiser, an interpreter and life-long friend of the Indians. Sylvanus habitually stopped at the White Store to talk with the people he met there and to make purchases for his family and neighbors. On the Square, too, stood the Court House, where he could ordinarily find Uncle Jonas during court sessions.

With his business completed at the White Store, Sylvanus proceeded to the ironworks to have his horses shod and farm tools made at the blacksmith shop. The ironworks also had a store where he could buy kettles, flatirons, and other articles made in the foundry. Apparently Sylvanus made some purchases on an-

<sup>3</sup> Stitestown is now Lebanon, Pennsylvania.

<sup>4</sup> This was apparently the Reading Furnace near Wernersville.

other visit to the furnace to get a colt shod, for a few days later he sold to tavernkeeper Scull an iron pot for 8s. 2d. and a skillet for 3s. 6d. Another kettle he sold to Gilham for 9s. Sylvanus, as one can see, never missed a chance to do a little trading.

After the haying was done, it was time to start reaping. Since this must be done when the grain is ready, it required a large force in the fields swinging their cradles as they cut the grain in wide swaths. Judging by the quantity of rum consumed during the harvest, Sylvanus on some days must have had a dozen or more men in the fields. On July 12, when the reaping began, the Seelys were cutting rye with a gang of men and two gallons of rum. Three days later while reaping rye and wheat Sylvanus must have had a veritable army in the fields considering the fact that they consumed seven gallons of rum. A day or so later they hauled in the first cutting of rye, quenching their thirst with three gallons of rum.

Threshing began early in August. During the first day devoted to this task, Sylvanus had two hired men, Dennis Brady and another called Shrader, threshing rye on the barn floor. With perfect timing, the men alternately flailed until all the grain had fallen from the straw. At intervals the men stopped to shovel the grain into piles to await cleaning. Ordinarily, two men threshed from twenty-five to thirty bushels of grain a day. Some of the grain Sylvanus set aside for seed. The rest was put in bins to await sale or milling for the family's supply of flour.

While the work on the farm went on from day to day, Sylvanus never lost sight of what was happening in the neighborhood. Polly Russell, he noted late in July, had come back from a trip to Stitestown. Uncle Samuel, who apparently found it too warm during the summer to finish surveying the road, went to Reading to attend court. In a few days he was back. About the 20th of August, with the weather cooler, he started out with Ike to resume laying out the road to Shamokin.

After the grain was cut and harvested, Sylvanus began dunging the stubble before plowing for winter wheat. When the plowing was done, several days were spent in rolling and harrowing until the ground was ready for planting. Assisted by his neighbors and their teams, Sylvanus had the ground ready for sowing about the

10th of September. A few days later the winter wheat was in the ground and growing.

Encouraged by the prospect of a good crop of apples, Jonas decided to invest in a cidermill. Sylvanus assisted by Gilham and another neighbor handy with tools constructed a "trough" for the cidermill. After finishing the trough, Sylvanus set out for Philadelphia to fetch the machinery which had been purchased from a millwright. He returned four days later with his wagon loaded down with wheels and gears. By the 19th of October the cidermill was erected and ready for operation. Throughout the season, Seely's mill was busy making cider until the last of the apples were gone.

While the men were picking apples and making cider, there was still work to be done in the fields. First the wheat had to be planted, and then in late October the corn was harvested. The corn harvest was followed by days of husking and cribbing. In this process, the Seelys received help from neighbors sustained by a goodly supply of rum.

Odd jobs also consumed much of Sylvanus's time during the beautiful autumn days. At one time we find him mending a windmill, on another occasion he measured boards at the sawmill for marketing. At times, especially on rainy days, he worked in the shop making staves and barrel headings. In need of boots, Sylvanus bought a tanned calf skin and took it to shoemaker Francis Kreek. Two weeks later he again visited the shoemaker and came away the proud owner of a fine pair of boots.

Although there remained much grain to thresh and clean, more time could be found for recreation and travel after the middle of November. Since nothing on the frontier was more prized than a good rifle, Sylvanus was a proud and happy man when he returned from Reading one day with a new rifle. Equipped with his new shooting iron, he was prepared for hunting as well as for the winter's shooting matches. At the matches, where participants put money in a pot for prizes, men customarily shot at live turkeys as the inquisitive birds lifted their heads above the sides of a pen. Sylvanus seldom missed one of these affairs, but how he made out usually went unrecorded.

Entries in Seely's diary during the winter reveal a variety of activities. In January he butchered two pigs; many days were

spent in sawing, chopping, and hauling firewood; and threshing went on well into March. It is impossible to tell how much grain the Seelys raised in 1768, but it ran into several hundred bushels. On two days alone they cleaned over a hundred bushels of wheat.

During the month of March in 1769, Sylvanus was kept busy with trips to Reading and Stitestown to sell produce and buy supplies. One day he paid shoemaker Kreek another call and bought a pair of shoes for himself. Trips were made, too, to the gristmill so that wheat could be ground into flour for family use. Several trips were made to the furnace, where on one occasion he bought a dog. Toward the end of the month, with spring in the air, Sylvanus took his rod and went fishing.

It was in March, too, that Uncle Jonas decided to sell the "old place" and auction off the contents. As it turned out it took three auctions before he was satisfied that enough had been sold. Meanwhile, Sylvanus made more trips to town and to the furnace for supplies. The selling of the old place and the trips to town presaged something momentous for the Seelys. They decided to go into the northern wilderness and settle on a large tract of land that Jonas had acquired. Three years before, in 1765, Jonas had obtained a warrant from the proprietary authorities for 10,000 acres in the Lackawaxen Valley. Settlement, however, awaited a release of the territory by the Six Nations who claimed ownership of the land. This had just been accomplished by a treaty with the Indians at Fort Stanwix.

Jonas Seely's wilderness holdings consisted of two tracts: one at Indian Orchard, the other at Blooming Grove. The Indian Orchard tract began a little above the forks of the Lackawaxen and Wallenpaupack rivers, where Hawley now stands. From this point, it extended north along both sides of the Lackawaxen past Indian Orchard to a spot near the present town of Honesdale. The Blooming Grove tract, centering around the present Blooming Grove, was fifteen miles south of Indian Orchard. According to the agreement with the proprietors, Jonas was to settle thirty families on his land, or it would revert to the Penns. Although he managed to hold on to the land until 1779, when debts forced him to sell, he was not able to fulfill this requirement.

On April 10, 1769, Sylvanus Seely made his last trip to Reading preparatory to starting out for the Lackawaxen. At the White

Store, where he made most of his purchases, he bought a pair of leggings for the rough life in the wilderness. He was also well aware of the value of the four cowbells purchased at the furnace; but even with bells, cattle often became lost for weeks in the forest.

It was a bright and sunny April morning when the little band of pioneers set out for the Lackawaxen. Riding a mare and accompanied by his brothers Abe, Ike, and Lue, who were also mounted, Sylvanus led the way on the old road to Bethlehem. Behind them came two Negroes, driving four or five cows and taking turns driving the oxen hitched to a wagon heavily laden with provisions as well as an assortment of equipment.

On the first and second days the Seelys made good time, passing through Bethlehem and getting as far as Nazareth, a distance of about forty-five miles. The next day they passed over the Wind Gap, stopping at Levis's just north of the Gap. By nightfall they reached Jacob Stroud's place. There they were entertained and put up for the night by their good-natured host. Taking the road paralleling the Delaware River, they covered thirty miles in the next two days and reached Smith's house near the present town of Milford. Here they spent the night. After the night's rest, they took the Wilderness Road to the Shohola House near Shohola Falls where the Ware family lived surrounded by the boundless forest.

Since the road ended at the Shohola House, the Seelys were obliged to leave the wagon behind. After loading as much as they could on the horses and shouldering what they could carry, the Seelys started out the next day for Indian Orchard with the Negroes driving the oxen and cows. With them went an Indian guide. Ahead of them there were no more outposts; there awaited the endless wilderness and a narrow Indian path leading to the forks of the Lackawaxen fifteen miles away.

When the Seelys and their guide reached the forks where the Wallenpaupack joins the Lackawaxen, two days were spent under the tutelage of the Indian in making a dugout canoe. Upon finishing the canoe, the Indian paddled load after load of supplies, tools, and gear over the treacherous river. Finally, all was safely on the other side. Here they made camp.

Early the following morning the Seelys started out on the remaining ten miles to Indian Orchard, a place where the Indians



had planted an apple orchard on the slope above the river. On the way Sylvanus, who was in front with the Indian, shot a deer which they tied on one of the horses. The Seelys reached Indian Orchard on April 20, just ten days after leaving Sinking Spring.

After unloading the horses, the first task was to build temporary shelters out of spruce boughs and birch bark. The next day, while the boys were busy at camp, Sylvanus explored the area with the Indian. They came back dragging a black bear that Sylvanus had shot. The following day Sylvanus again left his brothers and the Negroes at work clearing space for a house while he and the Indian went back to the forks to fetch some supplies left behind.

Making a cabin occupied the Seelys less than two weeks. As a result of several days of chopping down trees and hauling away the brush, the ground was cleared sufficiently for a house and yard. While the clearing and logging went on, some of the men were at work gathering stone and making a foundation for the cabin. One day was spent in making cedar shingles. Once the logs and shingles were ready and the foundation laid, it did not take long to finish the cabin. In one day the sides and rafters were up. In another, the shingles were on and the house with its dirt floor was ready for occupancy.

With the cabin built, Sylvanus decided to return to Sinking Spring to get his family and more supplies. Before leaving Indian Orchard, however, he put everyone to work planting a garden. He then set out for Sinking Spring, leaving his brothers with orders to clear more ground and get the garden fenced before the crops were up.

The first night out Sylvanus slept in the "Lost Swamp." From there on he found lodging, and after traveling four days reached Sinking Spring. It was then, it would seem, that the Seelys made a change in their plans for settling the North country. Perhaps Sylvanus's discouraging report on Indian Orchard persuaded Jonas to make Blooming Grove the principal settlement. In any event, Sylvanus now set about collecting supplies for settling Blooming Grove.

It was a beautiful June morning when Sylvanus, his wife, and children set out for Blooming Grove. Their destination, as Indian Orchard had been, was just a vacant spot in the wilderness of

northeastern Pennsylvania. Like Indian Orchard, Blooming Grove was in all probability the site of an abandoned Indian village. Pioneers chose such sites because the land was well watered, fertile, and partially cleared.

The Seelys made the journey from Sinking Spring to the Shohola House in eight days—about the time it took to get there on the first trip. At one stop they were happy to find Uncle Samuel on his way north to survey land for settlers. After this they ran into some trouble. During a stop at “Disappointed Hill” the horses, which were allowed to graze, wandered off in the night and were not found until near noon the next day.

The Seelys stayed four or five days with the Wares at the Shohola House while Sylvanus made preparations for settling at Blooming Grove, ten miles to the west. During the stopover, Sylvanus had six men improving and extending the road by following the old Minisink Trail from the Shohola House to Blooming Grove. Traveling along the completed road, the Seelys left the falls on June 13 and arrived at Blooming Grove late in the afternoon. Waiting for them at the Grove were Abe, Ike, and Lue with the two Negroes.

The following morning the Seelys set to work building another log house. This time they had the help of some of the men who had worked on the road, and the job went along rapidly. In three days the logs were cut, the foundation laid, and the walls up. But it was not until ten days later that Sylvanus got around to shingling the roof. The weather was warm, and since everyone could get along in makeshift shelters or by sleeping in the wagon, he set the men to planting a garden and making hay in the meadows.

While the Seelys were getting settled at Blooming Grove, they had the pleasure of a visit by the Wares. The Smiths, perhaps their next nearest neighbor, some twenty miles away, also came calling. Once his visitors left, Sylvanus drove to the Shohola House for a supply of rum. Rum, to be sure, would be as much in demand in the northern woods as in the grain fields of Sinking Spring.

Toward the end of June, Uncle Samuel visited Blooming Grove. Always on the go, Samuel was now on his way to Wyoming, where a band of Connecticut Yankees had recently settled on the

east branch of the Susquehanna. Samuel stayed only briefly at Blooming Grove before joining Ike in a fifty-mile trip to Wyoming. Along with the usual gear, they took six quarts of rum and an assortment of trading goods. Between Blooming Grove and Wyoming lay a vast swamp through which they made their way along the Minisink Trail. Five days later Uncle Samuel and Ike were back with stories of how the Yankees were faring and of their troubles with the Pennsylvania authorities who wanted to oust them from Wyoming.

During the early part of July, there was much coming and going at Blooming Grove. Sylvanus made a trip to the Shohola House and to Lackawaxen, a settlement of perhaps one or two families where the Lackawaxen joins the Delaware. Uncle Samuel and Ike left for Sinking Spring just before Daddy Seely arrived to see how his sons were getting on in the wilderness. Meanwhile, several parties of Indians came to Blooming Grove and sold Sylvanus a bear skin and some venison.

With the last of the Indians gone, Sylvanus decided to take most of the men to Indian Orchard for haying. The party, loaded down with supplies including three gallons of rum, reached Indian Orchard after a day's journey through the forest. The next morning all were in the meadows mowing hay. With everyone at work, Sylvanus soon started back to Blooming Grove for more provisions. He returned two days later to find the hay ready for stacking. Following two days of stacking, all returned to Blooming Grove where the men were put to work making hay.

August saw no slack in the activities at Blooming Grove. There was burning of brush on newly cleared land, plowing for winter wheat, and haying when the weather permitted. Having bought another plow, Sylvanus sent Daddy Seely to the Wares' to borrow their oxen. About this time Daddy Williamson showed up, and the occasion was celebrated with a quart of rum.

In September, with the men busy plowing and planting wheat, Sylvanus found time to build a spring house and put a chimney on his bedroom with the help of Daddy Seely. During the construction of the chimney Sylvanus had the fright of nearly being bitten by a rattlesnake. It was about then that Uncle Samuel returned and began surveying the Seely lands with Abe. Most

exciting of all, however, was the arrival of Uncle Jonas to look over his holdings and view the progress being made.

Entertaining Uncle Jonas soon put a strain on the rum supply at Blooming Grove. This compelled Sylvanus to make a trip to the Shohola House for two kegs of rum. A shortage of provisions forced Sylvanus to make a trip to Stroud's for twelve bushels of wheat. He could not resist buying some peppers and nutmeg to spice up Jenny's cooking. While at Stroud's he took a job for a day or two threshing rye, taking in pay five bushels of rye seed. On the way home he purchased seven gallons of rum at Smith's.

The first thing Sylvanus did after returning was to send seventeen buckskins to Stroud to apply on his account. It was now November, and time was found for more odd jobs. A stable was built for the livestock, the road to the Shohola House was repaired, another fireplace was built, and the meadows were burned as the Indians had done before. Intermittently, the men worked in the swamp making cordwood and clearing the land. One day in the swamp, Sylvanus had the good luck to shoot a big black bear and two deer.

Desiring to conserve the hay at Blooming Grove, Sylvanus sent the cattle to Wallenpaupack to feed on the hay stacked in the meadows along the creek. Toward the end of the month everyone was happy to see Uncle Samuel return from his surveying. Following supper, all gathered around the fireplace in the kitchen for a convivial evening. Altogether, Sylvanus noted, they drank nine gallons of rum during Uncle Samuel's stay at Blooming Grove.

Having caught a beaver, Sylvanus traded the pelt to Ware in exchange for cloth that he converted to family use as well as to making shirts for the Indian trade. One day an Indian named John Wompom came to the Grove and borrowed a gun for six weeks with a deal, no doubt, that Sylvanus would share in the kill.

In December there was the usual coming and going at Blooming Grove. Jenny left to visit Uncle Samuel and his wife Patience, who were now living near Smith's. On parting, Sylvanus gave his wife £3 in paper money for Uncle Samuel to enter for a shooting match that Sylvanus planned to attend. Not long after Jenny got back to Blooming Grove from Uncle Samuel's, Daddy Seely, who had been helping Sylvanus make two oxsleds and some other equipment, left for Sinking Spring.

During December Sylvanus had one or another of the men making trips to Wallenpaupack and Indian Orchard to check on the cattle. One day he sent the Negroes to Wallenpaupack to bring back the oxen for work in the swamp. They returned the next day with the bad news that one of the oxen had died. This was not the end of the hard luck, for a few days later Abe returned from Wallenpaupack with a report that one of the cows had died.

Toward the middle of December a wagoner arrived at Blooming Grove with ten gallons of rum, twelve bushels of corn, fourteen of wheat, and a sack of peas from Jacob Stroud. To apply on his account, Sylvanus sent the wagoner back with thirteen skins. For himself, the driver was given a pint of rum for the cold trip ahead.

When Christmas came Jenny was constantly in the kitchen making pies, cakes, and other desserts as well as cooking venison and the customary foods. On Christmas eve the Wares arrived to spend the holiday season. On the morn, Sylvanus gave the Negroes three quarts of rum, which they were to share with some Indians who had come to Blooming Grove to enjoy the merry-making.

Cold weather in January did not keep Sylvanus at home. After a trip to the Ware's, he decided to take advantage of a good covering of snow to go hunting. While out he shot a deer, which he dragged home over the snow and ice. A little later, on another trip to the Shohola House, Sylvanus suffered a case of frozen toes. The frostbite, however, did not prevent him from working with the men in the swamp the very next day. Only a day later, he was off to Wallenpaupack (someone had apparently settled there since the Seelys came to Blooming Grove), where he traded a deer skin for some supplies. Unfortunately his return was saddened by news that his red steer had died.

February, 1770 was much like January with work in the swamp, hauling wood, and frequent visits on the part of Sylvanus to one place or another. The extremely cold winter had a good side: Sylvanus got around to making a stabledoor. The weather, though, did not prevent him from traveling beyond the confines of his farm. He visited the Smith's, stopping along the way at Ware's.

Sylvanus returned home after three days. His sled was loaded with supplies, including a pair of shoes for Jenny. He then sent Smith £50 to apply to his account. It was about this time that Sylvanus became concerned because of his daughter Phyllis's illness. Fortunately she recovered quite soon, but it took three quarts of rum to effect the cure.

Having spent a day hauling fence rails, Sylvanus went out early the following morning with his gun to "view the road." Everything looked different, he mused, with the landscape hidden under a deep blanket of snow. On the way he met some Indians who offered to guide him for 8s. Sylvanus accepted their offer since the usual markers were buried in the snow. He thereafter shot two "pheasants."

Since they were low on hay at Blooming Grove and Wallenpaupack, Sylvanus decided to drive the cattle to Indian Orchard. Starting out early one morning with Abe and Lue, he found the going very difficult. It was windy and cold; to add to their tribulation, the horses wandered off and were lost during the night. Believing it would take too long to find them, they abandoned the animals and pushed on by foot through the deep snow.

They arrived at Lackawaxen the following day despite the hardship of a strong wind. Disappointed that the river was not frozen over and was too deep to wade, they were obliged to build a raft. It was late afternoon when they crossed the river, but worst of all they had exhausted their provisions. Fortunately, some food was stored at Indian Orchard, but by the time they got there the next day they were almost too exhausted to eat. On the way back the weather continued bitter cold—so cold that they did not stop to look for the horses. They arrived home by moonlight, dead tired and chilled to the bone.

Their return was followed by several days devoted to building a rail fence and then making maple sugar. For a number of days, they tapped the trees, gathered the sap, and boiled it down into sugar.

While the men were working with the maple sugar, Sylvanus took one of his brothers and started for Indian Orchard to see how the cattle were faring. Even though it was the 5th of March, the snow was still ten inches deep. They were heartened upon finding the horses that had been lost three weeks before. Since

these tough animals could withstand the cold and live off the buds and twigs when snow covered the grass, they had survived the cold.

It was toward night when Sylvanus and his brother reached Indian Orchard. It was not a happy arrival; they found that "the little cow" was dead. They were consoled by the fact that the others were safe and well. The next day they drove the cattle to the other side of the Lackawaxen, where more hay was stacked. Then Sylvanus and his brother started back to Blooming Grove, taking with them two oxen which Ware wished to borrow.

Until May, when all the cattle was brought back to Blooming Grove, a weekly check was made on the animals at Indian Orchard. On one occasion, the Negroes returned with the news that the "white ox" had died.

During the spring, Blooming Grove had the customary run of visitors. One day the Smiths called and left with four venison hams worth £4 which was applied to Sylvanus's account. Then Uncle Charlie, an otherwise unidentified relative came, stayed awhile, and left with a skin worth 13s. which he was to sell for Sylvanus.

In May, Sylvanus made a trip to Sinking Spring. Among his purchases at Reading was an assortment of fishhooks as well as a pair of shoes for Jenny. At Nazareth, on the way back, he bought some tobacco, a doorlock, some tin, and other items. While at Sinking Spring he hired two young men for work at Blooming Grove. One of them, named Bartly, was hired for one year for £3 with food, clothing, and lodging. The lad was given his first allowance in clothing when Sylvanus bought him a new hat at Reading.

Upon returning to Blooming Grove, Sylvanus found time to do more than just direct the work in the fields. One day he set out for Lackawaxen with Bartly to fish for shad. They returned with all the fish they could carry. The next day Sylvanus busied himself making a yoke for the oxen. With the yoke finished, he spent several days constructing a milkshed next to the house.

Having accumulated many pelts by trapping and trading with both white men and Indians, Sylvanus decided, considering the lateness of the season, to dispose of them. He therefore sent to Philadelphia a shipment which included, in addition to a number

of buckskins, the pelts of fourteen beaver, one otter, three raccoons, two wildcats, and one fox. When sold, the furs brought over £12. Other furs he traded with another pioneer for a yoke of oxen worth £15.

Not long after Sylvanus arrived home with his newly acquired oxen, the animals wandered away and became lost. At first Sylvanus did not let it worry him. Instead he continued mending a bridge over Blooming Grove Creek which periodically was washed out by floods. When there was still no report of the whereabouts of the oxen on the following day, he sent Abe out to look for them. While in the woods, Abe could supplement the rations in his sack with fish by using the four precious fishhooks provided by Sylvanus. Abe's failure to return after a few days led Sylvanus to send the Negroes out to look for both Abe and the oxen. The Negroes had not been gone long before Ware appeared with a report that he had seen the oxen between Blooming Grove and the Shohola House. Meanwhile, Abe was still out in the woods, apparently enjoying his leisure and the fishing.

During May and June, fencing and planting occupied the Seelys. Altogether Sylvanus had eight or ten men working at Blooming Grove, Wallenpaupack, and Indian Orchard. In July, with the men working in the fields, Sylvanus found time for frequent trips. On one occasion, he left Blooming Grove for Smith's in the company of Samuel Ogden, a well-known frontier justice of the peace who figured in the attempt of the Penns to eject the Connecticut people from Wyoming. His stay at Smith's gave Sylvanus an opportunity to pick cherries along the Delaware. He followed this side trip with a visit to Uncle Samuel at his nearby home. Concluding his two-day jaunt, he set off for Blooming Grove to check on the work, especially the planting of the buckwheat. This done, he left for Wyoming to trade some articles he had picked up at Smith's. From Wyoming he returned with a scythe, a hammer, and some other articles gained from his swapping with the Yankees.

Of interest are some of the miscellaneous happenings at Blooming Grove during July. One time, Sylvanus gave Bartly and the Negroes each a knife. The Negroes were also given some bearskins from which they were to make trousers for themselves. Sylvanus also made a cradle for reaping while keeping an eye on



the men fencing the garden before the woodchucks ate up all the vegetables. It was about this time that Sylvanus found an opportunity to "swopt" a fowling piece for a rifle.

August passed with its reaping and haying. In September the Seelys were busy again growing the winter wheat, harvesting the buckwheat, and doing other work. Toward the end of the month, Sylvanus bought a pair of oxen from some Connecticut people passing through Blooming Grove. From the Yankees he also bought some "shoger" and other items. Hearing that he might find trading good at Wyoming, Sylvanus made a trip to the Susquehanna in October with the snow already on the ground.

Soon after his return, Sylvanus set out on a trip which would finally take him to Sinking Spring. First of all, accompanied by Uncle Samuel, Sylvanus went to Indian Orchard to supervise some work. Then the two went to Ware's where they found Nicholas Scull, the surveyor. Sylvanus gave Scull some money owed by his father. They then went on to shoemaker Cartwright's before making their way to Stroud's where Sylvanus found his wife, who had been visiting in the area.

Sylvanus headed for Sinking Spring with Jenny following a deal with Stroud for the delivery of a load of goods to Blooming Grove. Just four days after arriving at Sinking Spring, Jenny had a miscarriage which cost them the life of a son. Jenny's condition, nonetheless, did not prevent them from starting back to Blooming Grove the next day.

Soon after Sylvanus returned to Blooming Grove, he received a shipment of knives, flints, powder, and cloth from Bartly, who had returned to Reading. Some of the articles Sylvanus sold to people visiting the Grove. The rest he took to Wyoming, where it was readily disposed of. Sylvanus returned by way of Wallenpaupack, where he sold some venison and a buckskin, having killed a deer on his way through the great swamp.

During November and December, Sylvanus seemed constantly on the go. Upon his return from Wyoming, he made a trip to the Shohola House to have some flour ground at the tubmill. The next day he was off to Snell's for butter. The following day he rode to Brodhead's, where he sold some skins. On the way back he stopped at Stroud's and he took time to make a pair of skis. Shortly thereafter, on a trip to Smith's he bought a mare for £7.

Then he went to Easton, where he purchased some goods which he intended to sell at a shooting match on Christmas day. At the match he won a hogshead of cider.

The year 1771 would be much like the others at Blooming Grove, but it would be the last year for Sylvanus in the Lackawaxen country until he returned long after the Revolution. Toward the end of January, Sylvanus set out for "Pexaick" (Passaic), now Chatham, New Jersey. Sylvanus was being sued by Nathaniel Day for some furs, and he wanted to be there to defend himself. As it turned out he lost the suit, but he made a decision that would affect his life for years to come. C. Bonnel had a house for sale in Chatham on the main road one-half mile west of the river. Sylvanus liked the property, so he bought it on time for £370 while making a down payment with money borrowed from a future neighbor, Jacob Morrell. With the transaction completed, Sylvanus returned to Blooming Grove.

During the late winter and early spring, he accumulated a large stock of furs and skins by trading and trapping. Even during May his catch was especially good. On one day alone he caught six beaver and three wolves. During a fishing trip, he caught thirty trout. On still another occasion, he came home from a hunting trip with a pouch full of pigeons.

After a summer supervising the work in the fields and making his endless trips, Sylvanus was back in the fur business in the fall. Some of the deer skins he had tanned by John Fish or other tanners. At one time he used some of the tanned hides to make moccasins. During this period he used skins to buy a horse, a gun, some traps, and other necessities. More and more Indians were beating a path to Blooming Grove with their furs and skins. Sylvanus sought out the Indians too. On one occasion, accompanied by Amos Ware, he went to an Indian's wigwam and traded a blanket coat and a pair of leggings for a deerskin and a fisher pelt.

After a trip to Sinking Spring in December, during which he bought and sold skins and pelts at various stops, Sylvanus was ready to leave Blooming Grove with its rough and rocky terrain for New Jersey. The house in Chatham was available; it needed only furnishing for occupancy. As was his custom now, Sylvanus sold furs and skins wherever he could find a customer.

On reaching Chatham, Sylvanus had cordwood carted to his new home from the Great Swamp, while he busied himself buying furniture and gathering provisions for the house. Then he left for Blooming Grove to get his family and belongings. In a few weeks Sylvanus Seely, the pioneer of Blooming Grove, was headed eastward to start life anew in New Jersey.