THE
Pennsylvania
Magazine
OF HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY

The World of Elizabeth Drinker

WOMEN'S HISTORY has been neglected over the years partially because historians have found women to be less "visible" than men. Because women were denied a major role in politics and business, they lacked the forums for expression which are the basis of historical analysis. Since women's "sphere" revolved around the home, there is a dearth of the traditional source material such as correspondence, political tracts, account books and speeches. This lacuna is particularly noticeable in the colonial and early federal periods.

With the burgeoning interest in women's studies, however, scholars have begun to re-examine existing source material in the hope that it will offer some assistance in this new field of historical enquiry. In so doing, researchers have turned to the one avenue of written expression which was commonly used by women—the diary. Many women took the time to record their daily impressions wherever they may have been. Although some diaries reflect nothing more than a strong sense of piety, others are a rich source of information about contemporary society and women's place in it. The latter description fits the journals of Elizabeth Sandwith Drinker.[1]

[1] The manuscript of this diary is located at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. Selections from the journal were published by Henry D. Biddle, ed., *Extracts from the Journal of Elizabeth Drinker* (Philadelphia, 1889).

Elizabeth Drinker (1734-1807) was a Quaker, a member of Philadelphia society ("the best Sort," she modestly admitted), and a keen observer of life in that community during one of the most turbulent eras in American history.[2] Her diary begins in 1758 and records both commonplace happenings and events of national significance over a period of forty-nine years. Mrs. Drinker's comments are an invaluable contribution to the understanding of her world. Not only are we privy to the opinions, aspirations, and self-perceptions of an eighteenth-century woman, but the people surrounding her take on greater clarity because of her daily recordings.

The journal consists of thirty-three manuscript volumes which have been transcribed into nearly 2,000 single-spaced typescript pages. The social history of eighteenth-century Philadelphia is contained in these pages and by carefully extracting information, one can construct a picture of daily life in a colonial and early federal city. Patient reading of the diary offers information on a variety of topics: medical practices in the eighteenth century, the role of women and the family in that community over a period of time, the urbanization and technological growth of Philadelphia. Equally important, it presents a view of the less fortunate Philadelphians: those who were dependent on the Drinkers and other elite members of the community for their sustenance.

Although Mrs. Drinker never indicated her purpose in keeping a diary, the care with which the entries were written suggests that she considered the possibility of future readers. The journal is a dispassionate commentary, an unemotional record of events. No expression of grief or joy affect the matter of fact way in which marriage, death, elopement, or loneliness are treated. Mrs. Drinker appears almost as an observer rather than a participant. She used French phrases to disguise the meaning of certain entries: "Je donne a MP argent."[3] She hinted at personal upheavals, but stopped short of commiting them to paper: "I have made a sorrowful discovery."[4] She was circumspect as to the whereabouts of runaway slaves in her private journal. She rarely criticized or spoke poorly of anyone—except, perhaps, Tom Paine. And

[2] Sept. 26, 1759. All dates, unless otherwise noted, refer to the Drinker diary

[3] "I am giving MP money." She was probably referring to Molly Penry who dined at her house on April 4, 1800.

[4] Dec. 28, 1800.

yet, despite the detachment of the author, the richness of the entries radiates from Mrs. Drinker to her family, her household, her neighborhood, Philadelphia, and the new republic. More important, we become aware of changes over time as her family and community mature.

Elizabeth Sandwich was a young woman of 24 when she began her journal; she was 73 and close to death at its end. The youthful woman of boundless energy spent her time horseback riding, at washing "frolicks," and in the constant company of friends. Once committed to Henry Drinker, her dear HD figured prominently in the journal. With age, she developed a fear of riding, she was reluctant to travel any distance, socializing (other than with her family) became an effort, and it was home that she loved "better than anywhere else."[5] Even the mild but constant expressions of affection for her husband paled as youth gave way to age.

Historians have only begun to tap this diary for the wealth it contains. In general, they have concentrated on extracting Drinker's words and activities to support their larger arguments. For example, Catherine Scholten has woven Drinker's childbirth experiences into her article on that subject.[6] Similarly, Mary Beth Norton touched on Mrs. Drinker's war time activities, her opinion of Mary Wollstonecraft, and her apparent lack of knowledge concerning her husband's business affairs. Linda Kerber expanded on some of these topics as well as on Mrs. Drinker's reading habits in her study of female intellect and ideology in the revolutionary era.[7] Elizabeth Drinker is also mentioned several times in J. William Frost's study of the colonial Quaker family. In addition to such topics as child rearing and the role of women in the Quaker community, Frost covered subjects such as courtship and educational opportunities, extracting information from the diary to corroborate his thesis.[8]

Yet none of these historians have focused on Drinker herself as an

[5] July 7, 1779.

[6] Catherine M. Scholten, "'On the Importance of the Obstetrick Art': Changing Customs of Childbirth in America, 1760-1825," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 34(1977), 426-45.

[7] Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (Boston, 1980), 233, 251, 7; Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill, 1980), 63-64, 95-98, 237-239.

[8] J. William Frost, *The Quaker Family in Colonial America: A Portrait of the Society of Friends* (New York, 1973), 71-72, 144, 165, 177, 209.

example of a woman living in late eighteenth-century America. What was her world like? What were her perceptions? What does the diary tell us about other women at that time and place? At the very least, it suggests that we should rethink our assumptions about eighteenth-century women. For example, only one of Elizabeth Drinker's comments supports Mary Beth Norton's contention that colonial women knew little of their husband's business activities: "I am not acquainted with the extent of my husbands great variety of engagements."[9] This may be Mrs. Drinker's perception, yet a complete reading of the diary suggests that she did indeed have a familiarity with her husband's financial affairs. In his absence during the war, she was forced to conduct business on behalf of James and Drinker.[10] She also pressed debtors and borrowed money for herself, Sally Jones, and Mary Pleasants.[11] The front room of their home was Henry Drinker's counting room, and since a great deal of business was conducted there or at the dinner table, it is not likely that much escaped Elizabeth Drinker's watchful eye.[12] As household manager, Mrs. Drinker paid the bills as well as the servants. Under these circumstances, she must have known something of the family's finances, and there is little doubt that Henry Drinker discussed such matters with her:

> My husband is gone this evening to attend the sale of Atsion Iron-works at the Coffee house—by which he is like to be a considerable loser. but it is nissesary they should be sold.[13]

In much the same way, a thorough reading of the diary persuades us that Mrs. Drinker was politically astute and took a keen interest in issues that historians usually argue were beyond the sphere of women. The problem of conflicting interpretations seems to stem from the fact that women were extremely diffident about their own knowledge or achievements and their words have been taken at face value. Just as Mrs. Drinker considered herself uninformed about her husband's

[9] Dec. 12, 1795.
[10] Jan. 3, 1778.
[11] April 1, 4, 1778.
[12] April 17, 30, 1794.
[13] June 20, 1805.

business engagements, she seems to have perceived of herself as lacking in political acumen:

> I read today. . .A Vindication of Mr. Randolph's Resignation, some say it does not make good the Title. for my part I look not on myself as a competent judge.[14]

The diary is striking evidence to the contrary, however, and suggests that it is time to reassess the whole question of political awareness and female deference. Throughout the journal Mrs. Drinker is politically assertive, and on no occasion did she apologize for her political opinions. She immersed herself in the political pamphlets of the day, deciding on her own whether a particular diatribe was "rather triffling," "but middling," or "an excellent piece."[15] Her distaste for Tom Paine was complete, and his writings ranged in her opinion from merely "vile" to a series of "blasphemies."[16] She grudgingly admitted that he had "the knack of writing" and her greatest fear was that "the ignorant, the weak and the vicious [would] fall into his snare."[17] Clearly, she was not among those taken in. Her dislike of the Democrats was only slightly more disguised.

She avidly followed election results, noting on one occasion that "we know not yet how ye Election will go, but, I for my part, have little doubts about it."[18] Her diary suggests a similar concern with congressional and international affairs, and she sought the most current news about events in France.

There is no reason to think her political opinions were a reflection of her husband's attitude. The constant flow of visitors and conversation, the availability of political literature, the fact that Philadelphia was the political hub of the country, all influenced her political sensibilities in much the same way they affected the opinions of the male members of her family. Moreover, Mrs. Drinker's daughter Sally delivered po-

[14] Oct. 27, 1795.
[15] Oct. 11, 1796; May 31, 1798; Sept. 1, 1796.
[16] Sept. 1, 1796; July 3, 1798.
[17] Sept. 6, 1794; Dec. 16, 1796.
[18] Oct. 14, 1800.

litical sallies with as little deference as her mother, offering opinions on Albert Gallatin, Robert Goodloe Harper, and William Cobbett to a complete stranger.[19]

For the most part, however, the diary supports our image of the eighteenth-century woman. Molded by the society in which she lived, Elizabeth Drinker thought of herself first and foremost as a wife and mother, and her commitment to her family was total. She raised her children, tended her husband, and never went further than their circle "to look for comfort."[20] She nursed them through their illnesses, secure in the knowledge that purges, bloodletting, and chicken soup would eventually save the day.[21]

An extremely literate and well informed woman, she nevertheless questioned her own intellectual ability, referring to her "dull brain"[22] and the fact that her mind wandered when she read.[23] Although politically aware, she never pressed for political rights, even when she took a partisan stand. And if, after reading Mary Wollstonecraft in 1796, Elizabeth Drinker could say that in "many of her sentiments" she "speaks my mind," she was quick to add that she herself was "not for quite so much independence." A few years later, she admitted that she did not even like Wollstonecraft, "or her principles."[24]

Mrs. Drinker was content to be dependent on the male members of her household and community. She had "no independent fortune," nor did she "wish for one" as long as she could depend on her beloved HD or her sons.[25] She felt safer with men around, becoming "easily frighted" or "a little cowardly" in their absence.[26] A household at night without a male resident left her sleepless, and the Drinkers frequently arranged for HD's clerk, Peter Widdows, to take the place of the absent Henry Drinker.[27] She appears to have run her household efficiently, yet it is clear that she relied on her husband's advice: "I am always at a

[19] June 18, 1797.
[20] Jan. 1, 1802.
[21] Feb. 6, 1795.
[22] March 28, 1795.
[23] Sept. 3, 1796.
[24] April 22, 1796; Nov. 25, 1798.
[25] Oct. 13, 1796.
[26] Sept. 11, 1794; Sept. 2, 1794.
[27] Aug. 6, 1796.

loss how to act, but hope I shall be directed for the best."[28]

Yet despite her determination to act out the character assigned to her by eighteenth-century standards, the revolutionary upheaval forced another role upon her—and she played that one with a combination of reluctance and competence. She sternly confronted both British and American officers during the war years, and travelled to Lancaster in order to badger the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania until that august body released her husband.[29] She was capable of running the household and financial affairs in HD's absence, but was clearly not desirous of doing so. Once he returned, she retreated into her sphere. She may have walked part of the way to Lancaster in the chilly and wet spring of 1778, but she never doubted that on a cold day the "proper place for most women" was home.[30] She discouraged the assistance of Israel Morris on her mission to Lancaster because he interfered with her plans, yet in normal times she was not as self-reliant: "We are worse off this night than ever—having no man with us."[31]

Elizabeth Drinker's world extended beyond her family to include participation in the Society of Friends and, at least until her later years, socializing with friends. Her support of Quaker beliefs was absolute, and she attended meetings faithfully until old age prevented her from doing so. Although she did not become a minister, her circle of Friends included several who were. Company filled her house from morning until evening, and until late in her life it was "an uncommon circumstance" when no person outside the family visited. By 1800, however, she admitted that even though she still enjoyed "society," at times it became "burdensome" and she preferred to spend her leisure time either sewing or reading.[32] The latter activity was one she had little time for in the early years of her marriage, and although sewing was more constructive, it was reading that Elizabeth Drinker preferred.

She always harbored some guilt about this indulgent use of her time, and more than once felt compelled to defend the hours enjoyed in this manner. "It looks as if I spent most of my time reading, which is by no

[28] Aug. 11, 1798.

[29] Henry Drinker was among the Quakers imprisoned by the Americans for refusing to sign a loyalty oath to the rebel government. Feb. 3, 1778 ff.

[30] Feb. 25, 1795.

[31] April 3, 1778; Sept. 4, 1794.

[32] Jan. 4, 1795; Feb. 10, 1800.

means the case. . ." she noted in 1795. And in the winter of the following year she explained that she had been knitting, sewing, and baking, "to shew that I have not spent the day reading." The ultimate justification was that because of her ill health, reading was a consolation rather than a delight.[33] But read she did, and with an appetite that would astonish most people today. By this stage in her life she had forsaken "the old fashion Gothick stories" of her youth. Instead, she pored over—and commented on—ancient and modern histories, religious tracts, "Lavater on Physiognomy," "the Morals of Confucius," ("a sweet little peice it is"), "Dante's Inferno," and the "Letters from the Merchioness De Sevigne to Her Daughter" (which were too openly affectionate).[34] She read poetry and plays. She did not approve of novels or romances, but read them nonetheless, on the assumption that "an infirm old woman" did not sin by so doing. Mrs. Drinker found Rabelais' works "filled with such obscene dirty matter," however, that she immediately returned them to the library, lest she be tainted. She censored her thirty-six year old daughter's reading material on the grounds that the book on hand was too "pernicious" for her.[35]

Although Elizabeth Drinker's diary offers the opportunity to explore, in great detail, the mind and activities of its author over several decades, the journal is all the more valuable because it reaches outward beyond her life to the lives of her children and grandchildren, her household, and the city of Philadelphia. Because the diary spans so many years, and because Mrs. Drinker was a conscientious scribe, the journal becomes a source of quasi-quantifiable information for subjects about which we have had only literary evidence. This is nowhere more evident than when we examine such issues as age of childbearing, intervals between births, and duration of breast-feeding.

Mrs. Drinker married at age twenty-seven, and during her marriage gave birth to eight children,[36] three of whom died either in infancy or early childhood.[37] She conceived her first child immediately after her

[33] May 22, 1795, Feb 29, 1796

[34] June 20, 1795, July 13, 1794, May 28, 1795, May 8, 1797

[35] June 20, 1795, Jan 7, 1796, Sept 13, 1796, Aug 9, 23, 1800

[36] On Dec 31, 1793, Mrs Drinker referred to 9 children Perhaps she included a miscarriage or stillbirth

[37] Sarah (Sally), b 1761, Ann (Nancy), b 1764, Mary, b 1765, d 1766, William b 1767, Henry (Harry), b and d 1769, Henry S , b 1770, Mary (Molly), b 1774, Charles b 1781, d 1784

marriage in January 1761 and was delivered of a daughter in October of that year. For the next twenty years she had children at selected intervals ranging from fifteen months to seven years five months. Her last child was born in 1784 after a very difficult pregnancy when she was forty-seven years old.

Since we know that women over thirty-five conceive less quickly than younger women, it is not surprising to learn that her last pregnancies were spaced further apart than the earlier ones. What is interesting to note, however, is that her last few children were nursed for longer periods than her earlier ones, perhaps as an attempt to forestall further pregnancies.[38] Mrs. Drinker must have noticed that in the early years of her marriage, each time she weaned a child (or sent a baby out to nurse) she immediately became pregnant. With some reluctance, she turned her sixth child over to a wet nurse, knowing what the probable consequences would be.[39] She subsequently miscarried, and then to be on the safe side, nursed her last two children for twenty and twenty-six months.

All three of Mrs. Drinker's daughters married, the older two in their very late twenties, the youngest at an earlier age when she eloped in August 1796.[40] The two older daughters, Sally Downing and Nancy Skyrin, had fewer children than their mother (5 and 3) and although Mrs. Drinker's journal ends before her youngest daughter's childbearing years were over, it is clear from the pattern already set that Molly Drinker Rhoads would also have fewer children.

Molly's first child was stillborn, but despite this disappointment Mrs. Drinker was in no hurry for her daughter to become pregnant again. Speaking of the stillbirth, Mrs. Drinker sadly noted that because of it, Molly, who gave promise of "a good breast of milk," would suffer "the same excruciating trouble a year the sooner for the loss."[41] Her belief in the contraceptive power of lactation also led to words of com-

[38] Robert V. Wells confirmed a general trend toward smaller families and longer intervals between births in his article "Family Size and Fertility Control in Eighteenth-Century America A Study of Quaker Families," *Population Studies* 25(1971), 73-82

[39] July 13, 1771

[40] Both Mrs. Drinker and her two older daughters married later than average See Robert V. Wells, "Quaker Marriage Patterns in a Colonial Perspective," *William and Mary Quarterly* 39(1972), 417-419.

[41] June 14, 1797.

fort for her oldest daughter, Sally, who was in the throes of childbirth. She reminded Sally that since she was thirty-eight, this birth might be "the last trial of this sort if she could suckle her baby for 2 years to come, as she had several times done heretofore."[42] On the whole, all three of Elizabeth Drinker's daughters appear to have nursed their children for longer periods than their mother did. Even Nancy (who nursed her children for shorter periods than the others), breast-fed at least sixteen months. In her eagerness to prolong nursing, however, Molly ran into difficulty—and superstition. "Having a great weakness in her Eyes . . .she has been told it is owing to her suckling such a strong lusty boy—and was told of a person who lost her sight by it." Weighing that danger against a possible pregnancy, Molly Drinker Rhoads weaned her son.[43] Even her mother thought Molly carried breast-feeding to excess and remarked that it was "high time" for Molly to wean her third child after the toddler's second birthday.[44]

The diary not only offers comparisons between Mrs. Drinker and her daughters in terms of childbirth and nursing practices, but in other respects as well. Educational ideas and customs changed over the years, and Mrs. Drinker's journal chronicles some of the transformation. Of her own formal education we know little. She mentioned that Anthony Benezet was one of her schoolmasters,[45] and her diary entries suggest that at some point she learned elementary French. Since she recorded her ability to handle accounts, she must have had some mathematical skills. Her handwriting is quite good for an eighteenth-century female, and there is little doubt that her devotion to reading came early in life, although only in her later years did she have the leisure to indulge in that pastime.

All of Mrs. Drinker's children started what must have been a sort of nursery school around age 3½, but equal education ended soon after that. Although both boys and girls would learn reading, writing, arithmetic, and French, other customs and subjects were gender based. Both Billy and Henry eventually parted company with their sisters and went to a "man's school."[46] Sally and Nancy went to knitting school and

[42] Oct. 23, 1799.
[43] Dec. 7, 1802.
[44] April 1, 1806.
[45] Nov. 20, 1793.
[46] May 3, 1775; March 15, 1779; Nov. 4, 1782.

Nancy refined whatever artistic talents she may have had by attending drawing school.[47] The Drinkers sent their sons Billy and Henry to Latin school, but there is no evidence that Sally, Nancy, or Molly ever joined them.[48]

By the time Elizabeth Drinker's grandchildren were old enough to attend school, changing attitudes toward learning meant that the children of Sally, Nancy, Molly, and Henry would receive a different educational experience. At least six of Elizabeth Drinker's grandchildren (of both sexes) went to boarding school.[49] Elizabeth and Mary Downing attended what Elizabeth Drinker first called the "Western School," but what was really the newly founded Quaker Westtown School. Patterned after the Ackworth School in England, Westtown offered the Downing girls a broad spectrum of subjects, including Latin, a language to which neither their mother nor grandmother had been exposed. Although visits home were frowned upon, the Downing children appeared in Philadelphia at various intervals, sometimes staying as long as a month at a time.[50]

Eliza and Eleanor Skyrin also "boarded" at school, but not at Westtown. They were sent to study "at Bybary" at the house of a former Westtown school mistress, Rebecca Budd.[51] Henry Drinker Junior chose to board his son William at Haddonfield, while William's sister Esther was involuntarily schooled at James Emery's in Chester County, not far from Downingtown.[52] Although the curriculum at these other schools may not have been as full as the one at Westtown, the Drinker family made sure that the children had equal educational opportunities: "Eliz'th Skyrin came after dinner, her Uncle is about teaching her the rudiments of Latin."[53]

Elizabeth Drinker had mixed feelings about boarding school, however, particularly when girls were involved:

[47] Sept. 7, 1774; March 1, 1774.
[48] March 4, 1779; May 5, 1783; Feb. 8, 1803.
[49] Eliza and Mary Downing, Eliza and Eleanor Skyrin, William and Esther Drinker.
[50] April 11, 1802; Sept. 8, 1802.
[51] May 30, 1804.
[52] Jan. 3, 1805; May 6, 8, 1806.
[53] June 25, 1807.

> Jacob Downing [ED's son-in-law] went this morning before 5 o'clock to T. Stewardsons to enter Eliza's name for a place at ye boarding school. 14 had been before hand with him. people are in a great hurry, I think, to get rid of their children, 'tho I believe it to be the best thing many can do for their children, in some cases, but had I a doz'n daughters and health to attend to them, not one should go there. . .[54]

And her opinion had not changed six years later when her granddaughter Esther Drinker left for school: "I don't like it if it can be helped boarding out girls anywhere." Three of her granddaughters agreed, and Mrs. Drinker recorded the unhappy partings between parents and children.[55] If, in general, more children were sent away to school at the beginning of the nineteenth century, this fact would argue against the thesis propounded by some historians of the family that parents became more child-oriented after the Revolution, and that birth control was more widely practiced so that parents could spend a greater amount of time with each child. At the same time, it may also reflect a desire by Friends to monitor the educational environment of their children in a society that was becoming increasingly heterogeneous.

Elizabeth Drinker's family included a number of people who were not actually relatives. Household servants were considered part of one's family in the eighteenth century, and the Drinker diary provides a rare opportunity to examine the complex relationship between master and servant at that time.

Four types of household workers served the Drinker family. Bound servants, usually acquired as children, were indentured for a stipulated period after a one or two week trial.[56] Self-employed live-in maids, whose duties included general housework, cooking, and child care, made up the second group. These workers, usually unmarried women, were provided with room, board, and wages. Although they were frequently hired on a "per annum" basis, they were free to leave at any time—and their employers could dismiss them at will. The third type of worker was employed on a short term live in basis. This might be a

[54] June 1, 1800.

[55] March 15, 1806, May 3, 1804, May 8, 1806.

[56] See Frost, *The Quaker Family*, pp. 145-147 for evidence that indentured servitude in the Drinker family followed the general pattern in post-revolutionary Philadelphia.

woman hired as a wet nurse, or to care for someone recovering from a serious illness. The last group was composed of workers hired on a daily basis for such tasks as sewing, ironing, or whitewashing (painting). Although there were a few instances when Mrs. Drinker mentioned a scarcity of good help in Philadelphia—such as during the war or yellow fever epidemic—most of the time household help seemed to be available—even plentiful.[57]

Servants came and went with such bewildering frequency that it is difficult to know how many the Drinkers retained at any given time, but in the pre-war years she seems to have managed with five or six, while in the 1790s and thereafter, the staff was slightly larger.[58] Even when most of her children were married and her immediate household had dwindled to four people, Mrs. Drinker employed seven in help: "four in the parlor, 3 in the kitchen."[59] This may seem unreasonable by modern standards, but on any given day anywhere from six to sixteen people could come by unexpectedly for dinner (served mid-day) or tea. Several might take advantage of the Drinkers' hospitality and extend their stay for a few days or even a week. This was not considered either unusual or an inconvenience as long as the servants stood ready to prepare food and beds.

Given the various working arrangements in the Drinker household, it is possible to compare the advantages and disadvantages of indentured servitude with self-employed free labor. Indentured servants may have been bound by a long term commitment over which they had no control, but this was, perhaps, not too great a price for the advantages they received. In all but law, they were part of the Drinker's "family." Since their food, lodging, and clothing were provided by the Drinkers, an inflationary economy posed little threat to them directly. More important, for the length of their indenture they were assured of a "job" even in times of economic stress when others might be laid off.

Although contractual obligations prevented the Drinkers from firing an indentured servant prematurely, free workers could be dismissed either temporarily or permanently. When Mr. and Mrs. Drinker went

[57] Nov. 20, 1793; Sept. 10, 1778; Nov. 29, 1778.
[58] Sept. 10, 1778; Dec. 1, 1777.
[59] Dec. 1, 1805.
[60] Nov. 5, 1802.

to their summer house, they reduced the number of free servants in their household, hoping, perhaps, that these people would be available for work again in the fall. We do not know what the servants did for the five or six months that the Drinkers were out of town, but when Mrs. Drinker returned to Philadelphia she noted in her journal that "our Patience came yesterday morning on the old terms."[60] The Drinkers did not fire a servant for less than what they considered good cause, but indentured servants could get away with things that self-employed workers could not: "I dismist my maid Caty Paterson this afternoon, on her return home after 2 or 3 days frolocking." Waiting in the wings was a former retainer Molly Hensel, who would "supply her place tomorrow."[61]

On the other hand, live in wage-earning servants had a greater potential for upward mobility than indentured servants for the reason that if they were employed for any length of time, they could accumulate capital. Self-employed workers, as well as indentured servants, were spared the cost of room and board if they lived with the Drinkers. In addition, free workers received a salary, which, from time to time, was recorded by Mrs. Drinker. Although the diary does not lend itself to exhaustive quantitative study, the evidence tentatively suggests that the actual wages of free, live in general household workers increased during the last third of the eighteenth century. When an inexperienced Sally Gardner first came to work for the Drinkers in December 1766, she earned the equivalent of £6½ (Pa.) per annum. By May 1806, a relatively unskilled maid who knew "very little of cooking" could earn £19½ (Pa.).[62]

The journal clearly indicates that wages increased between 1766 and the Revolution, which, if true, is at odds with what Billy G. Smith has discovered for other Philadelphia laborers during this same period.[63] If Smith's figures are correct relative to the price of clothing between 1766-1771 (which was the only subsistence item not provided by the Drinkers), then the real wages of these household workers increased as well during that time. The journal pages are frustratingly silent con-

[61] Feb. 10, 1780.

[62] Feb. 1, 1766; May 30, 1806.

[63] Billy G. Smith, "The Material Lives of Laboring Philadelphians, 1750-1800," *William and Mary Quarterly* 38(1981), 163-202, esp. 173, 183, 184.

cerning wages during the 1780s, and for the 1790s only offer clues that a skilled houseworker could earn 8-9 shillings weekly (£20-23 annually) in 1795, and 10 shillings weekly (£26 annually) in 1796.[64] Beyond that, there is only enough scattered information for the early 1800s to suggest that the 1806 figure is not aberrational.

Within the same time frame, however, some servants were able to obtain higher salaries than others. For example, Anna Duffey and Ellen Foster (who replaced her) worked for 7/6 or $1.00 per week in the spring of 1806, but Lydia Atkinson who came "to service" was engaged that summer for $1.50 per week.[65] Whether she was older or possessed special skills that entitled her to 50% more salary, we do not know. For that matter, we are left ignorant as to Caty's duties for which she received only £1 or £1/1/4 monthly between June and November 1806.[66]

The amount of the wages, however, is secondary to the fact that self-employed live in servants were able to put aside money for future use. Anna Duffey is a case in point. At the inception of her service, she agreed to work for $1.00 per week. During the eighty weeks she was employed by the Drinkers she had "taken up but 17¾ dollars," so that when she resigned in May 1806 she had "a good sum due to her," a result of her being "a saving manageing body." Anna informed her employer that she had "taken a House at 20 pounds a year. . .to keep shop and take lodgers." On May 13, 1806 Elizabeth Drinker paid Anna "in full—62½ dollars," and Anna left the next day.[67]

If Anna succeeded in her effort to move from a domestic worker to shopkeeper and landlady, this would surely indicate a degree of upward mobility. We do not know whether in fact she achieved her goal, and she is mentioned only once again in the diary. On November 1, 1806, Elizabeth Drinker recorded that "a young married woman of the name of North called to inquire the character of Anna Duffey, which I gave her." This vague reference may mean that Ms. Duffey was forced to abandon her scheme and return to domestic service in order to maintain herself. Yet the Philadelphia county census of 1810 lists an Ann Duffy as a head of household in West Southwark, an area on the southern

[64] April 19, 1795, July 1, 1796.
[65] 7/6 means seven shillings, 6 pence. Oct. 30, 1804, May 24, 30, 1806, July 9, 1806
[66] £1 Pa. equals $2.66. See inside diary cover 1806.
[67] Oct. 30, 1804, May 2, 12, 13, 14, 1806.

periphery of the city which was home to a large number of laborers and sailors. If this was the same Anna Duffey, her household in 1810 included one white female (presumably herself) between the ages of 16 and 45, and two white males who were somewhere between 26 and 45. Whether these men were relatives or boarders was unrecorded.[68]

Anna Duffey was not the only self-employed servant who was able to set aside funds. Lydia Atkinson also managed without collecting her wages on a regular basis. "I settled with Lydia Atkinson this even'g pd her off and took a receipt. She has left 33 Dollars under MS's care. . .to keep 'till she returns. . . .[69] What use Lydia eventually made of the money we do not know. Sally Dawson, on the other hand, who remained with the Drinkers on a wage earning basis after she became free, had "a great call for money—to purchase finery."[70] In the seventeen months between the end of her indenture and the time Mrs. Drinker "settled with S. Dawson," Sally had spent £27/6 on articles of which Mrs. Drinker clearly disapproved. One might also point out that Anna Duffey, Lydia Atkinson, and Sally Dawson all evidenced their trust in the Drinkers by allowing them to withhold wages for such a lengthy period of time, especially since Mrs. Drinker had gratuitously withheld wages from another servant who threatened to leave.[71]

The diary makes it reasonably clear that the constant and widespread use of the word "family" in connection with servants was not loosely applied. In the network of eighteenth-century relationships, a servant *was* part of the employer's family in the sense that she or he received the kind of support that today one would expect only from a family. Elizabeth Drinker routinely tended sick servants in the same way that she tended her children. When Sally Dawson contracted yellow fever, Mrs. Drinker was consumed with guilt because she herself was ill and could not care for the girl. The doctor sent Sally to the hospital and assured Mrs. Drinker that it was the best course "unless her mistress could attend constantly on her," at home. A hospital was a second choice, to be relied upon in unusual circumstances: "[Molly's] maid is

[68] The Pennsylvania census for 1810 may be examined at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

[69] MS was Mary Sandwith, Elizabeth Drinker's sister.

[70] May 13, 1803.

[71] Jan. 6, 1800.

gone to the Hospital. . .having no one to take care of her."[72]

Even more interesting from a twentieth-century perspective are the relationship and responsibility that the Drinkers felt toward former servants. "Polly Chapman, who liv'd some years ago at service with us, came here yesterday to tell her troubles, she has lost her husband (a poor thing) and left with two young children." It is unlikely that Mrs. Chapman left the Drinker house emptyhanded. Widows were particularly vulnerable in eighteenth-century Philadelphia, and more than one found herself requesting aid from Mrs. Drinker: "Grace Biddle formerly Thomas who lived at service here 11 years ago came to solicit help, having buried her husband lately. . . ."[73]

Poor pregnant women often asked for donations to see them through the expenses of childbirth. "Black Hannah. . .came this morn'g to pay us a visit and make a collection against her laying in." This servant lived with the Drinkers "between seven and nine years ago" but was "so very naught[y]" that the Drinkers disposed of her after a year. Despite this unpleasant association, Hannah correctly felt that Mrs. Drinker would be sympathetic to her needs. Sally Brant, who was pregnant again in 1798, appeared at the Drinker's to collect the "several useful things" that had been "put up" for her.[74]

Molly Drinker made some garments for another former servant, who, Mrs. Drinker noted, "lived at service with us many years ago, was an industrous ignorant poor woman, lately married to a drunken old man, and was I fear addicted to the same failing." A year after Sally Downing sent her "boy Dan. . .off with Freedom Cloaths, and got him a good place," he returned to her house "rag[g]ed and lousay. Sally . . .gave him a Shirt and p'r trousers, and mony to get lodgings."[75]

The responsibility that the Drinkers felt toward former servants was extended even further to the families of these same people. Peter Woodward's brother sought and received assistance from the Drinkers when he was ill. And when Peter Woodward's father died, his mother went to the Drinkers "to ask for a shirt to lay him out in."[76]

[72] Molly Drinker was Elizabeth Drinker's youngest daughter. Sept. 29, 1803; April 10, 1799.

[73] Nov. 20, 1793; May 2, 1797.

[74] Jan. 26, 1796; April 18, 1798.

[75] Sally Downing was the oldest of Elizabeth Drinker's three daughters. Jan. 30, 1796; April 15, 1807.

[76] May 2, 1807; March 7, 1807.

As a record of servitude written by one individual, there are certain drawbacks to the use of the Drinker journal. The diary cannot tell us how many Irish or black servants lived in eighteenth-century Philadelphia, or, for that matter, how many households included servants. It offers no information on the number of indentured servants compared to free workers in colonial or early federal Philadelphia, and adds little or nothing to our knowledge of another form of servitude—slavery.

Yet despite the fact that Elizabeth Drinker was only one person and her household only one household, in many ways she and her family typified the master-servant relationship in eighteenth-century Philadelphia. There is no reason to think that servants were any more or less available to anyone else, or that hiring practices differed from place to place within Philadelphia. Similarly, there is no evidence that wage earning servants earned any more or less money from Elizabeth Drinker's contemporaries. Forced to cope with continuing turnover and the need for replacements, the Drinkers used both indentured and wage earning servants. The day to day problems Mrs. Drinker faced were likely to have been similar to those faced by other household managers.

Beyond these issues, however, what the diary suggests is that masters dominated the lives of their servants in ways it is difficult to comprehend today. It is no accident that Mrs. Drinker constantly referred to "our John," "our Sally," "our Peter," or "our Patience." There is a suggestion of possessiveness that pervades the diary, and one suspects that this attitude was widely held. The servants were young men and women who were considered "family," and as a senior member of that family, Elizabeth Drinker made decisions for these junior members and imposed her own standards and rules upon them. She considered it her duty to guide their behavior; they probably resented her intrusion into their private lives. "There is great trouble with Servants sometimes, more especially with some when we are thoughtful for their welfare."[77] In master-servant terms, this thoughtfulness translated into a responsibility on the part of the Drinkers for those dependent on them far beyond twentieth-century expectations.

[77] May 6, 1795.

In turn, the diary suggests that servants had a vital role to play in Philadelphia beyond their household chores. In the absence of telephones, they were the information links of the community. The fragility of life demanded constant and up-to-date news concerning the health of family members or friends who lived in another part of town. This was particularly crucial during the all too frequent yellow fever epidemics when an apparent black immunity to the disease allowed these servants to act "as nurses to the sick."[78] Servants fetched doctors in other cases of illness and announced the arrival of babies. When cries of fire were sounded, a servant went to determine its location or severity. A strange noise in the night cost a servant sleep, as he or she investigated the cause. The family driver or coachman delivered messages and waited for replies at various households en route to market. Recognized by others as members of the Drinker household, servants might be questioned about any number of things by those who were not fortunate enough to have servants to send on errands. Servants were privy to matters of importance that could be gossiped about with the constant stream of tradespeople and supplicants at the back door.

Although the servants are seen only through Mrs. Drinker's eyes, the picture of them and their activities is uncommonly multifaceted. In the absence of written accounts by the servants themselves, the journal stands as a unique example of a document that enables us to learn a little more about people once thought lost to history.

* * * *

Elizabeth Drinker's diary also records the nature of Philadelphia over half a century. Among other things, the journal registers the class consciousness of William Penn's spiritual descendants, and Mrs. Drinker speaks casually of the "lower class of people" who could be clearly identified by certain characteristics.[79] Yet as people moved from one house to another during these years, neither Mrs. Drinker nor her neighbors on Front Street showed that their awareness of class lines affected residential patterns.[80]

Although Henry Drinker was an affluent merchant, he and his family shared their alley with "one Dows a sailmaker," as well as with

[78] Sept. 8, 1793

[79] Sept. 25, 1777; July 20, 1796.

[80] See Sam Bass Warner, Jr., *The Private City* (Philadelphia, 1968), 11-15 for further evidence of mixed settlement patterns.

another person who turned out to be a thief. Directly opposite the Drinkers, a neighbor built "a large Soap House" which Mrs. Drinker conceded was "a disagreeble Surcumstance," and which attests to the absence of zoning regulations.[81] "Nearly opposite" the Drinkers in 1793 were Caty Prusia and her husband Christian, the biscuit baker, "Christopher the Barber near ye corner, and a fringemaker, on the side of him."[82] By 1803, Mrs. Drinker's olfactory sensations were alternately whetted by Christian Hahn the chocolateer, or abused by the varnish fumes of the windsor chair maker.[83] Nevertheless, while the Drinkers may have been content to live among tradespeople they did not socialize with them, preferring to keep company with other Quakers, or with the more prominent Philadelphians of the day.

The evolution of urban amenities is also contained in the diary pages. If, in 1760, Elizabeth Sandwith remained home from meeting because of "it being very dark and ye streets dirty," by 1795 her excuse was less valid. In July of that year, the "corporations of the City. . .provided watering carts for the watering and cleaning of ye streets. . . ."[84] Two years later the cobblestones were removed in Mrs. Drinker's neighborhood, and the streets paved.[85] Although Mrs. Drinker did not live long enough to see water brought into homes via indoor plumbing, in the last year of her life pipes were laid in her alley "to convey ye water as far up as the livery Stable."[86]

The personal cleanliness of Philadelphians also took a turn for the better at the end of the eighteenth century. Although in fine weather people could resort to the river for bathing (in addition to bath houses), men seemed more inclined toward these activities than women. Finally in 1798 the Drinkers rigged up a shower in their backyard, operated by a string or a patient maid. Although her daughter Nancy availed herself of this device immediately, Mrs. Drinker sensibly waited a year until the summer of 1799 before trying it out. She "bore it better" than she expected, "not having been wett all over at once, for 28 years past."[87] A

[81] July 20, 1784.
[82] Sept. 2, 1793.
[83] Oct. 1, 1803; June 24, 1806.
[84] Jan. 20, 1760; July 24, 1795.
[85] June 12, 1797.
[86] May 31, 1807.
[87] July 31, 1798; July 1, 1799.

few years later, the Drinkers, and others who could afford it, began to install indoor bathtubs "made of wood lined with tin and painted—with Castors under ye bottom and a brass lock to let out the water."[88] The Drinkers never did solve the problem of keeping the water heated long enough for everyone to take a bath. She and her husband claimed first use of the water, and only after they were sufficiently cleansed were the servants "Lydia and Patience" allowed "into ye same bath. . .and John after them."[89] Rank had privileges.

Mrs. Drinker's diary also allows us a glimpse of the infant American republic at the turn of the nineteenth century. It is a view from Philadelphia, because in her mature years Elizabeth Drinker rarely left home, content merely to read and comment about places beyond her immediate neighborhood. One of the more interesting series of entries from this period relates to a number of fires which broke out along the eastern seaboard in 1796 and 1797. According to the newspaper accounts which Mrs. Drinker faithfully copied, the Delaware Fire Company first made Philadelphians aware that

> Savannah, Charleston, New-York, Baltimore, and divers other places in the United States, have been lately conflagrated by fire. . .and there is reason to apprehend that some of those fires took their rise from the incendiary proceedings of evil disposed persons, a combination of whome we are informed exists. . .perhaps throughout the seaports of the union."[90]

The Delaware Fire Company recommended a citizen patrol to protect Philadelphia from similar attacks by arsonists. Two days later, Elizabeth Drinker confirmed that "new attempts have been made to set fire to buildings in New-York and Baltimore," despite the nightly watches in those towns. Alexandria, Virginia suffered from the same mysterious out-breaks.[91] In her last entry of the year, Mrs. Drinker told of a fire in Philadelphia and the arrest of a Negro woman who "on examination confessed she set her masters house on fire to revenge his severe treatment of her." At the same time, Mrs. Drinker commented

[88] July 8, 1803.
[89] Aug. 7, 1806.
[90] Dec. 21, 1796.
[91] Dec. 28, 1796.

on the "repeated attempts. . .made by individuals "to burn the town of Baltimore and the "great numbers. . .confined for trial."[92] By February, Mrs. Drinker noted that even the usually placid New Londoners agreed that "never since the existence of the world, has any nation witnessed the devastations of fire in so striking a manner as we do at present."[93] Northern cities such as New Haven and Boston, middle colony towns in Somerset County, New Jersey, and southern communities such as Norfolk and Williamsburg suffered the terror and tragedy of extensive fires.[94]

Even though "a number of whites and blacks" were "examined" in Norwich, Connecticut after a series of fires, the "incindiaries" remained undiscovered, much to the alarm of Mrs. Drinker.[95] Although on three other occasions that spring she mentioned fires that had been set deliberately, and noted each time that a black—usually a servant—had been charged with the crime, she never connected the idea of arson with the black population as a group.[96] Nevertheless, if the fires were not coincidental—and their frequency suggests they were not—it is possible that this was indeed a concerted act of rebellion on the part of the blacks. What, short of an armed uprising (which stood no chance of success) could send as much fear through the white community as an attempt to spread fire?[97] There can be little doubt that an information network existed throughout the black population; they must have realized by this time that the gains of the revolutionary era had been transitory. Were they angry or frustrated enough to attempt mass reprisals? Mrs. Drinker's diary entries—if not Mrs. Drinker herself—suggests that possibility.

Elizabeth Drinker's diary is sprinkled throughout with information on topics historians have only begun to explore. As a member of the elite, her diary incorporates a built-in bias, but if we keep in mind that her perceptions were those of a genteel scribe, it is possible to retrieve something of the world surrounding her with a fair degree of accuracy. Sometimes a single sentence opens an avenue of thought or confirms

[92] Dec. 31, 1796.
[93] Feb. 25, 1797.
[94] April 7, 18, 1797; May 1, 1797.
[95] March 20, 1797.
[96] April 7, 18, 1797. May 1, 1797.
[97] Urban dwellers were also particularly sensitive to rumors of poison plots. See Sept. 3, 1793.

what historians have only suspected; other times the continual repetition of an idea or sentence illuminates a way of life long lost to the twentieth century. For example, on the subject of class structure she made only a few pointed references; yet by constantly noting the almost daily visits of her married daughters we become conscious of a parent-child relationship that has evaporated in the complexities of the modern era. Similarly, one easily missed entry indicates that ether was used in the aftermath of childbirth in 1797, while the recurrent references to illness suggest a society in constant battle with disease.[98]

Although there are very few eighteenth-century diaries written by women—and certainly none of this magnitude—those that do exist reinforce each other and clarify the everyday world historians are now trying to recreate. Mary Gould Almy's diary suggests that Elizabeth Drinker was not the only woman to perceive of herself as "easily frighted." Almy also considered herself timid, yet events proved her strength, just as they did in Drinker's case.[99] The staggering amount of sickness is confirmed in one diary after another, and even mundane details take on greater significance when they are mentioned by more than one person. In September of 1759, Mary Sandwith, Elizabeth's sister, "could not go to Meeting, for want of Clean Cloaths." This in itself is not significant; no more, perhaps, than a minor inconvenience or embarrassment in the fairly comfortable household of Elizabeth Sandwith's youth. Yet in another diary, Mary Cooper (of Oyster Bay, Long Island) constantly complained of the difficulties which attended personal cleanliness, and remarked at one point, "Still I have got some clean cloths on thro Mercy."[100] At a time when clothing was made by hand and people had fewer pieces of wearing apparel, it was necessary to wash clothing more frequently. This was hard work, time consuming, and in the end dependent on sunny skies or a large indoor fireplace to dry the clothing. What was a simple comment about missing Meeting for lack of a clean dress takes on greater meaning when we realize that other eighteenth-century women faced the same problem and that their activities were often determined by the availability of clean clothing.

[98] June 17, 1797.

[99] See the diary of Mary Gould Almy, reprinted in Elizabeth Evans, *Weathering the Storm* (New York, 1975).

[100] Sept. 9, 1759; Dec. 15, 1769 in *The Diary of Mary Cooper: Life on a Long Island Farm 1768-1773*, edited by Field Horne (Oyster Bay Historical Society), 1981, 25.

Elizabeth Drinker's diary deserves to be read—and read again—for the clues to her world and the ways in which people coped with life in the eighteenth century. Although a world without washing machines and dryers seems inconceivable by twentieth-century standards, in some ways her everyday life was remarkably similar to ours. As a wife and mother, Elizabeth Drinker's hopes and fears transcend the centuries that separate her from women today, and we recognize all too well the anguish in the following entry:

> Henry came home at 10 minutes after 10 o'clock, his father and brother had been in bed half an hour, I waiting for him—not a little uneasy. When young men go a courting so far from home, they should make their visits shorter, and not walk two miles in a dark night alone; the risk of meeting with mischievous persons, or of taking cold at this season of the year, should have some weight with them.[101]

Henry was twenty-four years old.

Fordham University ELAINE F. CRANE

[101] Aug. 19, 1794.

TABLE 1

Elizabeth Drinker's Children and Grandchildren
Age of Mother at Birth, Intervals Between Births,
Weaning of Children

Elizabeth Drinker's children[1]

Name	*Born*	*Died*	*ED's Age at Birth*	*Weaned*	*Nursed Out?*
Sarah (Sally)	Oct 23, 1761		27	March 31, 1763 (17 mo)	prob not
Ann (Nancy)	Jan 11, 1764		30	Oct 1764 (10 mo)	yes (July '64)
Mary	April 20, 1765	June 7, 1766	31	Apr 1766 (12 mo)	
William	Jan 28, 1767		33	Feb 6, 1768 (12½ mo)	
Henry (Harry)	May 24, 1769	Aug 20, 1769	35	---	
Henry S	Oct 30, 1770		36	Feb 1772 (16 mo)	yes (July '71)
Mary (Molly)	March 14, 1774		40	Nov 1775 (20 mo)	
Charles	Aug 16, 1781	March 17, 1784	47	Oct 1783 (26 mo)	

Elizabeth Drinker's Grandchildren

Sally Downing's children[2]

Name	*Born*	*Died*	*Sally's Age at Birth*	*Weaned*	*Nursed Out?*
Eliza	1790?		29		
Mary	Jan 1792		31	Feb 25, 1794 (25 mo)	
Henry	Apr 1795		34		prob not
Sarah	June 1797		36		prob not
Sandwith	Oct 1799		3		

Nancy Skyrin's children[3]

Name	*Born*	*Died*	*Nancy's Age at Birth*	*Weaned*	*Nursed Out?*
Eliza	Jan 1793		29	July 1794 (16 mo)	
Eleanor	Sept 1795		31		
Mary	Aug 1801		37	Dec 1802 (16 mo)	

Molly Rhoades' children[4]

Name	*Born*	*Died*	*Molly's Age at Birth*	*Weaned*	*Nursed Out?*
Sally	Oct 1798		24	Oct 1800 (24 mo)	
Sam	1801?[5]		27	Dec 1802	
Elizabeth	March 1804		30	Apr 1806 (25 mo)	no
Mary	Jan 1807		33		

Source The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker

Notes to Table

[1] Elizabeth Drinker miscarried in Feb 1763 and sometime between the birth of Henry S and Molly

[2] Sally miscarried March 30, 1794

[3] Nancy Skyrin's husband appears to have taken extended trips which may explain the few pregnancies In 1804-1805 he was away for nearly a year

[4] Molly delivered a stillborn child in June 1797

[5] The diary pages are missing for 1801

TABLE 2

Wages for Live in Maids, 1766-1806

Dec. 1, 1766	Sally Gardner	£ 6½	per annum	
June 16, 1767	Rosanna	£ 8	per annum	
June 26, 1770	Sally Gardner	£ 8	per annum	
Sept. 13, 1770	Peggy Roach	£ 11	per annum	
Oct. 4, 1770	Sally Gardner	£ 8	per annum	
Oct. 17, 1770	Maria Singer	£ 10	per annum	
Dec. 16, 1770	Nancy Evans	£ 11	per annum	
Jan. 4, 1771	Peggy McClain	£ 12	per annum	
Apr. 18, 1771	Patty Clark	£ 10	per annum	
Apr. 27, 1771	Betty Davis	£ 10	per annum	
Apr. 19, 1795	potential replacement	£ 20-23	per annum	(skilled)
July 1, 1796	Patience Clifford	£ 26	per annum	
March 4, 1803	Sally Dawson	£ 29	per annum	(skilled)
Oct. 30, 1804	Anna Duffey	£ 19½	per annum	
May 24, 1806	Ellen Foster	£ 19½	per annum	
July 9, 1806	Lydia Atkinson	£ 29¼	per annum	(skilled?)
June-Nov. 1806	Caty	£ 12-13	per annum	

Source: The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker, *passim*

Sally reported to ED that she was offered this amount by Phebe Waln.