

Jacob Hiltzheimer Diaries
1765-1798
Mss.B.H56d

American Philosophical Society
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Summary Information

Repository	American Philosophical Society
Creator	Hiltzheimer, Jacob, 1729?-1798
Title	Jacob Hiltzheimer Diaries
Date [inclusive]	1765-1798
Call number	Mss.B.H56d
Extent	28.0 Volume(s)
Location	LH-MV-E-14 (Diaries); LH-MV-E-2 (Family materials)
Language	English
Abstract	<p>Jacob Hiltzheimer, farmer and assemblyman, emigrated from Germany to Philadelphia in 1748 and lead a moderately active political and social life. He was a successful farmer and raised select livestock in the city of Philadelphia. He also boarded horses including those of John Penn and George Washington. He served in the Pennsylvania Assembly for 11 consecutive years beginning in 1786. He was an active contributor in civil affairs and took a remarkable enthusiastic interest in events, in persons, and in every day life all of which he wrote down in his diary. As a result of his Revolutionary War and political acquaintances his contacts were numerous.</p> <p>Hiltzheimer's record of social affairs are for the most part routine daily events such as buying and trading horses, attending barbecues and funerals, and drinking punch. However it is his every day accounts that also records significant events such as the Revolutionary War, transactions of the Pennsylvania Assembly, and Philadelphia's yellow fever epidemics,</p>

as well as the dealings of significant people including George Washington, Thomas Mifflin, and John Hancock.

Preferred Citation

Cite as: Jacob Hiltzheimer Diaries, American Philosophical Society.

Background note

Born in about 1729, Jacob Hiltzheimer left his native city of Mannheim, Germany, at the age of 19, embarking on the ship *Edenburg* for Philadelphia. Shortly after his arrival on September 5, 1748, Hiltzheimer was apprenticed to the silversmith John Nagle, but upon the termination of his term of service, he decided to leave the trade to take up farming and raising livestock. From the start of his new trade, Hiltzheimer took a particular interest in horses, and launched a prosperous livery stable where he raised and sold livestock, and he maintained a pasture for his stock at "Gravel Hill" on the outskirts of the city. His rising local prominence is suggested by advertisements in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* in which men interested in racing were required to register their horses with Hiltzheimer.

Although not a Quaker himself, Hiltzheimer married a Quaker woman Hannah Walker in 1761, and the two established themselves in a house on the corner of Seventh and High (Market) Streets, reportedly the same house where Thomas Jefferson later drafted the Declaration of Independence. He became a naturalized citizen on March 29, 1762, and from that point on, was an ardent patriot in a changing political climate. Hiltzheimer's great-grandson reported that during the French and Indian War, Hiltzheimer took part in a campaign to expel the French from the Ohio River and the lakes to the west, and during the Revolutionary War he served with the First Battalion of City Militia. A strong proponent of Independence, Hiltzheimer was entrusted by the Philadelphia Committee of Safety with taking firelocks out the city for safe keeping in 1776, and on August 13, 1777, he took the Oath of Allegiance confirming his patriotism. As a representative of the city of Philadelphia to the Quartermaster General, he was also given charge of procuring supplies, including horses, for the Continental Army.

In 1784, Hiltzheimer began a successful political career with an appointment as Street Commissioner, and in 1787, he was elected as a representative to the Pennsylvania Assembly, serving for 11 consecutive years. He sat on several committees in the Assembly, chairing the Committee of Claims, and maintained a full slate of civic involvements, including the German Society of Pennsylvania for which he was elected Vice-President, the Society for the Promotion of Domestic Manufactures, the Society for Promoting Agriculture, the Republican Society, and the Fire Department.

Hiltzheimer's wife died on March 9, 1790, after a "long and painful illness," but Jacob's end would come far more swiftly. Having survived the great yellow fever epidemic of 1793, Hiltzheimer sat down on September 4, 1798, to record 66 deaths in his diary. On the next day, however, he became infected himself, succumbing to the disease on 14 September 1798.

Scope & content

The 28 volumes of the diary of Jacob Hiltzheimer are an important, almost daily record of the life of a artisan in late colonial and early national Philadelphia. Covering the years from 1765 to 1770, 1772 to 1774, and 1777 to 1798, they a rich account of Hiltzheimer's activities as a livery stable owner, livestock dealer, and politician, ranging from discussions of drinking and socializing with friends to sleighing, hunting, and visiting. Unfortunately the diaries from 1775 to 1776 have not survived.

As an active member of several political and social organizations in the city, Hiltzheimer's circle of friends was wide and respectable, including such notables as George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Mifflin George Clymer, and Samuel Miles. Hiltzheimer often wrote of visiting such friends and sharing wine or punch or gathering at a tavern at the end of a business day. The drinking of alcohol was an important part of the diet of colonial Americans and appears to have played a central role in Hiltzheimer's social activities.

As a Pennsylvania Assemblyman from 1786 until his death in 1798, Hiltzheimer's diary includes a view of the daily activities of the Assembly such as debates, bills voted on and passed, and attendance. He was in attendance at the State House during the Constitutional Convention of 1787, recording tersely on December 12, 1787, that the Convention "Ratified the Constitution of the United States. Votes in its favor 46, against it 23, just Six days after the State of Delaware." The Federal Procession of July 4, 1788, in honor of the adoption of the new Constitution, also figures in Hiltzheimer's diary. Hiltzheimer was asked to provide 10 horses to pull a 36 foot long ship through the streets of the city, embalzoned with the names of the ten states that had already ratified the Consitution. He provided 18 additional horses to pull other carriages in the three hour procession that wound its way from Third and South Streets to Bush Hill. Unfortunately Hiltzheimer's diary lapses from the 4th to the 8th of July.

Hiltzheimer's diary is particularly interesting during the yellow fever crises of 1793, 1797, and 1798. During the epidemics, he provides an almost daily account of the burials, which he estimated at 75 deaths per day in 1793. On October 14, 1793, Hiltzheimer rode to Germantown and noted how full the town was with Philadelphians who had fled the city because of the infectious disease. He observed that the people "seemed to be very anxious to hear the news from the city but kept their distance, when they found that we were just out of the city." Hiltzheimer recounts the fear during the 1797 epidemic, writing on October 3rd that a man "dropped suddenly in Arch Street" and after being examined by two physicians, was presumed dead and placed in a coffin for burial. He had not been moved far when the man began "to rap on the lid of the coffin, upon which they let him out, and the man is now alive."

Hiltzheimer does not seem to have feared yellow fever himself, never leaving the city for more then a few days during any of the epidemics, and he does not seem to have evacuated his family either. This may have been an unwise decision. When yellow fever returned to Philadelphia in August 1798, Hiltzheimer continued to tally the daily deaths, this time distinguishing between children and adults. Regardless of the danger of remaining in the city, Hiltzheimer continued with his daily routines, taking rides with those friends who had not fled. On September 4, 1798, after returning from a two day trip to Trenton, New Jersey, he wrote: "I set out for Philadelphia called at M. Clarkson Esqr., then called at Mr. Satterthwait

there dined on fish just taken out of the Delaware", this was his last diary entry. He contracted yellow fever the following day and died on September 13, 1798.

Administrative Information

Publication Information

American Philosophical Society 5/2003

Provenance

Acquisition Information

Acquired, 1974, 1975.

Processing Information

Recatalogued by Leigh McCuen, May 2003.

Alternative Form Available

The Hiltzheimer diaries are available on microfilm (Film 1558).

Related Materials

Related Material

The Historical Society of Pennsylvania has two volumes of diaries kept by Jacob Hiltzheimer, 1770-1772 (Am.0804 and Am.0804.1).

Indexing Terms

Corporate Name(s)

- German Society of Pennsylvania.

Genre(s)

- Diaries
- Diaries.
- Meteorological Data

Geographic Name(s)

- Philadelphia (Pa.)--Social life and customs

Personal Name(s)

- Francis, Tench, 1730-1800
- Mifflin, Thomas, 1744-1800
- Miles, Samuel, 1740-1805
- Washington, George, 1732-1799

Subject(s)

- American Revolution
- Horses
- Medicine
- Philadelphia History
- Social Life and Custom
- United States--History--Revolution, 1775-1783
- United States--Politics and government--1775-1783
- United States--Politics and government--1783-1809
- Yellow fever--Pennsylvania--Philadelphia

Other Descriptive Information

The Jacob Hiltzheimer Diary takes up twenty-eight volumes and offers insight into the social life and customs of Philadelphia. He describes a wide range of events, such as sleigh riding to ice skating to attending a large celebration of King George's Birthday on the banks of the Schuylkill attended by over 380 Philadelphians (before Independence). During the imperial crisis, Hiltzheimer's observations can provide an interesting perspective on the events happening within the city. He notes the arrival of dignitaries from other colonies and records some of the events happening in the city. Hiltzheimer's journal also records family and personal details, like the death of his thirty-year old son. He records the weather in Philadelphia on a nearly daily basis, and his account of the Yellow Fever epidemic in Philadelphia is fairly exhaustive.

Bibliography

Portions of these diaries were edited and published by Jacob Cox Parsons, *Extracts From the Diary of Jacob Hiltzheimer of Philadelphia 1765-1798* (Philadelphia, 1893) **Call no.:** B H56h. The diaries for 1771 and 1775-1776 had not located when Parsons wrote his book.

Jacob Hiltzheimer Diaries

Collection Inventory

Jacob Hiltzheimer Diaries	1765-1798	28 vols.	
Hiltzheimer, Jacob, 1729?-1798 Diary	1765-1766	AMsS, 1 volume	Volume 1
Hiltzheimer, Jacob, 1729?-1798 Diary	1766-1768	AMsS, 1 volume	Volume 2
Hiltzheimer, Jacob, 1729?-1798 Diary	1768-1769	AMsS, 1 volume	Volume 3
Hiltzheimer, Jacob, 1729?-1798 Diary	1769-1770	AMsS, 1 volume	Volume 4
Hiltzheimer, Jacob, 1729?-1798 Diary	1772-1773	AMsS, 1 volume	Volume 5
Hiltzheimer, Jacob, 1729?-1798 Diary	1773	AMsS, 1 volume	Volume 6
Hiltzheimer, Jacob, 1729?-1798 Diary	1773-1774	AMsS, 1 volume	Volume 7
Hiltzheimer, Jacob, 1729?-1798 Diary	1777-1778	AMsS, 1 volume	Volume 8
Hiltzheimer, Jacob, 1729?-1798 Diary	1779-1780	AMsS, 1 volume	Volume 9
Hiltzheimer, Jacob, 1729?-1798 Diary	1780 March-1781 April	AMsS, 1 volume	Volume 10
Hiltzheimer, Jacob, 1729?-1798 Diary	1781 April-1782 February	AMsS, 1 volume	Volume 11

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Hiltzheimer, Jacob, 1729?-1798 Diary	1782 March-1783 February	AMsS, 1 volume	Volume 12
Hiltzheimer, Jacob, 1729?-1798 Diary	1783 March-1784 February	AMsS, 1 volume	Volume 13
Hiltzheimer, Jacob, 1729?-1798 Diary	1784-1785	AMsS, 1 volume	Volume 14
Hiltzheimer, Jacob, 1729?-1798 Diary	1785 April-1786 January	AMsS, 1 volume	Volume 15
Hiltzheimer, Jacob, 1729?-1798 Diary	1786 January-1787 January	AMsS, 1 volume	Volume 16
Hiltzheimer, Jacob, 1729?-1798 Diary	1787-1788	AMsS, 1 volume	Volume 17
Hiltzheimer, Jacob, 1729?-1798 Diary	1788	AMsS, 1 volume	Volume 18
Hiltzheimer, Jacob, 1729?-1798 Diary	1789	AMsS, 1 volume	Volume 19
Hiltzheimer, Jacob, 1729?-1798 Diary	1790 January-1791 January	AMsS, 1 volume	Volume 20
Hiltzheimer, Jacob, 1729?-1798 Diary	1791	AMsS, 1 volume	Volume 21
Hiltzheimer, Jacob, 1729?-1798 Diary	1792	AMsS, 1 volume	Volume 22
Hiltzheimer, Jacob, 1729?-1798 Diary	1793-1794	AMsS, 1 volume	Volume 23
Hiltzheimer, Jacob, 1729?-1798 Diary	1794 March-1795 March	AMsS, 1 volume	Volume 24

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Hiltzheimer, Jacob, 1729?-1798 Diary	1795 March-1796 February	AMsS, 1 volume	Volume 25
Hiltzheimer, Jacob, 1729?-1798 Diary	1796	AMsS, 1 volume	Volume 26
Hiltzheimer, Jacob, 1729?-1798 Diary	1797	AMsS, 1 volume	Volume 27
Hiltzheimer, Jacob, 1729?-1798 Diary	1798 January-September	AMsS, 1 volume	Volume 28