

# Wit and Religion Mingle in Diary Of Lass of Revolutionary Period

Sober Bible Texts Offset Humor in the Record Set Down by  
Jemima Cundict, or Condit, Whose Home Was on  
the Mountain a Mile Back from Eagle Rock.

A man who is an authority on literary affairs was heard to say recently: "It's a great pity there are so few diaries being kept these days. These little books invariably present an intimate side of the affairs of people and of events that seldom appears in records which are used in after years to make up history."

To many diaries are silly things, the playthings of the adolescent girl, but they need not be. There is one at the New Jersey Historical Society rooms which, though it was written by a young girl in Revolutionary days when women were expected to be of sentimental tendencies, is looked upon as a very valuable document.

This diary was written in a farm house which stood on the top of the Orange Mountains about a mile back from Eagle Rock. The vicinity is now known as Pleasantdale and the home of the writer was formerly close to the Pleasantdale church. There one might picture her often, perhaps by the light of a sputtering candle, setting down the thoughts that occurred to her and recording the affairs of the times.

The document is an odd mixture. One page sparkles with wit and humor, while many others are filled with sober Bible texts, the chastened thought of devout religious sentiment, and the two, if one reads between the lines, are ever at war. The difficulties of living a most exemplary life when all frolics were considered more or less of a sin must have been legion, and this popular belle bubbles over at one moment and becomes contrite the next.

The young woman's name was Jemima Cundict—or Condit, historians differing as to the spelling—and a horseback ride to Newark was a real event in her life. One sunny day in June, 1772, she set out with her sisters for such a journey, but she "was like to have had her neck broke." She "rid" a young horse. It was windy and the dirt flew and there were chairs (possibly horse drawn sedan chairs) and wagons with teams and yokes (of oxen, perhaps) and her mount threw her and sprained her wrist.

This is one of the first incidents recorded of a lighter vein—if it could be called such. Those which precede it are church and funeral services and their Bible texts. The first records were set down in April of the same year when Jemima was seventeen.

In August of the same year, just before her eighteenth birthday, she "was took with measles and a fine coular, red as a chery," but overflowing with religious sentiment. Her religion evidently was a sort of a safety valve for her high spirits, for she scarcely more than hints at her love affairs, and spends much time covering the pages with her texts and the neighborhood doings. But in one place she breaks in on her text with "O Lord, I have writ the rong verse!"

tunity, the pleasure was declined. She writes: "So he went off gentlemanly like, but I thought, when he got on his little nag, that he did not want a button (passenger) behind him, for he almost covered him himself."

She was invited to go to "West Branch" to spend the winter with friends, who told her there were many nice young men there. But she could not bear to think of being more than a day's journey from her father's house, and wrote she was in no hurry for a husband and "don't care to go so far, anyway, on an uncertainty."

She attended frolics and sang where "Newarkites" and "Horseneckites" were guests. One day, after a gay party, "To please the Devil" she wrote a song on their gay doings.

During the days of the Revolution she faithfully records national affairs after this fashion: "Troublesome times a coming and a great disturbance abroad in the earth. They say it is tea that caused it. So then if they will quarrel about such a trifling thing as that what must we expect but war." Her father was a lieutenant colonel in the Revolutionary army, and she helped to prepare the dinner on training day for the potential soldiers, "& worked Perdigus hard all day for they had roast meat and bakt Podins (puddings). But, figs, we got but little of it. But come off and got home and took to my bed." Hard, indeed, to bake and brew and sniff the good things and see them gobbled up by a hungry horde.

One is perhaps apt to think of the men of Revolutionary days as all of the manly or burly pioneering type, but Jemima sets us right in regard to that, even as she has set historians right in regard to neighborhood affairs and war and pestilence. This is a description of a newly wed couple she met at a party:

"They cut a fine figer for She is a Bounser and he a little Cross Snipper Snapper snipe. They tell me he cryd when he was married, at which I dont a bit wonder for I think 'twas anuf to make the poor fellow bellow if he had his wits about him, for I am shure She can beat him. \* \* \* I will leave them to make the best of their bargain. I don't know as any one has lost for she has a Dolefull Long nose & he a Conceiyd (conceited, probably) Chin Like myself."

Poor Jemima, it's a pity she didn't know how very valuable her scribbings would come to be. The sermon texts, hymns, death records and allusions to Revolutionary battles in her diary have been scanned closely by many, and there was no need of her deploring her love for setting things down. The diary closed abruptly about the time she was married, like the books that used to end: "And she was married and lived happily ever after."

## Spelling Was Phonetic.

Her book learning was too limited for literary elegance, and as the first English dictionary had not then been introduced into the Newark schools, much of her spelling is phonetic.

One Sunday night she carefully set down her day's text and then continues: "I spent this evening in writing. But the worst of it is what I write is nonsense. If I did but write that (which) would be instructive or would do me any good or any one else, 'twould be some sense in spending time and paper. But no wonder I can write nothing that's good, for I don't do anything that's good. I hope I may live to spend my time better and I can have Better Employment for my Pen, for I must be scribbling (scribbling) when leasure (leisure) time, tho I find but little time now. Sometimes after our people is gone to bed I get my pen, for I don't know how to content myself without writing something."

She tells of a tailor who came to the house to work. She worked with him and they "discoursed about old times and concluded their chat with wishing each other well." She adds naively that he is a worthy young man and that he said he hoped she would be suited, but he never would be adding:

"I will tell you the reason why. Because he want to have such a creature as I."

Jemima must have been a good horsewoman. They rode double in those days and sometimes father and mother and the babies went to church on the same horse. One suitor must have been fat. He invited her to ride to Elizabethtown, a distance of nine miles from her home. Notwithstanding his impor-

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