

William Byrd (Virginia), diary extracts (1709-1712)

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April 9, 1709. I rose at 5 o'clock and read a chapter in Hebrew and 150 verses in Homer. I said my prayers devoutly and ate milk for breakfast. My wife and I had another scold about mending my shoes but it was soon over by her submission. I settled my accounts and read Dutch. I ate nothing but cold roast beef and asparagus for dinner. In the afternoon Mr. Custis complained of a pain in his side for which he took a sweat of snakeroot. I read more Dutch and took a little nap. In the evening we took a walk about the plantation. My people made an end of planting the corn field. I had an account from Rappahannock that the same distemper began to rage there that had been so fatal on the Eastern Shore. I had good health, good thoughts and good humor, thanks be to God Almighty. I said my prayers.

May 6, 1709. I rose about 6 o'clock and Colonel Ludwell, Nat Harrison, Mr. Edwards and myself played at cricket, and I won a bit. Then we played at whist and I won. About 10 o'clock we went to breakfast and I ate some boiled rice. Then Colonel Ludwell went to Jamestown court and then we played at [l-n-s-n-t] and I lost £4, most of which Nat Harrison won. In the afternoon Colonel Ludwell returned and brought us the bad news that Captain Morgan had lost his ship in Margate Roads by a storm as likewise had several others. My loss was very great in this ship where I had seven hogsheads of skins and 60 hogsheads of heavy tobacco. The Lord gives and the Lord has taken away -- blessed be the name of the Lord. In the evening Mr. Clayton and Mr. Robinson came and confirmed the same bad news. However I ate a good supper of mutton and asparagus. Then we went to dance away sorrow. I had good health, good thoughts, and good humor, notwithstanding my misfortune, thanks be to God Almighty.

June 4, 1709. I rose at 5 o'clock and read a chapter in Hebrew and some Greek in Josephus. I said my prayers and ate milk for breakfast. I danced my dance. My man Jack was pretty well. We made some wine of the common cherry for an experiment. It was extremely hot this day. I was out of humor with my wife for not minding her business. I ate roast shoat and sallet for dinner. In the afternoon I read some Latin and some Greek in Homer. In the evening Mr. C-s came to see me, who is a man of good understanding, and Ned Randolph brought me a letter from Mr. Bland in which he told me that the Lord Lovelace was dead at New York. We took a walk. I said my prayers and had good health, good thoughts, and good humor, thanks be to God Almighty.

June 9, 1709. I rose at 5 o'clock and read two chapters in Hebrew and some Greek in Josephus. I neglected to say my prayers, for which God forgive me. I ate milk for breakfast. I received a very foolish letter from Robin Bolling which contained many ridiculous arguments to justify his late foolish proceedings, to which I sent him a full answer. I ate mutton and sallet for dinner. My Eugene ran away this morning for no reason but because he had not done anything yesterday. I sent my people after him but in vain. The sloop came from Falling Creek with copper, timber, and planks. In the evening Captain Keeling came to see us to account with me for the quitrents of New Kent. I ate some supper with him, contrary to custom. I neglected to say my prayers, for which God forgive me. I had good health, good thoughts, and good humor, thanks be to God Almighty. I danced my dance.

July 9, 1709. I rose at 5 o'clock and read two chapters in Hebrew and some Greek in Josephus. I said my prayers and ate milk and apples for breakfast with Captain Wilcox who called here this morning. I danced my dance. I wrote a letter to England and read some Latin. I ate roast chicken for dinner. In the afternoon I saluted my wife and took a nap. I read more Latin and Greek in Homer. Then I took a walk about the plantation. I neglected to say my prayers. I had good health, good thoughts, and good humor, thanks be to God Almighty.

July 31, 1709. I rose at 5 o'clock and read a chapter in Hebrew and some Greek in Josephus. I said my prayers and ate milk for breakfast. I threatened Moll with a good whipping again tomorrow for her many faults. Old Ben grew better and better. I read a sermon in Dr. Tillotson. I took a little nap before dinner. I ate roast pork for dinner. In the afternoon I read some geometry. In the evening Mr. C-s came to see me and we drank a syllabub. We walked in the garden till late. I said my prayers and had good health, good thoughts, and good humor, thanks be to God Almighty.

September 5, 1709. I rose at 5 o'clock and read some Greek in Josephus and a chapter in Hebrew. I said my prayers and ate milk for breakfast. I danced my dance. My wife was much out of order and had frequent returns of her pains. I read some geometry. I ate roast mutton for dinner. In the afternoon I wrote a letter to England and I read some Greek in Homer. Then in the evening I took a walk about the plantation and when I returned I found my wife very bad. I sent for Mrs. Hamlin and my cousin Harrison about 9 o'clock and I said my prayers heartily for my wife's happy delivery, and had good health, good thoughts, and good humor, thanks be to God Almighty. I went to bed about 10 o'clock and left the women full of expectation with my wife.

September 6, 1709. About one o'clock this morning my wife was happily delivered of a son, thanks be to God Almighty. I was awake in a blink and rose and my cousin Harrison met me on the stairs and told me it was a boy. We drank some French wine

and went to bed again and rose at 7 o'clock. I read a chapter in Hebrew and then drank chocolate with the women for breakfast. I returned God humble thanks for so great a blessing and recommended my young son to His divine protection. My cousin Harrison and Mrs. Hamlin went away about 9 o'clock and I made my [satisfaction] to them for that kindness. I sent Peter away who brought me a summons to the Council. I read some geometry. The Doctor brought me two letters from England from Captain Stith. I ate roast mutton for dinner. In the afternoon I wrote a letter to England and took a walk about the plantation. I said my prayers and had good health and good thoughts, thanks be to God Almighty.

September 19, 1709. I rose at 4 o'clock and read a chapter in Hebrew and some Greek in Josephus. I said my prayers and ate milk for breakfast. I danced my dance. I beat Anaka for letting the child piss in bed. I wrote a letter to England for the government of Maryland. I read some law. I ate blue wing for dinner. In the afternoon I wrote another letter to England and then took a walk about the plantation. My wife was something better, thank God. I said my prayers and had good health, good thoughts, and good humor, thanks be to God Almighty. I read some Greek in Homer.

October 6, 1709. I rose at 6 o'clock and said my prayers and ate milk for breakfast. Then I proceeded to Williamsburg, where I found all well. I went to the capitol where I sent for the wench to clean my room and when I came I kissed her and felt her, for which God forgive me. Then I went to see the President, whom I found indisposed in his ears. I dined with him on beef on beef [sic]. Then we went to his house and played at piquet where Mr. Clayton came to us. We had much to do to get a bottle of French wine. About 10 o'clock I went to my lodgings. I had good health but wicked thoughts, God forgive me.

October 15, 1709. I rose at 3 o'clock and recommended my family to the divine protection. Then I was set over the creek and proceeded towards Williamsburg by moonshine. I got as far as C-ler before the rising of the sun and to Williamsburg by 10 o'clock. I waited on the President and found five of the Council there. A letter came from Colonel Parke that informed us that he had like to have been assassinated by a negro hired for that purpose who shot at him and broke his arm. I was sworn a judge of the General Court and took my place on the bench. I dined at Mr. Bland's with Mrs. Stith and Captain Llewellyn and ate beef for dinner. In the evening the President, Mr. Bland and I played a pool at piquet. I said my prayers and had good health, good thoughts, and good humor, thanks be to God Almighty.

November 2, 1709. I rose at 6 o'clock and read a chapter in Hebrew and some Greek in Lucian. I said my prayers and ate milk for breakfast, and settled some accounts, and then went to court where we made an end of the business. We went to dinner about 4 o'clock and I ate boiled beef again. In the evening I went to Dr. [Barret's]

where my wife came this afternoon. Here I found Mrs. Chiswell, my sister Custis, and other ladies. We sat and talked till about 11 o'clock and then retired to our chambers. I played at [r-m] with Mrs. Chiswell and kissed her on the bed till she was angry and my wife also was uneasy about it, and cried as soon as the company was gone. I neglected to say my prayers, which I should not have done, because I ought to beg pardon for the lust I had for another man's wife. However I had good health, good thoughts, and good humor, thanks be to God Almighty.

December 3, 1709. I rose at 5 o'clock and read two chapters in Hebrew and some Greek in Cassius. I said my prayers and ate milk for breakfast. I danced my dance. Eugene pissed abed again for which I made him drink a pint of piss. I settled some accounts and read some news. About 12 o'clock I went to court where I found little good company. However I persuaded Mr. Anderson and Colonel Eppes to come and dine with me. I ate a venison pasty for dinner. In the evening Mr. Anderson and I walked to Mr. Harrison's where we found Frank W-l-s and James Burwell and Isham Randolph. Here I ate custard and was merry. I stayed till 9 o'clock and when I came home my wife was in bed. I neglected to say my prayers and had good health, good thoughts, and good humor, thanks be to God Almighty.

December 13, 1709. I rose at 5 o'clock and read a chapter in Hebrew and some Greek in Cassius. I said my prayers and ate milk for breakfast. I danced my dance. Last night I gave my wife a flourish and this morning I quarreled with her about her neglect of the family. I settled some accounts. About 12 o'clock Mr. J-- came and dined with me. He told me the Doctor was extremely ill, which made me resolve to go there in the afternoon. I ate fish for dinner and as soon as I had dined I rode with Mr. J-- to Captain Stith's where I found the Doctor in a very weak condition. We prayed by him and I took my leave, committing him to God, before whom he was likely to appear very soon. Then I returned home with Mr. Harrison, and Mr. Anderson, and Mr. Cocke who had all been to take leave of the poor Doctor. In the evening I read some Latin. I neglected to say my prayers, but had good health, good thoughts, and good humor, thanks be to God Almighty.

January 7, 1710. I rose at 7 o'clock and read a chapter in Hebrew and some Greek in Cassius. I said my prayers and ate milk for breakfast. I danced my dance. I gave a vomit to my negro children to prevent the distemper. I settled some accounts and prepared some accounts to send to England. I ate roast pork for dinner. In the afternoon I played at cards with my wife. Then I took a walk about the plantation to see what the people were doing. In the evening I gave the rest of the servants a vomit to prevent the distemper which is come as far as G-l-s Ordinary. I read some Latin in Terence with which I was very much pleased. I said my prayers and had good health, good thoughts, and good humor, thanks be to God Almighty.

February 26, 1710. I rose at 8 o'clock and read nothing because of my company. I neglected to say my prayers, for which God forgive me. I ate milk for breakfast. Then we took a walk about the plantation till it was time to go to dinner. I ate fish for dinner. In the afternoon we saw a good battle between a stallion and Robin about the mare, but at last the stallion had the advantage and covered the mare three times. The Captain's bitch killed another lamb for which she was beat very much. We took another walk about the plantation. My maid Anaka was very well again, thank God, and so was Moll at the quarters. My wife was out of humor with us for going to see so filthy a sight as the horse to cover the mare. In the evening we drank a bottle of wine and were very merry till 9 o'clock. I neglected to say my prayers but had good health, good thoughts, and good humor, thanks be to God Almighty.

March 14, 1710. I rose at 6 o'clock and read the Psalms and some Greek in Anacreon. I said my prayers and ate milk for breakfast. I received a letter by Captain Posford from Mr. Bland by which I learned that my sloop was taken into Martinique. Captain Ned Bolling died of the smallpox at sea and so did Ch-s-t-r, both pretty young men. The death of this last makes way for Isham Randolph to command Colonel Hill's ship, for which he shall have my recommendation. My wife was melancholy, which made me weep. I danced my dance. I ate roast mutton for dinner. In the afternoon we played at piquet, then I read more Dutch. Then I took a walk about the plantation. In the evening I read some English. I said my prayers and had good health, good thoughts, and good humor, thanks be to God Almighty.

June 3, 1710. I rose at 6 o'clock and as soon as I came out news was brought that the child was very ill. We went out and found him just ready to die and he died about 8 o'clock in the morning. God gives and God takes away; blessed be the name of God. Mrs. Harrison and Mr. Anderson and his wife and some other company came to see us in our affliction. My wife was much afflicted but I submitted to His judgment better, notwithstanding I was very sensible of my loss, but God's will be done. Mr. Anderson and his wife with Mrs. B-k-r dined here. I ate roast mutton. In the afternoon I was griped in my belly very much but it grew better towards the night. In the afternoon it rained and was fair again in the evening. My poor wife and I walked in the garden. In the evening I neglected to say my prayers, had indifferent health, good thoughts, and good humor, thanks be to God Almighty.

July 15, 1710. I rose at 5 o'clock and read two chapters in Hebrew and some Greek in Thucydides. I said my prayers and ate milk and pears for breakfast. About 7 o'clock the negro boy [or Betty] that ran away was brought home. My wife against my will caused little Jenny to be burned with a hot iron, for which I quarreled with her. It was so hot today that I did not intend to go to the launching of Colonel Hill's ship but about 9 o'clock the Colonel was so kind as to come and call us. My wife would not go at first but with much entreaty she at last consented. About 12 o'clock we went

and found abundance of company at the ship and about one she was launched and went off very well, notwithstanding several had believed the contrary. When this was over we went to Mr. Platt's to dinner and I ate boiled beef. We stayed till about 5 o'clock and then returned home, where all was well. I found an express from above with a letter from Joe Wilkinson desiring to be discharged from my service when his year was out. I neglected to say my prayers and had good health, good thoughts, and good humor, thanks be to God Almighty.

July, 30, 1710. I rose at 5 o'clock and wrote a letter to Major Burwell about his boat which Captain Broadwater's people had brought round and sent Tom with it. I read two chapters in Hebrew and some Greek in Thucydides. I said my prayers and ate boiled milk for breakfast. I danced my dance. I read a sermon in Dr. Tillotson and then took a little [nap]. I ate fish for dinner. In the afternoon my wife and I had a little quarrel which I reconciled with a flourish. Then she read a sermon in Dr. Tillotson to me. It is to be observed that the flourish was performed on the billiard table. I read a little Latin. In the evening we took a walk about the plantation. I neglected to say my prayers, but had good health, good thoughts, and good humor, thanks be to God. This month there were many people sick of fever and pain in their heads; perhaps this might be caused by the cold weather which we had this month, which was indeed the coldest that ever was known in July in this country. Several of my people have been sick, but none died, thank God.

August 22, 1710. I rose at 5 o'clock and read two chapters in Hebrew and some Greek in Lucian. I said my prayers and ate boiled milk for breakfast. John G-r-l was taken sick of a fever. About 9 o'clock Mrs. Harrison came to ask my advice concerning her overseer and those people who sold them drink. I offered my service to wait on her to her quarters which she accepted of. When we came there we saw the overseer and I threatened him severely so that he promised never to neglect his business more. Then we went to C-t Ch-r-n and I threatened him likewise if he ever entertained any of Mrs. Harrison's people any more. He promised, very frightened, too, and then we returned home. I ate whole hominy for dinner. In the afternoon I settled some accounts and then read a little in Grotius. In the evening I had a severe quarrel with little Jenny and beat her too much for which I was sorry. I went into the river. I said a short prayer and had good health, good thoughts, and good humor, thanks be to God Almighty.

October 29, 1710. I rose at 6 o'clock and sent away my man Tom home with a letter to my wife. I read two chapters in Hebrew and some Greek in Homer. I said my prayers and ate boiled milk for breakfast. I went to church about 11 o'clock and heard a sermon of Mr. Taylor. Then Colonel Duke and I went to Mr. Commissary's to dinner and Mr. Hamilton the general postmaster with us. I ate roast mutton. I had a great deal of wit this day, more than ordinary. My cousin Harrison and her daughter were here. About 5 o'clock we took our leave and walked to the coffeehouse where I

drank two dishes of tea. Here I sat till 8 o'clock and then returned to my chambers where I read some verses of the Commissary's making. I said my prayers and had good health, good thoughts, and good humor, thank God Almighty. I committed uncleanness this night, for which God forgive me.

November 13, 1710. I rose at 7 o'clock and said a short prayer. Then I took a little walk about the plantation. I ate toast and cider for breakfast. Colonel Digges sent for a white negro for us to see who except the color was featured like other negroes. She told us that in her country, which is called Aboh near Calabar, there were many whites as well as blacks. We played at dice till about 12 o'clock and then we [went] to Williamsburg, but I was so dusted with dirt that I was forced to change my clothes. Yesterday Mr. Ingles had a child burnt to death by fire taking hold of its clothes. We went to the capitol and stayed there about two hours and then I went and dined with the Governor where I ate roast mutton. I had a letter from home which told me all was well except a negro woman who ran away and was found dead. I said my prayers and had good health, good thoughts, and good humor, thank God Almighty.

December 14, 1710. I rose at 7 o'clock and read nothing because I was preparing to return home to Westover. I said my prayers and ate boiled milk for breakfast. It was very cold weather. However I was resolved to go home because my wife was indisposed. Accordingly I went and took leave of Mrs. Bland and thanked her for all her kindness to me and my servants. About 10 o'clock I took horse and rode away, without calling anywhere till I got home, where I arrived about 4 o'clock and found my wife better and the rest of the family pretty well only two people were sick without danger. I came just as my wife was at dinner with Mr. Dunn and his wife and ate some wild duck. In the evening I looked about me a little and found things in pretty good order. In the rest of the evening I read nothing because of the company that was here. I neglected to say my prayers but had good health, good thoughts, and good humor, thank God Almighty. I gave my wife a flourish, notwithstanding she was indisposed.

February 27, 1711. I rose at 6 o'clock and read two chapters in Hebrew and some Greek in Lucian. I said my prayers and ate boiled milk for breakfast. I danced my dance and then went to the brick house to see my people pile the plants and found them all idle for which I threatened them soundly but did not whip them. The weather was cold and the wind at northeast. I wrote a letter to England. Then I read some English till 12 o'clock when Mr. Dunn and his wife came. I ate boiled beef for dinner. In the afternoon Mr. Dunn and I played at billiards. Then we took a long walk about the plantation and looked over all my business. In the evening my wife and little Jenny had a great quarrel in which my wife got the worst but at last by the help of the family Jenny was overcome and soundly whipped. At night I ate some

bread and cheese. I said my prayers and good health, good thoughts, and good humor, thank God Almighty.

March 20, 1711. I rose at 6 o'clock and read two chapters in Hebrew and some Greek in Lucian. I said my prayers and ate boiled milk for breakfast. I danced my dance. Captain Isham Eppes sent for rights but I sent him none because he sent no money. I took a walk to see my people at work. The weather was cold, the wind being northeast. My negro boy was better, thank God. I wrote another long letter to England, about increasing my salary to 400 a year, in which I hope to succeed because I have some friends in the Treasury. I took a walk to see my people at work. Captain Posford sent some of my things up. I made an indifferent dinner this day because Moll had not boiled the bacon half enough, for which I gave her some stripes under which she [b-s-t] herself. I wrote another letter to England in the afternoon. In the evening I took a walk about the plantation with my wife. At night I read in the Tatler and ate some bread and new butter. I said my prayers and good health, good thoughts, and good humor, thank God Almighty.

April 30, 1711. I rose at 5 o'clock and said a short prayer and then drank two dishes of chocolate. Then I took my leave about 6 o'clock and found it very cold. I met with nothing extraordinary in my journey and got home about 11 o'clock and found all well, only my wife was melancholy. We took a walk in the garden and pasture. We discovered that by the contrivance of Nurse and Anaka Prue got in at the cellar window and stole some strong beer and cider and wine. I turned Nurse away upon it and punished Anaka. I ate some fish for dinner. In the afternoon I caused Jack and John to be whipped for drinking at John [Cross] all last Sunday. In the evening I took a walk about the plantation and found things in good order. At night I ate some bread and butter. I said my prayers and good health, good thoughts, and good humor, thank God Almighty. The weather was very cold for the season. I gave my wife a powerful flourish and gave her great ecstasy and refreshment.

October 21, 1711. I rose about 6 o'clock and we began to pack up our baggage in order to return. We drank chocolate with the Governor and about 10 o'clock we took leave of the Nottoway town and the Indian boys went away with us that were designed for the College. The Governor made three proposals to the Tuscaroras: that they would join with the English to cut off those Indians that had killed the people of Carolina, that they should have 40 shillings for every head they brought in of those guilty Indians and be paid the price of a slave for all they brought in alive, and that they should send one of the chief men's sons out of every town to the College. I waited on the Governor about ten miles and then took leave of him and he went to Mr. Cargill's and I with Colonel Hill, Mr. Platt, and John Hardiman to Colonel Harrison's where we got about 3 o'clock in the afternoon. About 4 we dined and I ate some boiled beef. My man's horse was lame for which he was let blood. At night I asked a

negro girl to kiss me, and when I went to bed I was very cold because I pulled off my clothes and after lying in them so long. I neglected to say my prayers but had good health, good thoughts, and good humor, thank God Almighty.

Oct 29, 1711. I rose about 7 o'clock and read two chapters in Hebrew and some Greek in Homer. I said my prayers and ate boiled milk for breakfast. About 9 o'clock I went to wait on the Governor but he was not at home and I walked after him to the new house and found him there and saw several of the Governor's contrivances, and particularly that for hanging the arms. About 11 o'clock I came with the Governor to court where we sat till about 3 and then I went up stairs and danced my dance and wrote a letter to England. Then I returned to court where we stayed till about 5 and then I went home with the Governor and ate venison for dinner and then drank a bottle till 8 o'clock. Then we went to the coffeehouse, where we played at cards till 10 and I won 25 shillings. Then I returned home and I committed manual uncleanness, for which God forgive me. I neglected to say my prayers, but had good health, good humor, but indifferent thoughts.

January 1, 1712. I lay abed till 9 o'clock this morning to bring my wife into temper again and rogered her by way of reconciliation. I read nothing because Mr. Mumford was here, nor did I say my prayers, for the same reason. However I ate boiled milk for breakfast, and after my wife tempted me to eat some pancakes with her. Mr. Mumford and I went to shoot with our bows and arrows but shot nothing, and afterwards we played at billiards till dinner, and when we came we found Ben Harrison there, who dined with us. I ate some partridge for dinner. In the afternoon we played at billiards again and I won two bits. I had a letter from Colonel Duke by H-l the bricklayer who came to offer his services to work for me. Mr. Mumford went away in the evening and John Bannister with him to see his mother. I took a walk about the plantation and at night we drank some mead of my wife's making which was very good. I gave the people some cider and a dram to the negroes. I read some Latin in Terence and had good health, good thoughts, and good humor, thank God Almighty. I said my prayers.

May 22, 1712. I rose about 6 o'clock and read two chapters in Hebrew and some Greek in Lucian. I said my prayers and ate boiled milk for breakfast. I danced my dance. It rained a little this morning. My wife caused Prue to be whipped violently notwithstanding I desired not, which provoked me to have Anaka whipped likewise who had deserved it much more, on which my wife flew into such a passion that she hoped she would be revenged of me. I was moved very much at this but only thanked her for the present lest I should say things foolish in my passion. I wrote more accounts to go to England. My wife was sorry for what she had said and came to ask my pardon and I forgave her in my heart but seemed to resent, that she might be the more sorry for her folly. She ate no dinner nor appeared the whole day. I ate some

bacon for dinner. In the afternoon I wrote two more accounts till the evening and then took a walk in the garden. I said my prayers and was reconciled to my wife and gave her a flourish in token of it. I had good health, good thoughts, but was a little out of humor, for which God forgive me.