

Carroll History Journal

Historical Society of Carroll County, Maryland

STARTING OVER: EXCERPTS FROM THE DIARY OF CLOTWORTHY BIRNIE, 1810-1811

BY MARY ANN ASHCRAFT

One mission of the Historical Society's Publications Committee is to acquaint Society members with the material held in various HSCC collections. This issue of the Journal explores one of the fascinating manuscripts shared with HSCC and the Maryland State Archives by descendants of Clotworthy Birnie, an Irish immigrant who settled in the Taneytown area in 1810.



The Birnie Papers – which include everything from account books, diaries, letters, ledgers, and deeds to tiny scraps of paper – cover aspects of the Birnie family's life in Ireland and America for nearly a century and a half, with particular emphasis on Clotworthy Birnie (1765-1845) and his descendants.

Famous names like Francis Scott Key and little-known ones show up in these resources that are especially valuable

because of what they reveal about the history of northwestern Carroll County and its early inhabitants.

Clotworthy Birnie was the nephew of Upton Scott, an Irish physician who arrived in Maryland in 1754 with his good friend Horatio Sharpe, the newly-appointed colonial governor. Scott quickly established himself in the inner circle of Annapolis political and social life and became wealthy through his marriage to heiress Elizabeth Ross, as well as by his own dealings. However, by 1810, Scott was growing old and looked to his nephew back in Ireland for help managing some of his extensive land holdings. Birnie was then a prosperous 45-year-old merchant living in Belfast with his wife, Hester, and eight children.

He had never been to America but was willing to uproot his family and cross the Atlantic to settle on



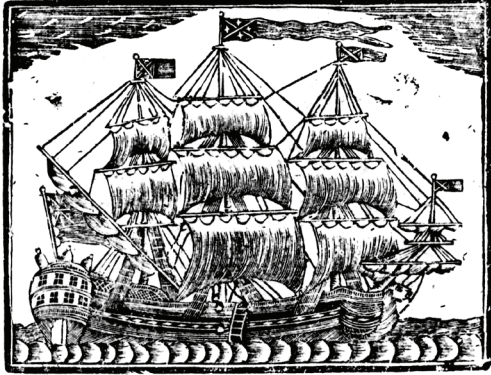
Silhouettes of Hester Birnie (c.1776-1844) and Clotworthy Birnie (1765-1845).

more than three thousand acres of farmland Scott owned in the Taneytown area. A vastly different life lay before him. He would live in the back country; most of his neighbors would be middling farmers; German speakers would outnumber Gaelic ones; and he would spend most of the coming years outdoors rather than behind a desk.

Birnie's 1810-1813 diary, which begins May 5, covers those first years in America. The manuscript is available on microfilm in the Historical Society's library. Readers are rarely privy to any of Clotworthy's emotions. Almost nothing is mentioned of his family life. Entries are usually brief and factual, often without punctuation, and there are many days when nothing is recorded, but the reader emerges with an appreciation for the confidence and energy needed to start afresh in a new land and a sense of what it was like to farm on the outskirts of Taneytown during the early nineteenth century.

Clotworthy engaged the *President*, a small American vessel, to transport his family and furniture from Belfast to Baltimore. A broadside printed to recruit additional passengers is part of the Birnie Papers, but the diary doesn't reveal how many people actually made the journey beyond the ten family members and the crew. The *President* departed Belfast harbor May 6. On Monday, May 7, Birnie noted there were fresh breezes from the east and southeast and all sails were set. By 8 o'clock that evening, those on board glimpsed the "last light of the Irish Land." No one in the family ever saw Ireland again.

Their Atlantic crossing lasted about six weeks and was relatively uneventful although the diary



FOR BALTIMORE,
The remarkable fast-sailing American
S H I P
PRESIDENT,
Burthen 300 Tons.
ABNER BAKER, MASTER,
WILL proceed for the above mentioned Port on the 12th April next.---As the number of Passengers that can be taken by this Vessel is but small, those who mean to embrace the opportunity will do well to make immediate application at No. 1, Chichester-Quay, to
C. BIRNIE,
 Who intends going with his Family, and will take care to make the Passengers as comfortable as possible.
BELFAST, March 14.

Broadside from 1810 soliciting passengers to accompany the Birnies to Baltimore.

occasionally mentions heavy squalls and the ship's "pitching badly." On May 8, Birnie wrote, "Strong Gale from S.E. to E.S.E. with a heavy following Sea that caused the Ship to labour much. Most of the Passengers Sick. Slight rain in the afternoon." The following day he commented that the passengers were "better" and the decks and cabins had been "washed out." Seasickness doesn't appear to have been a problem later in the voyage, or at least there are no other references to it by the seemingly stoic diarist.

This was the era of the Napoleonic wars, and several days into the journey a ship was spotted "Standing right for us which excited some alarm being apprehensive that she was a French Privateer." Whatever that ship's nationality, she passed by and the *President* continued her westward journey. From time

to time other vessels were seen and information was occasionally exchanged with them, but there were no encounters with French ships. Birnie often jotted down the weather, wind direction, ship's speed, and latitude-longitude during the voyage. The diary illustrates that he was fully engaged in all aspects of the journey and not content to be a passive participant in it; however, he never mentioned how Hester and his children, ranging in age from sixteen to one, were faring. In fact, there are no references to any of the passengers or crew.

By June 15, the ship was "in Sight of the Land" and passed the Cape Henry Lighthouse as it entered the Chesapeake Bay. On June 19, Birnie noted they were sailing "within a mile the West Maryland shoar. The Land seemed sandy & very little Verdure except trees, as we proceeded up the Bay the Land seemed

better." By Thursday, June 21, the *President* lay in Baltimore harbor, and by Saturday the Birnie family and their furniture were settled in a house on Green Street rented for \$60 per month. The following Monday, June 25, found Clotworthy in a stage bound for Annapolis where Upton Scott lived. He was not very impressed with what he saw on the journey. "The Land between B^e and An^s is in general very poor. Sandy Hills & very little cleared or cultivated."

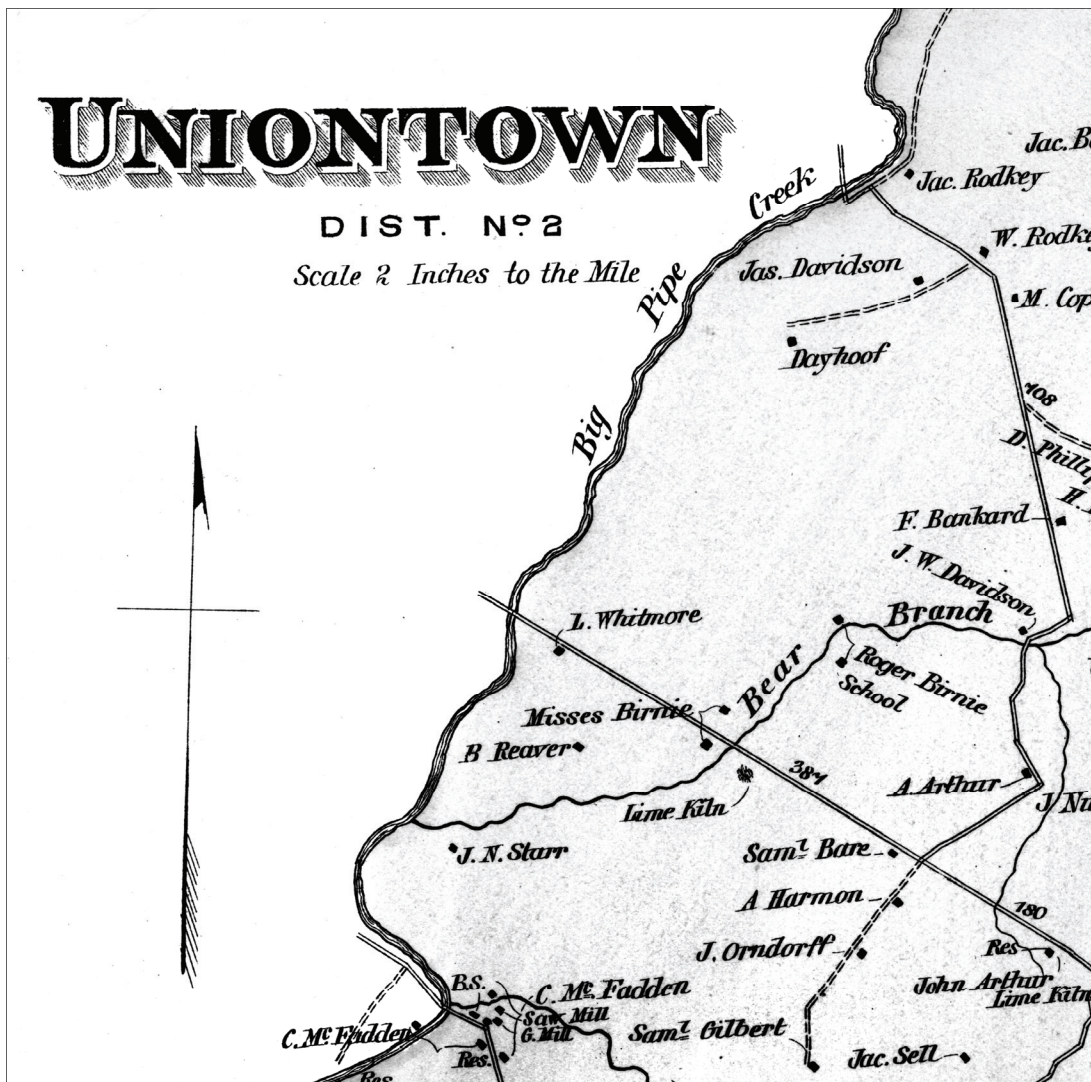
Although his stay in Annapolis lasted only two days, Birnie accomplished a great deal. He met important people and was invited to dine with the influential Colonel Henry Maynadier who owned *Belvoir*, an elegant plantation formerly belonging to Birnie's uncle. The diary states he "was kindly received" by his aunt, Elizabeth (Ross) Scott, and received \$300 from his uncle. On June 27 he took a packet boat back to Baltimore, but the connections he established

with the Maynadiers, the wealthy Ross family, and others proved valuable the rest of his life.

The Birnie family spent most of July in Baltimore. During that time Clotworthy acquired a saddle horse and purchased items he would need in Taneytown. Then he arranged for his family and furniture to make the forty-mile journey over dirt roads to what was then eastern Frederick County. On July 20 he wrote, "Arrived with my Family at Tawnytown. Dined at Crabster's Tavern & slept at M^r McKillip's."

Birnie's diary entries during the first eighteen months in Taneytown are very revealing, presenting his impressions of local towns like Frederick and Liberty (now Libertytown), his business and social contacts, his acquisition of slaves and hired hands, his agricultural efforts, his purchases of food, seed,

livestock, and other necessities, his arrangements for the education of his children, and the construction of a new home. Exactly where the family lived during the first fall and winter is hard to discern from the diary. They probably settled in Taneytown rather than on *Runnymede Enlarged*, the 3,600 acre tract of land east of town that Upton Scott had leased to Clotworthy for \$1,300 a year.



Seven of Clotworthy Birnie's children lived on part of *Runnymede Enlarged* in 1877 when this map of the western edge of the Uniontown District appeared in *An Illustrated Atlas of Carroll County, Maryland* by Lake, Griffing & Stevenson.

On July 24 Birnie noted he “Planted a few Potatoes in Drills and sent my Horse to Major McKillip’s Fields.” Planting potatoes seems a typically Irish thing to do. Was there anything symbolic in it for Clotworthy? Three days later he again “Planted a ridge of Potatoes.” On July 29 he recorded, “Fanny the Black Girl came from Mrs. Fouts’s to my service.” At last it appeared Hester Birnie would have help meeting the many challenges of her new situation. On August 1, four of the older children began attending “M^r Hemin’s [Henon’s?] School.” Family life had fallen into a routine within ten days of their arrival.

On August 5, Birnie purchased his first livestock – a cow and calf from Upton Reid, a neighbor. Acquiring quality livestock remained a lifelong interest. The cow was put to pasture in Mr. McKillip’s field. At that point, the family apparently had nowhere to keep either the calf or Clotworthy’s horse. The calf was slaughtered. Birnie waited until the spring of 1811 before buying more livestock because he had no feed.

Over the years Clotworthy maintained correspondence with many people in the United States and abroad. By the beginning of August, he finally had time to write Mr. Napier, a relative back in Belfast who handled the family’s business affairs after they emigrated. He sent a letter to John Jenkins, also in Ireland, asking him to come to America and resume working for the family. He kept in touch with Hugh Birnie, an older brother living near Pittsburgh. Letters also went back and forth between Taneytown and Annapolis in order to handle the family’s business and personal affairs.

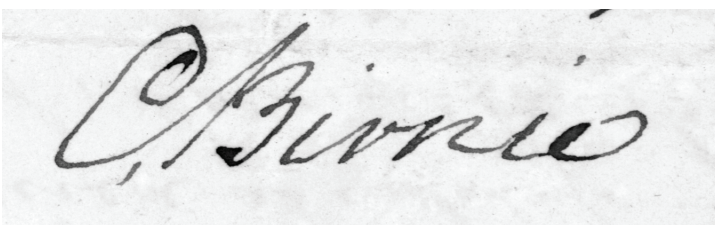
As the year 1810 wore on, the diary includes frequent references to buying wood, as well as feed for Birnie’s horse. “Worthy” (Clotworthy, Jr.), the family’s oldest son, age eleven, went off to St.

John’s College in Annapolis in mid-September. A month later, Clotworthy and John McKillip traveled to Frederick “for the purpose of attending a Sale of Negroes but there was no Sale.” They saw a horse race, and then continued to Liberty the following day in hopes Birnie could purchase a slave from a Mr. Steele, but they had no luck. Birnie’s comments about both Frederick County towns were less than flattering. Interestingly, the diary never includes his impressions of Taneytown. Several entries address the health of his horse; it is not surprising that it may have suffered from excess use during those first few months.

Late in October Birnie went to an auction at a Mr. Gibson’s but bought nothing and “saw a deal of Racing & other folly going on.” He attended another auction in early November, again coming away empty-handed because “the owner and auctioneer were both drunk.” Most diary entries are factual and non-judgmental, but occasionally Birnie reacted to the rough and unsophisticated people he encountered in the vicinity.

“Old Jack a black man came home to work between U. Reid & I, to be cloathed by him & fed by me.” Jack appears to have been a free man willing to work for Birnie and Reid in return for board and clothing. There was no mention of purchasing either Jack or Fanny, servants who helped the family during those first few months.

At the beginning of December, Clotworthy set out for the Annapolis area, determined to finally buy a slave. After some initial disappointments, he bought a man named Charles for \$325 from Mr. Osborn Sprigg who owned *Northampton*, a tobacco plantation in Prince George’s County. Mr. Sprigg was described as “a very wealthy hospitable illiterate man & a great Democrat” in the diary. Charles proved to be an excellent worker. February 16: “Had Jn^o Warner & Charles employed from 9 till 4 o’clock in cutting Logs in Jos. Peppel’s Field.” March 9: “Charles & I hauled 5 Logs only.” March 14: “Charles went to Jn^o Scott’s & got 7½ Bushels clover seed @ \$7 per Bushel & got 2 Bags Rye ground.” March 15: “Charles & I sowed 2 Bushels Clover Seed.” March 16: “Charles took out a load of manure Sowed a Bushel of Clover Seed & bro^t a



Clotworthy Birnie’s signature.

load of wood.” April 4: “Charles Ploughed all day for Oats, Jack gathering Stones off Clover Ground.” Clotworthy and Charles not only worked side by side on multiple occasions but also traveled together now and then. March 20: “Charles & I went to the Forks.” In the diary’s many references to Charles, it was obvious Birnie trusted him, but no word of praise or censure appeared except on Easter when he wrote, “Charles was absent forenoon without leave.”

Herbert Smith and other local residents supplied the family with wood throughout the winter of 1810-1811, although perhaps some of the logs Clotworthy and Charles hauled were used for heating. While the diary rarely mentions snow or ice, Taneytown’s weather must have been considerably colder than what the family was accustomed to in Belfast and the house far less comfortable. On February 19, Birnie wrote, “This day froze very hard. The Thermometer in our sleeping room being so low as 15 & in the Open Air at 9 degrees.”

This day froze very hard . . .

With the arrival of spring, Hester and the children moved out to Bear Branch, part of *Runnymede Enlarged*, while Clotworthy, Charles, Jack, and local hired hands sprang into action in the fields. They hauled manure from nearby farms and worked it into the soil. They spent long days plowing and harrowing before planting clover, flax, rye, and oats. Lime, which Birnie referred to as Plaister of Paris, was spread as fertilizer. Birnie frequently attended auctions to buy a variety of livestock.

Suddenly the name “Pompey” appeared as one of the field hands, but without an indication of whether he was free or a slave. April 13: “Charles & Pompey in sowing P. of Paris, Ringed & branded the young Hogs in the evening.” The family garden was “well dunged” and prepared for the planting of potatoes and carrots. Pompey sheared some newly-bought

ewes. Birnie never recorded how exhausted he must have been that spring. Once the weather improved and the family was ensconced at Bear Branch with its furniture, the couple occasionally entertained local friends like Mr. and Mrs. McKillip and Upton Reid, but hard work must have been the norm for both of them. Their attendance at the funeral of Normand Bruce on April 26, 1811, was probably a welcome respite.

On Sunday, April 2, Birnie sat down and tallied up the livestock and farm equipment he had at Bear Branch:

3 geldings (ages 11, 7 and 6 years)
2 mares (ages 5 and 4 years, one in foal)
2 cows (one to calf in May, the other “lately calfed”)
2 heifers (one “to calf shortly,” the other a yearling)
1 bull (a yearling)
5 young hogs (2 boars, 3 sows)
14 sheep & 4 lambs
2 geese, 1 gander
1 cock, 5 hens

Above livestock valued at \$532

Also

3 ploughs (various kinds)
1 harrow with 19 iron teeth
1 straw cutting machine
1 two-horse cart and gear
6 sets of plough traces and other gear
3 “pairs of Hews Iron Mounted”
1 wheel barrow
3 hay pitch forks
4 dung pitch forks
1 dung iron rake
3 field hoes
1 garden spade
2 iron wedges, 1 maul
2 scythes, 1 hay rake

The list, which didn’t include the number of acres of land under cultivation, was a testament to his ambitious plans for the family’s future.

Birnie approached farming scientifically for someone who probably had little prior experience as a farmer. As the spring weather alternated between wet and dry spells, he recorded the effects of rain on what he had planted. April 17: “The fall of rain between Ploughing & Sowing does not appear to have injured the Crop.” When he sowed corn, he noted the different varieties and the people who had

provided the seed. When he planted other crops, he recorded which rows had been treated with lime and brimstone (a sulfur-based fertilizer) and which went untreated, so he could compare the results.

Several times he wrote that his men were working in "Warner's Field" or "Mowler's Field" which suggested he had established sharecropping arrangements with some of his neighbors. At the end of May, he "called on Sundry Tenants for money but got none." Mowler must have been a tenant on *Runnymede Enlarged* because his name appeared in a July entry as furnishing significant amounts of wheat and rye in lieu of rent money. "Maxwell," "S. Thompson," and "Warner" were probably other tenants; *Runnymede's* many acres were likely divided among quite a few tenant farmers.

Splitting rails, repairing old fences, and putting up new ones kept everyone busy during the late spring in addition to plowing and planting new fields, tasks which usually fell to Charles and Pompey. The "roaned" mare produced a foal on April 28; a heifer calved on May 5, and a bull calf was born May 15. A week later Birnie bred his bay mare *Cate* to *Figure*, a stallion standing at stud in Taneytown. How much he knew about agriculture and animal husbandry before he came to America is hard to determine, but he must have learned a great

THE NOTED HORSE *FIGURE*,

Will stand to cover Mares the ensuing season, viz. from the first day of April until the first of July next, at the stable of John Kuntz, Uniontown, on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesday until four o'clock in the afternoon, in each week, and the residue of each week, viz. Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays, at the stable of the public house now occupied by Solomon Jennings, in Taneytown at the low rate of *Eight Dollars and one bushel of Oats the Season*, but if paid within the season, Five Dollars will be taken in lieu thereof; *Three Dollars cash the single Leap*, and *Ten Dollars and one bushel of Oats to insure a Colt*, to be paid as soon as the mare is known to be with colt—the oats to be brought when the mare is first offered, or a half a dollar in lieu thereof. Any person insuring a mare, and afterwards parts with her, must make proof of her not being with colt, or pay the price of insurance.

As the Horse FIGURE is so well known, it is thought needless to give any description of him. Good attendance will be given, and due care taken, but will not be accountable for accidents.
JOHN WINROTT.
March 17.

Advertisement appearing in *The Engine of Liberty and Uniontown Advertiser* on March 17, 1814.

deal in a very short period if his earlier years had been spent as a merchant.

At the end of May, another slave, Jenny, joined the laborers at Bear Branch. At first she worked in the garden hoeing, planting, and doing sundry jobs with Jack. She and Jack were usually assigned less strenuous tasks than Charles and Pompey, but Birnie put all four hands to work in the fields at various times. Eventually, the family garden included not only carrots and potatoes, but also melons, "curley cale," pumpkins, onions, cabbages, turnips and parsnips. Most of these were vegetables that would store well over the winter.

As spring turned into summer, plowing, sowing, cutting grass, making hay, and thatching the barn occupied not only the slaves but also local hired help like John Lutz and Daniel Snook. The diary frequently names many local men and boys who worked for Birnie day-to-day. Throughout the summer of 1811 there is no mention of the heat, although many days during July and August must have been scorching, especially

for anyone in the fields behind a plow. Late in July, Birnie wrote that he flogged Fanny "for Insolence yesterday to her Mistress & avowing her infamy with Charles." It is the first indication of problems with any of the family's servants, but not the last. What

Monday 3

Pompey absent being a Holiday, Charles
Ploughing a part of the Garden, & the
Potatoes at Warrick's &c. Jack & Jenny
in the Garden, digging, Mudding and
Transplanting Cabbages

Entry from Clotworthy Birnie's diary for June 3, 1811.

Hester Birnie demanded of Fanny as a house servant is unknown, although the diary constantly reveals how much Clotworthy asked of those working outdoors for him. As the year progressed, there are other indications that not only Birnie's slaves but also some white workers found him a hard taskmaster.

Construction of the family's new house along Bear Branch in *Runnymede* began midway through the summer. August 4: "Pompey & Charles dig[g]ing the Cellar." Birnie hired two carpenters, but on August 29 he wrote, "The Carpenters trifled away ab^t half their time. I went to John Scott's in quest of a Mason." August 31: "Mixing mortar, Jack at Sundry Jobs. The Carp^r went away immediately after Breakfast, having made a poor week's Work." September 4: "Linn the Joiner came at Breakfast and after some Conversation went off Tools & all." September 6: "I went to Stovers in quest of Carpenters & to Jn^o Scott's after a Mason." Some local masons and carpenters might have been unwilling to work as hard as Clotworthy expected or perhaps he wouldn't pay the wages they were asking. Whatever the reason, they wouldn't work. Nevertheless, he apparently managed to find some men to continue the construction. Jesse, another slave, appeared at Bear Branch, although there was no mention of his previous owner, his cost, or the

terms of his service; the same information was missing for Pompey and Jenny.

In mid-September, John Jenkins arrived from Ireland, accompanied by Owen Corr [Con?], a carpenter. Owen proved reliable, although he, too, had to iron out some difficulties with Birnie near the beginning of his employment. He stuck with the job, however, and the house slowly began to take shape. November 6: "Pompey to collect people for raising." November 11: "Fitting Rafters." November 23: "A. Haynes & Owen finished the New Roof." December 7: "Got all the House plaistered except the Gable inside." December 18: "Owen & I laying the Floor." At that point, Birnie noted that the masons had worked a total of 32½ days. Meanwhile, hard frosts were becoming more and more frequent. Where the family was living is again somewhat of a mystery because, on October 25, Haynes, John Lutz, John Mowler, and Owen were "Pulling down the old House."

Construction couldn't consume the energy of everyone during the fall because the crops planted throughout the spring and summer had to be harvested. Birnie slaughtered four hogs weighing a total of 705 pounds in December and killed a cow as well. Although he had Jesse, Pompey, Jack, Charles, Jenny, and John Jenkins working for him, not all of

them were equally productive. John Jenkins fell sick shortly after he arrived and couldn't work for a month. Jack and Jenny never did the hard work expected of Charles or Pompey.

On Saturday, October 19, Clotworthy noted, "Mrs. B. was Safely delivered of a Son." A baby could not have arrived at a less opportune moment, but there was no choice except to take everything in stride. Fanny no longer worked for Hester because she had only been hired for a year. An indentured girl named Betty apparently replaced her. Fortunately, Margaret, the Birnies' seventeen-year-old daughter, still lived with them. Her help must have proved a godsend because four of the nine children were age six or younger. Only Worthy was away from home.



Labor troubles came back to haunt Birnie at the end of the year. His slave Jenny "decamped" on November 19, just after he had flogged her for "idleness & impudence." He had no luck tracing her, though he went "nearly to the Sulphur Springs [New Windsor]," so he offered a \$3.00 reward for her apprehension. Betty fled in mid-December. Details, too lengthy to quote here, of the ugly confrontation he had when he tried to force her to return appear in the diary. It is the only incident he reported in graphic detail. On December 28, Pompey "took his departure," and was not recaptured until January.

In spite of these incidents, Birnie had many reasons to rejoice as 1811 drew to a close. The family's house was almost complete and the crops were harvested. It appeared there would be plenty for everyone to eat during the winter months based on the animals he had slaughtered and what the garden had yielded. There was enough feed for all the livestock he had accumulated. One mare and several cows had reproduced; another mare and many of his ewes would give birth in the spring. He and his wife had a healthy son. Although he never said as much in his diary, the first year and a half of life in America had turned out rather well.



The Clotworthy Birnie Diary 1810-1813 is found on Microfilm Roll M 1088. It is part of MSA SC 725, a special collection of the Maryland State Archives.

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