

Guide to the John and Garret S. Baxter journals

ARC.257

Finding aid prepared by Larry Weimer

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Describing Archives: A Content Standard

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Summary Information

Repository	Brooklyn Historical Society
Creator	Baxter, Garret S.
Creator	Baxter, John, 1765-1826
Creator	Bergen, Garret
Title	John and Garret S. Baxter journals
Date [inclusive]	1790-1836, 1876
Extent	2.25 Linear feet in one manuscript box and two flat boxes
Language	English
Language of Materials	Materials in English.
Abstract	<p>The collection includes the journals maintained from 1790 to 1826 by Flatlands (Kings County, N.Y.) farmer John Baxter (1765-1826) and from 1826 to 1835 by his son, Garret (1792-1835). In addition, the collection includes a manuscript attributed to Garret Bergen with extracts from the journals of both Baxters. The Bergen manuscript also includes extracts dated 1824 from a journal not in the collection, that of one John Bergen. Access to the documents in this collection is restricted because they are in exceptionally fragile condition. Researchers are requested to use the typescript transcriptions available in the library. Researchers requiring access to the original documents need to request permission in writing from the Director of Library and Archives. With attributes of diaries, the subjects covered by the Baxter journals include farming and agriculture, market transactions, health and illness, social relationships, civic duties, and weather conditions. The division and overlap of labor across gender,</p>

age, and race can be discerned. References to African-Americans, including those enslaved, are found in the journals. Social networks and matters of genealogical interest are illustrated by the journals because individuals are attributed by name in connection with labor, social visits, recreation, Sunday preaching, medical assistance, marriages, births, and deaths. Among the many family names well-represented in the journals are Wyckoff, Stoothoff, Bergen, and Lott.

Preferred Citation

Identification of item, date (if known); John and Garret S. Baxter journals, ARC.257, Box and Folder number; Brooklyn Historical Society.

Biographical/Historical note

John Baxter was born in Omagh, county Tyrone, Ireland on December 20, 1765. In 1784, leaving his parents in Ireland, Baxter migrated to the United States. By 1790, he had settled in Flatlands, Kings County, NY (now part of Brooklyn, NY), initially working as a teacher, but soon taking up farming. He married Altie Stoothoff on October 13, 1791. Their son, Garret (often spelled "Garrit"), was born on August 4, 1792. Garret married Abigail Wyckoff on May 8, 1816. They had a daughter, also named Abigail, on April 8, 1817. The mother died shortly after the birth, on May 4, 1817. Garret, also a farmer in Flatlands, later married Abigail's sister, Sarah Wyckoff, on November 21, 1820. Beginning in 1790 and continuing until his death on May 2, 1826, John Baxter kept what he called a daily journal, but which has many attributes of a diary. At John's death, Garret Baxter continued the journal until some months prior to his own death, on December 22, 1835.

(Source: Information gleaned from the Baxter journals.)

Scope and Contents

The collection includes the journals maintained from 1790 to 1826 by Flatlands farmer John Baxter and from 1826 to 1835 by his son, Garret. John maintained a daily journal and also, for the period 1790 to 1817, an abridged and edited version of the journal; both versions are in the collection. In addition, the collection includes a manuscript attributed to Garret Bergen with extracts from the journals of both Baxters. The Bergen manuscript also includes extracts dated 1824 from a journal not in the collection, that of one John Bergen. The collection holds a copy of the typescript transcription of Garret Bergen's extracts, prepared in 1943 by Long Island Historical Society librarian Edna Huntington.

The Baxter diaries are consistent across the decades in their subject content. Topics concerning farming and agriculture appear frequently, including the planting and harvesting of crops; maintenance of farming needs, such as buildings, dung, etc.; marketing and prices of produce; traveling to local waterways for fish, crabs, eels, and clams; and the labor involved in farming. Labor included slaves, hired hands, and family members, and the journals often identify the specific individuals involved in particular tasks. The division and overlap of labor across gender, age, and race can be discerned. References to African-Americans are found in the journals. Social networks and matters of genealogical interest are illustrated by the journals because individuals are attributed by name throughout in connection with labor, social visits, recreation, Sunday preaching, medical assistance, marriages, births, and deaths. The cause of death is often noted, including suicides, accidents, cholera epidemic (1832), etc. Health concerns, mostly within the Baxter family, commonly appear in the diaries. Among the many family names well-represented in the journals are Wyckoff, Stoothoff, Bergen, and Lott.

Weather conditions, especially those that were extreme or presented particular challenges to the farm, family, and community are recorded. The Baxters' civic and community lives are the subject of many entries, particularly concerning participation in local elections, town meetings, juries, Independence Day (July 4) celebrations, local militia musterings, and bearing coffins at burials. John Baxter's diaries, more so than Garret's, convey a sense of piety and spiritual devotion through the prayers he noted at the turn of the year and on his birthdays.

The entries tend to be focused on the Baxters' personal observations and experiences regarding family and local Flatlands matters. But notable matters that came to the Baxters' attention concerning other Kings County towns were noted as well, such as the 1818 agreement on the boundary with Flatbush. References to business and social trips taken by family members to Flatbush, Brooklyn, New York City, and New Jersey are common. Matters of broader statewide or national import generally do not appear in the diaries, though there are exceptions, such as those concerning the War of 1812 and related embargo.

Arrangement note

The original John Baxter journals appear first, followed by John's abridged version, then Garret's journals, closing with the extracts recorded by Garret Bergen.

Administrative Information

Publication Information

Brooklyn Historical Society September 2011

Conditions Governing Access

Access to the documents in this collection is restricted because they are in exceptionally fragile condition. Researchers are requested to use the typescript transcriptions prepared by Long Island Historical Society (now Brooklyn Historical Society) librarians, found on the library shelves. The John and Garret Baxter journals, including both John's original and abridged versions, are found at call number F129.B7.F53.1955 (6 volumes). The John Bergen extracts are found at call number F129.B7.F529.1943. Researchers requiring access to the original documents need to request permission in writing from the Director of Library and Archives.

Conditions Governing Use note

The material is in the public domain.

Immediate Source of Acquisition note

The manuscript of extracts from John Baxter's journal was donated to the Long Island Historical Society (now the Brooklyn Historical Society) circa 1943 by Stryker Bergen, who was likely the son of Garret Bergen, who prepared the manuscript. The typescript transcription of the manuscript was prepared in 1943 by Edna Huntington, a BHS librarian. The original John and Garret S. Baxter journals were donated in 1988 by a descendant of the Baxters, Mrs. Abbie Baxter Van Siclen Peterson.

Processing Information note

The collection was processed in September 2011 by Larry Weimer. The collection combines two accessions: 1973.096 and 1988.010.

Related Materials

Related Archival Materials note

Access to the documents in this collection is restricted because they are in exceptionally fragile condition. Researchers are requested to use the typescript transcriptions prepared by Long Island Historical Society (now Brooklyn Historical Society) librarians, found on the library shelves. The John and Garret Baxter journals, including both John's original and abridged versions, are found at call number F129.B7.F53.1955 (6 volumes). The John Bergen extracts are found at call number F129.B7.F529.1943. Researchers requiring access to the original documents need to request permission in writing from the Director of Library and Archives.

Garret Baxter held the position of Overseer of the Poor in Flatlands from at least 1807 until the position was abolished in 1831. BHS holds the account book with the financial records of the Overseers (call number 2005.001). A typescript transcription of the account book is also available on the library's shelves at call number F129.B7.F529 on page 109.

Controlled Access Headings

Family Name(s)

- Bergen family
- Hegeman family
- Lott family
- Stoothoff family
- Vanderveer family
- Voorhees family
- Wyckoff family

Genre(s)

- Diaries
- Journals (accounts)
- Transcripts

Geographic Name(s)

- Brooklyn (New York, N.Y.)
- Flatlands (New York, N.Y.)
- Flatlands (New York, N.Y.) |x Climate
- Flatlands (New York, N.Y.) |x Social life and customs |v 19th century
- Kings County (N.Y.)
- Kings County (N.Y.) |x History |y War of 1812

Personal Name(s)

- Baxter, Garret S. -- Diaries
- Baxter, John, 1765-1826 -- Diaries

Subject(s)

- African Americans |z New York (State) |z Kings County
- Agriculture |z New York (State) |z Kings County
- Families |x Health and hygiene
- Farmers |z New York (State) |z Kings County
- Fishing |z New York (State) |z Kings County
- Genealogy
- Labor |z New York (State) |z Kings County
- Markets |z New York (State) |z New York
- Piety

- Slavery |z New York (State) |z Kings County

Other Finding Aids note

The typescript transcriptions of the journals found on the library shelves include indexes prepared by Long Island Historical Society (now Brooklyn Historical Society) librarians. These are mostly name references, but include town names and subjects as well.

Bibliography

Geoffrey D. Needler, "Gleanings from John Baxter's Journals, 1790-1826," in *American Speech*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (Oct., 1965), pp. 196-200. Available on JSTOR: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/454068>.

This article makes observations about the contents of the diaries. The author is especially interested in linguistics and examines some of the vocabulary of John Baxter, an Irish immigrant.

Collection Inventory

	Dates	Box	Folder
John Baxter journal (1 of 4)	1790-1805	1	1
John Baxter journal (2 of 4)	1806-1812	1	2
John Baxter journal (3 of 4)	1812-1821	2	1
John Baxter journal (4 of 4) to April 1826, then continued by Garret Baxter	1822-1827	3	1
John Baxter journal (abridged and edited by Baxter)	1790-1817	2	2
Garret Baxter journal (1 of 3)	1827-1830	3	2
Garret Baxter journal (2 of 3)	1831-1832	3	3

Garret Baxter journal (3 of 3)	1833-1835	3	4
Journal extracts taken by Garret Bergen, 1790-1835, 1876 (original)	undated	3	5
Journal extracts taken by Garret Bergen, 1790-1835, 1876 (typescript)	1943	3	6