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admin@exactphilosophy.net

exactphilosophy.net

avantgarde

Birth time of Caesar Rodney

For all that it appears, Caesar Rodney was born Monday, 7 October 1728 (Julian Calendar), shortly *before* midnight ("I believe just about midnight") according to the diary of his father who also acted as midwife. A birth on the *same date* shortly *after* midnight (i.e. almost 24 hours earlier) as indicated in at least one secondary source can be excluded based on diary entries for the previous and the following day. Scans and transcripts of the diary entries can be found towards the end of this document.

Details

I am aware of two secondary sources that quote the diary of this father, Caesar Rodney Sr., for the birth time. The first one is:

> *Caesar Rodney patriot*
> *Delaware's hero for all times and all seasons*
> *by William P. Frank*
> *Delaware American Revolution Bicentennial Commission*
> *1975*
> *http://archives.delaware.gov/eBooks/CeasarRodneyPatriot.pdf*

Frank quotes and interprets the father's diary as follows (page 9):

> *Caesar, our hero, was born shortly before midnight, October 7, 1728, amid unusual circumstances. His father kept a diary, which indicates that the father acted as midwife.*
>
> *The diary entry reads:*
>
> > *"October 7 — Hung some tobacco. Came in, got dinner and killed some squirrels. . . . About eleven o'clock at night, my wife awakened me for she was very bad. I got up and sent for ye midwife and women. But before any came, ye child was born and it was a SON. There was no soul with her but myself, being I believe just about midnight."*
>
> *Caesar was born on his father's farm in East Dover Hundred, Kent County, near the Delaware River, an area that had always been known as St. Jones Neck.*

The second source is:

> *A Gentleman as Well as a Whig*
> *Caesar Rodney and the American Revolution*
> *by Jane Harrington Scott*
> *National Society of The Colonial Dames of America in the State of Delaware*
> *University of Delaware Press, 2000*

Harrington Scott quotes and interprets the father's diary as follows (page 16):

> *Caesar Rodney, the first child of Caesar Rodney, Sr. and Elizabeth Crawford Rodney was born shortly after midnight, on October 7, 1728. It is thought that his young parents were living in a small house owned by Elizabeth's father, not far from the Rodney farm at Byfield.*
>
> *According to Caesar Rodney, Sr.'s diary, the young father immediately sent for a midwife "and other women," but "Before aney came ye Child wass Born and it wass a SON." As "There was no sole with her but myself—being I believe just about midnight." he "ran away for Isabelah Hughes." Apparently all was well, for his entry for the following day, October 8, tells us that he: "Past ye Day away with Eating and Drinking and at Night I got super Went to Bed fair and Good helth—My wife and Child Continues Brave and well thanks be to God."*

So two conflicting secondary sources, birth before resp. after midnight, both on 7 October 1728.

I ordered a transcript of the diary entries for October 6, 7 and 8 from the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. In addition, I got scans of two pages of the diary including for those three days. The researcher wrote:

> *[Caesar Rodney Sr.'s diary] is located in the Simon Gratz autograph collection (collection #250B) in box 237, folder 17 "Rodney, Caesar Father of Signer."*
> *The journal is written on loose pages, with just few lines per day.*

Here is a rough transcript (by me) of the diary entries for the three days around birth, plus at the end of the document scans of the two diary pages at slightly reduced resolution:

> ———————
>
> *Sunday 106 / 6*
> *a. m. I went to [Daniles?] got brakt then to John [Harts?] staid tell ye evening then to [M^{r} C^{d}?] my wife was there then shee and I came home together we [sate?] sum [vituls?] and at night went to bed. Fair weather and good helth. ———*

Monday 107 / 7
a m. I went to [M^r C^d?] thence to [Danils?]
got brakt then came home went an hung
sum tobaco came in got diner went and kilt
sum squerrells came in got super went to bed
fair weather good helth ———
About elevin oclock at night my wife awakened me
for shee was very bad. I got up and sent for for ye mid-
wife and women but before aney came ye child was born
and it was a **son**. *There was no sole with her but my*
self, being I believe just about midnight ———
~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~
Tuesday 108 / 8
a. m. My child being born and woman to take
care of my wife I ran away for Isabelah [Hughes?]
and left her all alone till I came back. Shee laid
my wife to bed and drest ye child (then ye midwife came
being Elizabeth Nedham) So we continued tell day there we
got brakt and past ye day away with eating and drinking and at
night I got super and went to bed fair and good health ——
My wife and child continues brave & well thanks be to God
———————

For all that it appears, the diary shows that a birth on 7 October shortly after midnight, as indicated by Harrington Scott, can be excluded.

What can be doubted is whether the father wrote the last sentences for 7 October still on Monday or already on Tuesday, as he was very busy that night and birth was "I believe just about midnight", i.e. nominally no time at all left on Monday for making notes in the diary.

The date format e.g. "107 / 7" appears to be simply a numbering of journal entries ("107") followed by day of month ("7"). The researcher at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania was so kind to give the diary another quick look:

> *This diary begins on "May the 30: 1727", and the page is labeled (1) at the top. The entries are labeled only with the dates until p. 6, with "Saturday July 1 / 31." [. . .] the previous entry was June 30, and the entries on the subsequent page continue to count up from 31 [. . .].*

Dates at that time were in Julian Calendar. Today's Gregorian Calendar was adopted in Britain in 1752, including in the colonies that would later become the first states of the U.S.A. This is consistent with the diary, as 1 July 1727 was a Saturday in Julian Calendar, but not in Gregorian Calendar. And 7 October 1728 was a Monday, as indicated in the diary, and October was the only month in 1728 in which the 7th was a Monday. The entry for "Tuesday 101 / 1" on the first scanned page of the diary also shows the month, "October ye [1st?]".

Since the father did apparently not have the opportunity to look at a clock at birth and it is not certain (at least to me) how precise their clocks were and how precisely they were in sync with local mean time, I guess maybe a time window of 10-20 minutes before midnight on Monday or after midnight on Tuesday (8 October) for the actual time of birth would be realistic ?

FYI: The main reason I made this research was to eventually help find out when Caesar Rodney arrived 2 July 1776 in Philadelphia just in time to cast his vote for independence (Lee Resolution), an important event for the USA.

[Historical Society of Pennsylvania
Simon Gratz autograph collection, #2508, Box 237, Folder 17 "Rodney, Caesar Father of Signer"]

Saturday 28 / 28 — A.M. I Got Brea.t &c and Staid at home all Day only Cate Diner and at night Supe. and then Went to Bed Fair Weather. I had the head Ach all Day

Sunday 29 / 29 — A.M. I Staid at home All Day. with Nothing But Common Eating and Drinking. at Night Supe. and Went to Bed Gun Hadnorday afternoon. But Good Helth

Munday 30 / 100 — A.M. I Got Break.t and Went to Mr Ca.r then Come home Went to Daniels Come Back then Got Diner and at Night Supe. and Went to Bed. Fair W.r & G.d Helth

Tuesday October 1 / 101 — a.m. I Got up and there Was a White Frost then I Got Ready and Went to Daniels there I Cate Break.t Got my horse and Went to the Election Bro.r Daniel and David Frank the Clerk — I Staid till Gust Gun Set then Come away Home (Call at Daniels) then Got Supe. and Went to Bed Fair & G.d H.th

Wensday 2 / 102 — A.M. I Went to Daniels Got Break.t thence to Mr Ca.r Cho told me he.d Assembly men Was Daniel Rodney John Brinkle Andrew Hamelton David French Richard Richardson Mark Manloe — Sheriff Willm Rodney Moses Vernon Coroner Edward Jones, Sam. Berry) then I Come home Got Diner and at night Supe. Went to Bed Fair W.r & G.d Helth

Thursday 3 / 3 — A.M. I Went to Daniels he Went at home then I Come home Got Break.t I Set at Doddle & Watered the Went Staid at Remainder of any Corn take then Got Diner and hered Gun of my tobacco Got Supe. and Went to Bed. Fair Weather and Good Helth

Friday 4 / 104 — A.M. I Went and Dress.d Gun Ryder Come in Got Break.t and Rocked all Day Went Got about two Barrels Got Diner and at night Went to Bed Fair & Warm Good Helth

Saturday 5 / 105 — A.M. I Got Break.t But it Rained So all Day I.t Was Cold to go to Work I Past the Day with one thing or other till night then Went to Bed Fair — Good Helth

Sunday 6 / 106 — A.M. I Went to Daniels Got Break.t then to John Harts Staid till Evening then to Mr Ca.r my Wife Was there then She and I Come Home Together Cate Gun Victuals and at night Went to Bed. Fair Weather and Good Helth

Names of Caesar Rodney's Children: Jr. Grate Queue Brier

Munday 107/7 | A.M. I went to Mr. Cd. thence to Danill Got Brakt. then Came home went and hung Sum tobaco Came In Got Diner went and Kill Sum Squarrells Came In Got Super went to Bed fair weather Good helth

About Eleuin aclock at night my wife awakened me for Shee was very Bad. I Got up and Sent for for 2d. midwife and women But before aney Came 2d. Child was Born and it was a Son. there was no Sole with her But my Self Being I Bleue Just about midnight

Tuesday 108/8 | A.M. my Child being born and woman to take Care of my wife I Ran away for Isabelah Huse and Left her all alone till I Came Back Shee Laid my wife to Bed and Drest 2d. Child (then 2d. midwife Came Being Elizabeth Nedham) So we Continued till Day then we Got Brakt. and Dast 2d. Day away with Eating and Drinking and a night I Got Super went to Bed fair. and Good helth my wife and Child Continues Brave & well thanks be to Go

Wensday 109/9 | A.M. I Got up Before Day and Got Brakt. then 2d. Graney and my Sister In-Law mary went to Bed In 2d. morning Elizah. Nedham went home. Mr. Cd. Came and Brought a woman to Look after my wife then we Got Diner and at night Super and went to Bed fair weather and Call In Good helth

Thursday 110/10 | A.M. I Got Brakt. and went to Danll. Got a horse and went to Go to 2d. Forrist Landing But Could not Git over thence to Mr. Finies and Borrowed 7½ Pds. of Super thence I Came to Danll. Left my horse and Came home Got Super and went to Bed fair Wr. Good helth

Fryday 111/11 | A.M. I went to Mr. Cd. Got mary French to Come to make my wife a Gound then I Came home Got Brakt. hired a man to work Set him to work then Got Diner and at night Super and went to Bed fair Wr. Good helth