

Poor Richard's Almanack ⁽¹⁾

The images on this page are from *Poor Richard's Almanack*. An almanac was one of the most important publications in colonial America, and nearly every household owned a copy. It provided people with valuable information as well as entertainment. The value of an almanac is best illustrated by the fourth image on this page, where the owner has written his name, declaring that the almanac is his.

Because almanacs were so important to colonists, printers would pay an astrologer a lot of money to do the calculations -- almost as much as a Justice of the Peace was paid.

Benjamin Franklin was a man of science who was able to do his own calculations. He must have had been somewhat accurate, because his two almanacs, *Poor Richard's* and *Poor Robin's*, were some of the most popular in the colonies. You can see how widely these almanacs circulated by looking at the list of courts Franklin published — Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, and Maryland. His almanacs could probably be found as far south as Georgia.

The most important use of an almanac was to predict the weather and to help people know when to plant their crops. There were no weathermen in the colonial period, no daily forecasts to read or listen to. People relied on their almanacs to know the best time to plant their crops and whether it was going to be a wet spring or a dry summer. But without modern science to rely on, people predicted the weather using astrology -- studying the movements of the planets and stars in the belief that they influenced events on earth. Even an illiterate person could read the astrological symbols because it was so important to the agriculture of the colonial period.

The monthly pages of the almanac also contain poems, advice, and historical information. Transcriptions of excerpts are below each image.

January 1753

Then from their Dens the rav'nous Monsters creep

Whilst in their Folds the harmless bestial sleep.
The furious Lion roams in quest of Prey,
To gorge his Hunger till the Dawn of Day;
His hideous Roar with Terror shakes the Wood,
As from his Maker's Hand he asks his Food.
Again the Sun his morning Beams displays,
and fires the eastern Mountain with his Rays.

Remark, days, &c.	ri.	set	ph.	Aspects, &c.
1 2 Circumcision	7 24 4 36		11	with
2 3 Clouds and cold, with snow;	7 24 4 36		23	with
3 4 Days inc. 4 m.	7 23 4 37		5	rise 4 23
4 5	7 23 4 37		17	'Tis against
5 6 Epiphany,	7 23 4 37		29	with some
6 7 1 p. Epiph.	7 22 4 38		22	w. Mens
8 2 wind and falling	7 21 4 39		4	Principle to pay
9 3 Days inc. 10 m.	7 21 4 39		16	Interest, and
10 4	7 20 4 40		28	seems against
11 5 weather, then very cold,	7 19 4 41		10	? others
12 6	7 18 4 42		23	rise 5 42
13 7	7 17 4 43		6	Sirius so. 10 52
14 G 2 p. Epiph.	7 16 4 44		19	+ Interest
15 2 Days incr. 18 m.	7 16 4 44		2	7 "s so. 7 42
16 3 wintry weather; but grows more	7 15 4 45		16	so. 10 39
17 4	7 14 4 46		0	rise 4 36
18 5 Day 9 36 long	7 13 4 47		15	with to
19 6 moderate;	7 12 4 48		17	the
20 7 3 p. Epiph.	7 11 4 49		3	Principal.
21 2 followed by clouds, wind and	7 10 4 50		18	sets 8 2
22 3	7 9 4 51		2	Philosophy as
23 4	7 8 4 52		15	well as Foppery
24 5 Conv. St. Paul.	7 7 4 53		28	+ often
25 6 Day incr. 38 m.	7 6 4 54		11	changes Fashion.
26 7 cold, with	7 5 4 55		24	rise 4 48
27 G 4 p. Epiph.	7 4 4 56		7	7 "s sou. 6 47
28 2 snow or	7 3 4 57		17	Sirius sou. 9 44
29 3 K. Char. behend.	7 2 4 58		1	with &
30 4 rain.	7 1 4 59		13	with

The Greatness of the Power, which

has been exerted in the Creation, through every Object in Nature shews it, will best appear by considering a little the GREAT Works, properly so called, of Nature; the Sun, and Planets, and the fixed Stars. The Sun and Moon, the most conspicuous ^[5] to us of all the celestial Bodies, are the only ones mentioned in the [sacred Text](#): But the Invention of the noblest of Instruments the Telescope, and [the Sagacity of the Astronomers of later Ages, whose Observations have improved and corrected those of the foregoing, afford us a very different Idea of the Solar System](#) from what the single Consideration of those two most conspicuous Bodies gives us. As this may probably fall into the Hands of some, who have not Leisure or Opportunities of reading Books of Astronomy, the following brief View of our System, and of the Imensity of the Creation, according to the Theory of the Moderns, may not be unacceptable.

It is proper, in the first Place, just to mention, That the real [Magnitude](#) ^[4], Distances, Orbits, and other [Affections](#) of the Bodies of our System are determined by what Astronomers call the [Parallaxes](#) ^[5], and by their [Elongations](#) ^[6] from the Sun, and their apparent magnitudes, and other [analogical](#) ^[7] Methods, which would take up by far too much Time to explain here; by which it is possible to determine...

February 1759

Its Vigour by Adversity refines;

The Jewel must be polish'd e'er it shines.
[Camillus, Cato](#), each heroic Name,
Tradition knows, derives from thence its Fame
Howe'er exalted, or how ever low;
As equal Dignity of Mind they show
In them ye little, mimic, Patriots view,
What to your country, to yourselves is due;
To brave the [Menace](#) ^[8], and to scorn the Bribe,
Than Stars, or Ribbons, more adorns your Tribe

Plutarch observes,

that [Pericles](#), at a Time when all the Citizens were crying out against him, and blaming his Conduct, like an able Pilot, who, in a Storm regards only the Rules of his Art for saving the Ship, and overlooks the Cries, [Lamentations](#) ^[9], and Prayers of all around him; that Pericles, I say [after having taken all possible Precaution for the Security of the State](#), pursued his own Scheme, without troubling himself about the Murmurs, and Insults, the injurious [Railleries](#) ^[10] and Accusations that were daily thrown out against him.

On the 1st of this Month, February,

A.D. 1172, King Henry II of England surnamed Plantagenet, returned from taking Possession of Ireland.

Self-Sufficiency exposed

The Honour which Science and [Genius](#) confer, results not merely from literary Attainments, and the Talents of the Mind, but the good Use made of them; for a Man may be adorned with the Knowledge of every Thing that is most curious and exquisite in the Sciences, and yet be a bad Man. This makes a Man learned, but does not make him good. And if a Man be only learned...

Christianity and the Occult

Although we tend to think of colonial America as a deeply religious place, church attendance actually decreased throughout the colonial period. By 1760, fewer than 15 percent of adults belonged to a church. Church attendance was at its lowest point just before the Revolution.

But although people did not attend church, Christianity was part of the popular culture. Most people, white and black, would have been familiar with biblical stories and poems even if they might not know the finer points of Christianity.

Because people did not belong to any particular church, they were open to blending different traditions into a popular culture that had pagan influences, such as palm reading and astrology, as well as Christian traditions such as the baptism of children.

Almanacs blended the Occult and Christian traditions. You can see the pagan influences in the astrological symbols in the pages above and in the Man of Signs, below; and the Christian influence is clear from the quotations from the Bible.

The Man of Signs

The Man of Signs is perhaps the most confusing image in almanacs. Before the 1800s, people had a very different understanding of the body. They believed that the weather and the alignment of the sun, moon, and stars could affect a person's health. People believed that the world was made up of four elements -- water, fire, earth, and air. The human body had four humors -- fluids -- that controlled its function, each corresponding to one of the four elements: blood (air), phlegm (water), black bile (earth), and yellow bile (fire). Each humor was in turn related to a particular temperament, so a person with more yellow bile (fire) might have a warmer body and a temper, while a person who had more phlegm (water) might be cooler in temperament. If the humors or elements became unbalanced, disease might be the result.

The four elements also corresponded with astrological signs. Parts of the body were also believed to be governed, or more powerful, at different parts of the year. People read these astrological signs to know how their health might change throughout the year. Transcriptions of these pages are below.

1753 Introduction

To know where the Sign is.

First Find the Day of the Month, and against the Day you have the Sign or Place of the Moon in the 5th Column. Then finding the Sign here, it shews the Part of the Body it governs.

Courteous Reader,

This is the twentieth Time of my Addressing thee in this Manner, and I have reason to flatter myself my Labours have not been unacceptable to the Publick. I am particularly pleas'd to understand that my Predictions of the Weather give such general satisfaction; and indeed, such Care is taken in the Calculations, on which those Predictions are founded, that I could almost venture to say there's not a single One of them, promising Snow, Rain, Hail, Heat, Frost, Fogs, Winds, or Thunder, but what comes to pass [punctually](#) ^[11] and [precisely](#) ^[12] on the Day, in some Place or other on this little [diminutive](#) ^[13] Globe of ours; (and when you consider the vast Distance of the Stars from whence we take our Aim [you must allow it no small Degree of Exactness to hit any Part of it](#)) say on this Globe; for tho' in other Matters I confine the Usefulness of my [Ephemeris](#) ^[14] to the Northern Colonies, yet in that important matter of the Weather, which is of such general Concern, I would have it more extensively useful, and therefore take in both Hemispheres, and all Latitudes from Hudson's Bay to Cape Horn.

You will find this Almanack in my former Method, [only conformable to the New stile established by the Act of Parliament, which I gave you in my last at length](#) the new Act once made for Amendment of the first Act, not affecting us in the least, being Intended only to regulate the Corporation Matters in England, before unprovided for. I have only added a Column in the Second Page of each month, containing the Days of the Old Stile opposite to their corresponding Days in the New, which may, in many Cases, be of Use; and so conclude (believing you will excuse a short preface, when it is to make Room for something better)

Thy Friend and Servant, [R. Saunders.](#)

Hymn to the Creator, from Psalm CIV.

Awake, my Soul! With joy they God adore;
Declare his Greatness; celebrate his Pow'r;
Who, cloath'd with Honour, and with Glory crown'd,

Shines forth, and cheers his Universe around.
Who with a radiant [Veil](#) ^[15] of heavenly Light
Himself [conceals](#) ^[16] from all created Sight.
Who rais'd the [spacious](#) ^[17] Firmament on high,
And spread the azure Curtain of the Sky.
Whose awful Throne Heav'n's stary Arch sustains,
Whose presence not Heav'n's vast Expanse restrains
Whose Ways unsearchable no Eye can find,
The clouds his Chariot, and his Wings the Wind.
Whom Hosts of mighty Angels own their Lord,
And flaming [Seraphim](#) ^[18] fulfil his Word.
Whose Pow'r of old the solid Earth did sound,
Self-pois'd, self-center'd, and with Strength grit round;

Court dates and church meetings

One of the most important events in colonial America were court dates. Because of the long distances between towns, a judge or a group of judges traveled around the county and hold trials on different days. It was easier and more efficient to move the judges to the people than to expect people to travel long distances. All of these different courts were responsible for overseeing different parts of the law.

Court days were important for the entire community. People might be involved in a minor incident, such as suing a neighbor for stealing a cow, or serve as a witness in a more violent crime. If they

were't directly involved in a trial, they would probably show up because court day was a form of entertainment. Court days were an opportunity for gossip, trade, and catching up with neighbors.

Franklin has also listed the monthly meetings for Quakers and Baptists, two of the largest religious groups in Pennsylvania. The Quakers and Baptists, as well as other religious groups, held weekly church meetings, and some churches also held monthly meetings. Several congregations would meet at a given location to oversee charity for poor members and to discipline members who had committed sins. Essentially, Franklin is advertising both the secular ^[19] courts and the religious courts of his day. Transcription of these pages is below.

January 1733

At Chester, the last Tuesday in May, August, November, and February.
At Lancaster, the first Tuesday in the Months aforesaid.
At Suffex the first, at Kent the second, and at New-Castle the third Tuesday in the same months.
Mayors Courts in Philadelphia, are held The first Tuesday in January, April, and July, last Tuesday in October.

Supreme Courts in New-Jersey are held

At Burlington, the 1st Tuesday in May, 2d Tuesday in August, 1st Tuesday in November and 3d in Febr(urary)
At Perth-Amboy, the 2d Tuesday in May, 3d in Aug. the 2d Tuesday in Novemb. and the 4th in February.
In Bergen County, April 3. In Essex, April 10.
In Somerset, Octob. 2. In Monmouth, April 24.
In Hunterdon, Octob. 23. In Gloucester, June 12. In Salem and Cape-May Counties, June 5.

General Sessions and County Courts are held

In Bergen county, Jun 2. April 3. June 12. Octob. 2
In Essex, January 9. April 10. June 19. Sept 25
In Middlesex, jan. 16, April 17, July 17, Octob 23
In Moonmouth, Jan 23, April 24, July 24, Octob. 2
In Hunterdon, Feb. 6. May 15. Aug. 7. Octob. 23.
In Burlington, Febr. 13. May 1 Aug. 14 Nov. 6.
In Glochester, March 27. June 12. Sept 1s. Dec. 25
In Salem, Feb. 20. June 5. Aug. 21. Nov. 27.
In Cape May, Feb. 6. May 13, Augu 8, Octt. 23.

Supreme Courts in New-York are held,

At the City of New-York, March 13, June 5 October 9. Nov. 27.
At Westchester, March 27.
At Richmond, April 10.
At Orange, April 24.
At Suffolk County, July 24.
At Albany, August 21.
At Ulster, Sept. 4.
At Dutches, Sept. 11.
At Kings County, Sept. 18.
At Queens County, Sept. 25.

Courts of Sessions & Common Pleas are held,

In the City of New-York, May 1. Aug. 7. Nov. 6. Feb. 6.
At Albany, June 5. Octob. 2 and Jan. 16.
At Westchester, May 27. Octob. 23.
In Ulster, May 1. Octob. 2.
In Richmond, March 20 Septemb. 25.
In Kings, April 17. Octob. 16.
In Queens, May 15. Sept. 18.
In Orange, April 24 Octob. 30.
In Dutches Co. May 15 and Oct. 16.

Provincial ^[20] Courts in Maryland.

Two in a Year, held at Annapolis, viz ^[21]. The 3d Tuesday of Mar. and 3d Tuesday of Octob.

County Courts in Maryland.

For Talbot, Baltimore and St Mary's counties, the first Tuesday in March, June, August, and November.
At Dorchester, cecil, Ann-Arundel, and Charles Counties, the second Tuesday in the same Months.
At Kent, Calvert, and Somerset Counties, the third Tuesday in the same Months.
At Queen Anne's and Prince George's Counties, the fourth Tuesday in the same Months.

Quakers General Meetings are kept.

At Philadelphia, March 18	At Wesbury, Aug. 26
At Salem, April 24	At Philadelphia, Sept. 16
At Flushing, May 27	At Jamaica 23
At West-River, June 3	At Choptank, Octob. 7
At Providence, 17	At Shresbury, 28
At Newport, 24	At Oyster Bay, 28
At Newton, 24	At Flushing, Nov. 25
At Westchester, July 22	At Westbury, Febr.25

Baptists General Meetings are kept

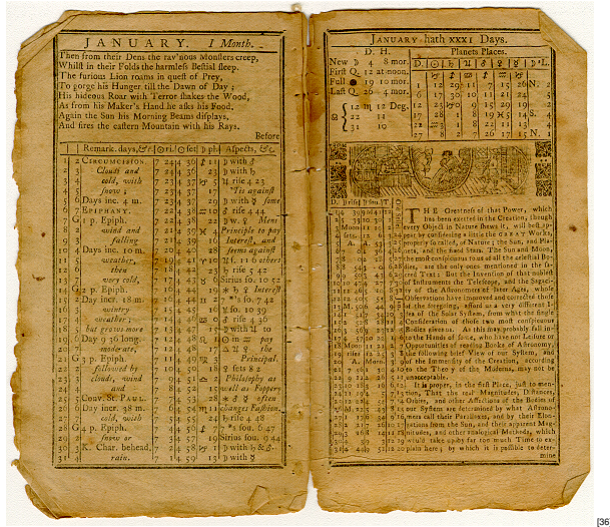
At Welch-Tract, May 13
At Cohansie, 20
At Piscataway, June 3
Philadelphia, Sept. 23

Fairs are kept

At Cohansie, April 24	At Chester Octob. 5
At N-York ditto, & Nov. 6	At Salem, 20
At Salem May 1	At Germantown 20
At Chester 5	At Bristol, 29
At Bristol, 8	At New Castle, 3
At Philadelphia, 16	At Philadelphia, 16

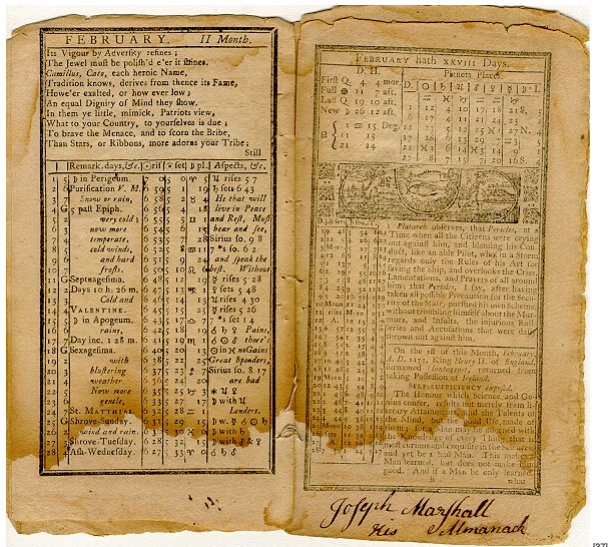
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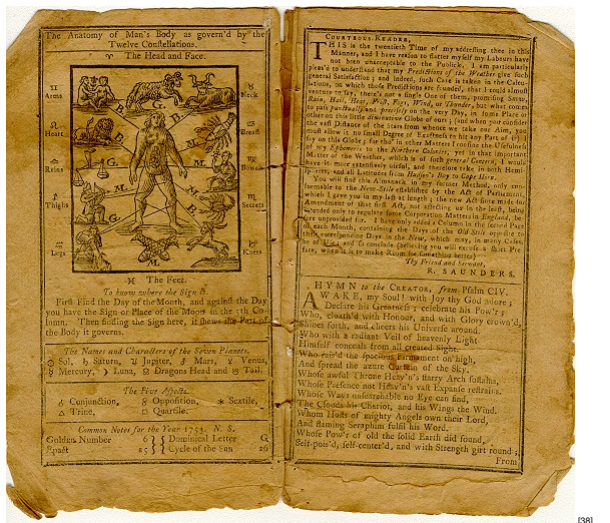
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Pages of Poor Richard's Almanac, 1753.



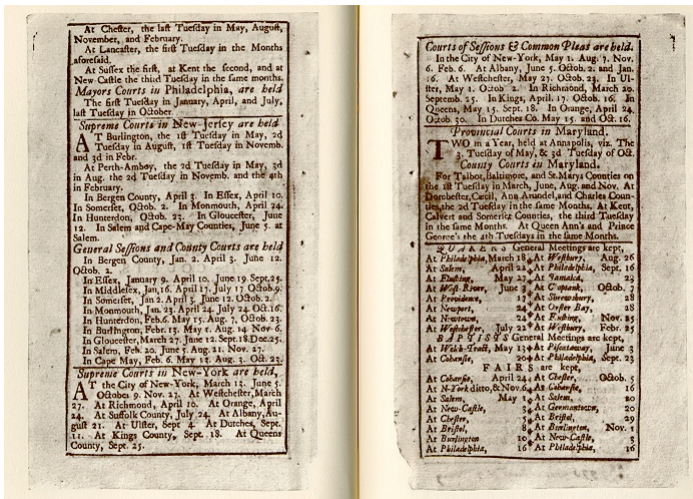
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Pages of Poor Richard's Almanac, 1753.



[38]

An introductory page from the 1753 Poor Richard's Almanac with the Man of Signs.



An excerpt of court and church dates. January 1733.

Artifacts:





[40]

This fifteenth-century illustration shows the believed relationship between signs of the zodiac and parts of the body.

3 January 2018

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