

CONRAD WEISER'S ACCOUNT BOOK

INTRODUCTION

Although Conrad Weiser was very busy as an interpreter and diplomat, helping to negotiate peace between the colony of Pennsylvania and the Iroquois Nation, he was also a landowner and farmer, owned and operated a tannery for tanning leather and held many positions in local government as well. His personal account book from 1746 - 1760 survives today, and provides a record of his expenses -- what he purchased and sold, what he paid for items and what people paid him. For centuries, long before calculators and computers were invented, these amounts were carefully added and subtracted and recorded by hand. Today, these account books help us understand more about the day-to-day life of colonists. Conrad Weiser's Account Book has been transcribed and reprinted; that is, it was copied from the original handwriting into a printed text we can read more easily.

UNDERSTANDING COLONIAL MONEY

Before the American Revolution, colonists used the English system of money. Instead of dollars and cents, there were three denominations: pounds sterling, [£], shillings [s] or pence [d]. **12 pence equaled one shilling, and 20 shillings equaled one pound.** This may sound complicated, but we use a similar rule today to convert cents to dollars: 100 cents equal one dollar. For example, if we want to know the total cost of two items listed at 54¢ and 50¢ we know to add the numbers up, and convert, or change, the total of 104 cents to 1 dollar and 4 cents, or \$1.04.

INSTRUCTIONS:

In his account book, Conrad Weiser added up the costs of things he sold, the amount of money people owed him for things and the amount of money he paid for items and services. From the excerpts from Conrad Weiser's account book reprinted below, add up the totals. **Remember: Use the conversion rule above to convert shillings to pounds and pence to shillings.**

EXAMPLE

			£	s	d
1751					
Sept. 18	C. Zimmer paid three pounds to me	3	00		
	a cow hide		00	10	5
	a ram		00	11	00
August 24	another ram		00	13	00
	received in Cash		00	11	10
			5	6	3

Explanation: The total amount of money Conrad Weiser received for the dates shown above is 5 pounds, 6 shillings and 3 pence. To get this total, you add the columns up, starting with the column on the right: 00

5
 00
 00
10
 15 pence.

Remembering that 12 pence=1 shilling, you see that 15 pence is equivalent to 1 shilling + 3 pence. You will therefore add 1 shilling to the middle (shilling) column and leave 3 in the pence column.

3 00+1 00
 0 10 5

0	11	00
0	13	00
0	11	10
		3

The process for the center column is the same: Adding up the numbers in the column (1[carried over] + 10 + 11 + 13 + 11) you get a total of 45 shillings. Since 20 shillings = 1 pound, you can see that 45 shillings is equivalent to 2 pounds + 5 shillings.

$$[45 \text{ s.} = 20 \text{ s.} + 20 \text{ s.} + 5 \text{ s.}]$$

1 £. + 1 £ 5 s. You will add the 2 pounds (£) to the left column, and add the 5 s. to the 1 s. already in the column. shillings

3 ⁺²	00 ⁺¹	00
0	10	5
0	11	00
0	13	00
0	11	10
		5
5	6	3

Exercises

1. Read the account book entries, below, for leather items Conrad Weiser sold to John Welch in April and May 1751. Add the total amount Mr. Welch will owe Weiser, using the rule for converting pence and shillings when necessary.

	£	s	d
to five sides of leather, 13 skins	3	19	00
to leather	1	5	4

2. Read the account book entries, below, for leather items, etc. that Conrad Weiser sold to Peter Fek in May 1756. Add the total amount Mr. Fek will owe Weiser, using the rule for converting pence and shillings when necessary.

	£	s	d
a pair of slippers	00	4	6
a pair of soles	00	1	6
a small deer skin	00	9	00
a half cow	00	15	00
ground rent, 4 years	00	6	00

3. Conrad Weiser frequently sold items to people who could not afford to pay him immediately. It was very common for them to pay him back by doing work for him, or providing some form of goods or services which Weiser would accept as payment. The following entries show the way John George Nagel worked off his debt to Weiser. Add the total to determine the money value of the work Nagel did.

	£	s	d
1755			
...for cleaning the meadows	00	10	00
[took a] trip to Shamokin	1	00	00
Hay making	00	10	00
making the second crop of hay	00	6	6

[worked] at the watch house

00 7 6

ANSWERS

1. 5 £. 4 s. 4 d [5 pounds, 4 shillings, 4 pence]

2. 1 £. 16 s.

3. 2 £. 14 s.