



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 birthtime. 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.

In July 2015, 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 weath 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 till 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?

(Historical Society of Pennsylvania

Simon Grotz autograph collection, #2508, Box 237, Folder 17 "Rodney, Caesar Father of Signer"]

18 Saturday / a.m. I got dress<sup>t</sup> and stay<sup>d</sup> at home all day only  
I eat dinner and at night Super and then went to bed  
fair weather. I had the head ach all day

19 Sunday / a.m. I stay<sup>d</sup> at home all day with nothing but common  
29/29 eating and drinking. at night Super and went to bed  
Sun & fair weather. afternoon. but Good health.

100/30 Monday / a.m. I got dress<sup>t</sup> and went to Mr. G. then came  
home went to Daniels came back then got dinner and  
at night Super and went to bed. fair w - G. health

→ 101/31 Tuesday / a.m. I got up and there was a white frost then I  
got dress<sup>t</sup> and went to Daniels there I ate breakfast got my  
books and went to the Election for Daniel and David Frank  
the Clerk - I stay<sup>d</sup> till just Sun. got then come away home  
(call at Daniels) then got Super and went to bed for G. health

102/2 Wednesday / a.m. I went to Daniels got dress<sup>t</sup> thence to Mr. G.  
who told me of a assembly men: was Daniel Godney John  
Brinkley Andrew Hamelton David Frank Richard Guberson  
marks Manlos - Sheriff William Godney Moses Freeman  
Coroner David Jonny, Sam. Gorrie then I come home got  
dinner and at night Super went to bed for G. health

103/3 Thursday / a.m. I went to Daniels he went at home then I  
came home got dress<sup>t</sup> I got 2 drops of water glass  
I went to Stabt D. he maind<sup>r</sup> of any form take then got  
dinner and being Sun of my tobacco got Super and went  
to bed. fair weather and Good health

104/4 Friday / a.m. I went and dress<sup>t</sup> him Lyder came in got dress<sup>t</sup>  
and work all day went got about two barrels got dinner  
and at night went to bed for G. health

105/5 Saturday / a.m. I got dress<sup>t</sup> but it rained so all day I  
could do no work I past 3 day with one thing or other  
till night then went to bed fair - Good health

→ 106/6 Sunday / a.m. I went to Daniels got dress<sup>t</sup> then to John  
Harts stay<sup>d</sup> till evening then to Mr. G. and my  
wife stay<sup>d</sup> there then I and I came home together  
I ate dinner with and at night went to bed.  
fair weather and Good health

Simon Grotz autograph collection, #2508, Box 237, Folder 17 "Rodney, Caesar Father of Signer"]

Monday / a.m. I went to Mr. Ed. theme to Danell  
107 / 7 / Got Draft then Came home went and hung  
Jum tobacco Came in Got Dinner sent and  
Jum Squorrells Came in Got Super went to bed  
Fair weather Good health

About Eleven o'clock at night my wife awakened me  
for she was very bad. I got up and went for some  
-wife and woman but before any came I Child was born  
and it was a SON. there was no Job with her but my  
Joh. being I blew just about midnight

Tuesday / a.m. my Child being born and woman to take  
108 / 8 / care of my wife I ran away for Gadalah Huger  
and left her all alone till I Came back the said  
my wife to bed and rest I Child then I and wife Came  
Denny Elizabeth (widham) home continued till day then we  
got Draft and sent I Day away with Eating and Drinking and a  
night I got Super went to bed fair and Good health  
my wife and Child continues to be well thanks to God

Wednesday / a.m. I got up before day and got Draft then I  
109 / 9 / Graney and my Sister in-law Mary went to bed  
In the morning Eliza (widham) went home. Mr. C  
Came and brought a woman to look after my wife  
then we got Dinner and at night Super and went to  
bed fair weather and well for Good health

Thursday / a.m. I got Draft and went to bank got a horse  
110 / 10 / and went to go to D. Forest Landing but could not get  
over theme to Mr. Finies and borrowed 1/2 D of Myson  
theme I Came to Danell left my horse and went home  
Got Super and went to bed fair weather Good health

Friday / a.m. I went to Mr. Ed. got very drunk to come to market  
111 / 11 / my wife a Count then I Came home got Draft hired a man  
to work. Got him to work then got Dinner and at night Super  
went to bed fair weather Good health