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Making meaning, making butter: The material world of Chester County farm women, 1750–1800

Parsons, Karen, M.A.

University of Delaware (Winterthur Program), 1993

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MAKING MEANING, MAKING BUTTER: THE MATERIAL WORLD
OF CHESTER COUNTY FARM WOMEN, 1750–1800

by

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For

Marguerite Proctor Parsons

and

Doris Phelps Bean

Butter makers, story tellers and my grandmothers
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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of eighteenth-century rural women's work and the material culture of that work, namely butter-making equipment. Its purpose is to analyze the extent to which diversity existed in Chester County butter makers' experiences and to broadly define a multiplicity of meanings they may have ascribed to their domestic tools. Evidence surrounding one woman, Elizabeth Smedley, her butter sales and her butter-making equipment help reveal the complexity of rural women's lives. Her butter making responded to family and farm changes, her equipment demanded maintenance and repair, and her customers varied over time. The possibility that Smedley's dairy implements obtained alternate meanings in different venues of her work suggests that butter makers in Chester County also ascribed individualized meanings to their domestic tools.

This study is concerned with three central issues: 1) how butter makers interacted with their tools during butter making, 2) how butter makers acquired and maintained their equipment and 3) how butter makers layered this task with other social, economic and domestic responsibilities. The analysis of these issues is based on a diverse evidence base. It includes public documents, prescriptive literature, tax records, craftsmen's and storekeepers' account books, farm account books, and public vendue records. Surviving eighteenth-century butter-making equipment provides crucial information about use, maintenance and repair of domestic tools.
INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on the multiple meanings assigned to domestic tools by their owners. To some eighteenth-century audiences, porcelain butter-making equipment represented a delightful (and perhaps fantasy) view of rural life: simple, clean and innocent. These were decorative tools, valued for their evocative powers. Other groups, namely rural producers of butter, interacted with butter-making equipment in very different ways. Primarily, the tools were valued because they made butter. However, these implements of earthenware, wood, and textiles acquired far greater significance because they helped individuals to successfully negotiate complex social and economic networks. Churns facilitated relationships between butter-makers and craftsmen, those who purchased rural women's butter, and the families of butter-makers who consumed the product within the household. There was nothing simplistic about the arenas in which these tools operated, or the interactions they spurred.

The ways in which these implements worked during the process of butter making helped to ascribe further meanings to them. Certain sizes and varieties of churns were valued because they required less physical energy to operate. Ceramic milk pans may have been favored because they were relatively inexpensive and were readily available in the spring. This corresponded with a seasonal rise in milk production. This springtime increase in butter making placed heavy demands on the tools of the process, causing some rural women to retool and replace implements during this time. Individual
tools gained significance in light of the methods of production and the strategies for their acquisition.

These meanings can only be partially understood from documentary evidence. Prescriptive literature relates some authorities’ views on appropriate butter-making equipment and processes. These writings do not necessarily describe the everyday practices of butter makers. Eighteenth–century design books display a variety of decorative rustic landscapes inhabited by milkmaids, but they do not explain how evocative these embellishments were on cream pots sitting in fancy parlors. Public records, such as probate inventories, wills, widows’ shares and tax records, offer small bits of information about the ownership and inheritance of domestic tools. These sources, however, are remarkably silent about women’s work and rural material culture. Diaries, letters and personal accounts written by rural butter makers are difficult to locate and often reticent as well.

Teasing valuable information from these documentary sources is arduous, sometimes fruitless. New windows on to the experiences of rural women may be opened through the material record. It offers a largely untapped well of evidence, and inspires new questions to heighten our sensitivity to the ways in which eighteenth–century farm life has been portrayed in more traditional research. Where documents have been tacit, material culture often provides evidence. Probate inventories leave few clues about the smaller implements of butter production, especially butter prints and molds. However, museum collections abound with these objects. Sometimes, the material record contradicts the documentary evidence. Many surviving butter churns include metal hoops and attached metal parts. Eighteenth–century prescriptive literature gave frantic warnings against the dangers of metal parts on butter churns; they were destined to corrupt the butter and poison the consumers. This mismatch of evidence
highlights the gaps between real life practices and those prescribed by advice writers. Objects can also offer information that simply does not exist in written form. The construction methods used in making barrel churns, and the level of craftsmanship at which they were executed, provide evidence about who supplied equipment to butter makers. In the absence of rural artisans’ account books, especially coopers’ account books, this material record is an essential and vital catalog for study.

Other historians have examined butter making and eighteenth-century rural life. Joan Jensen’s highly regarded scholarship on Chester County Quaker women, *Loosening the Bonds: Mid-Atlantic Farm Women, 1750–1850*, is concerned with changes over time in butter production and gender roles in rural Quaker society. Jensen acts as a cartographer placing women’s work in the landscape of developing technology, the consumer revolution and the industrialization of dairy production. Elinor Oakes’, “A Ticklish Business: Dairying in New England and Pennsylvania, 1750–1812,” explains butter making and animal husbandry practices in terms of political and economic events of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Neither of these inquiries have privileged the tools of butter making in the telling of rural history. It is with diaries, public records, prescriptive literature, and traveller’s accounts that these historians create the narrative about farm women’s lives. Material objects, especially for Jensen, are simply illustrations of concepts asserted by documentary evidence.¹

Scholars have been frustrated by the lack of object-related research on the material world of rural women’s work. Reflecting on her own work, Jensen commented, I “still find material objects awkward to use effectively...I (am) convinced

that the artifacts of the ages of wood, earthenware, and homespun need far more systematic analysis by historians than they have received." Anne Yentsch has identified similar gaps in the mid-Atlantic archaeological record. It "is...silent concerning the complex of activities associated with dairying. One has to tease and tug at the data to bring forth even a few glimpses of its parameter." This paucity of information is rooted in the absence of evidence about the material culture of women's work in public documents.

Gaps found in the documentary evidence encourage further investigation. These documents offer a good foundation for reconstructing the material culture of one eighteenth-century Chester County butter maker. This woman, Elizabeth Smedley, kept a farm account book noting butter sales and repairs to her churn. Probate inventories taken at her husband's and her death, describe some of the tools used in Smedley's butter production. Store account books, craftsmen's account books, tax records, and prescriptive literature add important details to the story. However, it is evidence gained from observing butter making and examining surviving eighteenth-century butter-making equipment that brings this study closer to describing the complexity of rural women's lives. This information contributes to a broader understanding of how Smedley interacted with the material world of her dairy production. By placing these objects in the contexts of choices available to Smedley for the acquisition and maintenance of equipment, for the sales of butter, and for the ways in which she juggled butter making with other domestic responsibilities, we may begin to define the many meanings ascribed to her implements.

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2 Jensen, Loosening the Bonds, 232.

The nature of such research is to provide few answers. Instead it hopes to provoke discussion about the ways in which historians have regarded rural life, women's work and everyday tasks, such as butter making. The introduction of material culture, as more than simply illustrations of the written word, makes this study unique. It also raises questions for further research as well as contrasting the material record with conclusions drawn in previous analyses of the lives and work of women such as Elizabeth Smedley. The challenge of unfolding the complex layers of Smedley's relationships and activities around her butter-making equipment is daunting. But even this small attempt to describe lives long past may further illuminate what once was seen by historians as simple work and simple people.
MAKING MEANING, MAKING BUTTER

Advertising the public vendue of wealthy Philadelphian William Bingham’s estate, the United States Gazette of November 16, 1805 listed a catalog of his personal effects. Bingham’s mansion house contained many objects not unusual to the homes of successful international merchants. His “Front Room South” was furnished with mahogany chairs, settees, dining tables, japanned dove cages, writing desks, a telescope and one piano forte. In this urban leisure space was also placed “1 Large China churn” and “10 China Milch pans.” The location of this butter-making equipment is puzzling. Did Bingham’s domestic servants churn butter in his front parlor? Was a material as precious as imported porcelain, known as “china,” used in the manufacturing of utilitarian dairying vessels during the eighteenth century? Historians have deduced that this churn and the milk pans were solely decorative, but they have not explained why Bingham and his wife chose dairy equipment as ornaments.¹

No objects are known to survive from the Bingham estate sale and we can only hypothesize about the appearance, size and decoration of these “china” vessels. They may have resembled some of the seventeen pieces belonging to an eighteenth-century Chinese Export Porcelain armorial dairying set, now in the collection of the Winterthur Museum (fig. 1). The two large cream coolers, four nesting cream bowls, six milk platters, three strainers and two long-handled spoons are decorated by gilt, and

sepia and blue over-glaze enamel borders. Each object is further ornamented by armorial elements or a full coat-of-arms; a shield containing fragments of the Digby and Neave families’ heraldry, symbolizing a union or marriage. It is likely that the set was given to Englishmen Sir Thomas Neave and Francis Caroline Digby in celebration of their 1791 wedding, and probably was secured by Neave’s father who was involved in the China trade and served as the Governor of the Bank of England. The Neave family resided at Dagnam Park, a country house outside London in what is now known as Romford in Greater London. The Naeve-Digby family retained ownership of the dairying set until the mid-twentieth century.²

It is unlikely that the Neaves used this equipment for butter making. The gilding, an extremely fragile surface decoration and thus most likely to suffer losses, does not show wear on areas that would have been abraded during dairy production. Nor is gilt missing from the milk pans’ spouts. Where one does find disintegration of the original surface treatment, it is in areas corresponding to methods of display, and on smaller objects, such as the strainers, that were more likely to be handled by curious visitors to Dagnam Park. The cream coolers’ finials—which more accurately depict donkeys than cows—have weathered no damage. One might expect that such figures would make manipulation of the covers clumsy and possibly result in chipping or breakage. This, however, is not the case. They are in excellent condition. Many of the objects are difficult to handle because of their size and weight; not a desired quality in dairy equipment. Frequent vessel washings, pouring the cream off the buttermilk after the two had separated, and daily transfers of cream to clean bowls or to the churn

required dairy workers to lift, carry and maneuver these objects. The Naeve set includes a milk platter measuring twenty-one and a half inches in length, and it probably was not an efficient tool in these chores, especially if made even heavier when filled with milk.

Like the Bingham's china churn and milk pans, this porcelain set was ornamental. It joins other eighteenth-century British-made dairy wares that were valued for their aesthetic characteristics. Wedgwood produced numerous such vessels, including a special order of milk pans for Lady Anson that was inspired by contemporary archaeological finds: "red outside—with Egyptian ornaments glazed within.” Countess Spencer commissioned Wedgwood to manufacture matching ceramic tiles and dairying utensils decorated with a trailing vine pattern for her dairy at Althorp. Thomas Hales commented in his 1756 Compleet body of husbandry on the gentlemen "who were encouraged by the current enthusiasm for agriculture, (and) rather over-elaborated their dairies by introducing imported China utensils.” He saw them as no more functional or desirable than plain glazed earthenware vessels.3

Hales overlooked the symbolic function of these expensive and decorated objects. They were effective in conveying “an informing spirit, an attitude...and a set of themes and images” about rural life. This attitude, known as the pastoral, included an idealized view of the countryside and its inhabitants. These ideas were simultaneously being considered by British art and poetry.4 Writers were advised that


it is sometimes convenient not to discover the whole truth, but that part which only is delightful... Thus in writing Pastorals, let the tranquility of that life appear full and plain, but hide the meanness of it; represent its simplicity as clear as you please, but cover its misery.5

Thus the pastoral impulse sought to depict rural life as one of pleasure. It veiled the arduous nature of agricultural work, choosing instead to characterize it as a peaceful, beautiful co-existence with nature. Ornamental porcelain dairying vessels evoked the rural work without also displaying the unsightly nature of keeping cows, the strenuous work of churning butter and the smell of cream gone bad in warm weather. The “china” world of butter making lacked the meanness of the actual world of dairy production.

Furthermore, the milkmaid was used in the arts and decorative arts as a symbol of the pastoral movement. Art historians have noted that by the mid-eighteenth century the tranquil landscape, peopled since antiquity by mythical creatures—nymphs, cupids and shepherdesses—became the territory of the milkmaid. She represented “more of what was thought to be the actuality of rural life” and was considered a more honest icon of simple rural existence. The paintings of Gainsborough and others employed her in their depiction of rustic scenes.6

Likewise, British ceramic producers of the second half of the eighteenth century decorated their fancy wares with images of dairymaids. From 1756 to 1775, the Worcester factory employed at least five different engravings portraying milkmaids in their fabrication of transfer printed vessels. Most designs were executed by Robert Hancock. These soft-paste porcelain vases, mugs and cream pitchers bear images of young working women in rustic landscapes; some milked cows while suitors serenaded

5The Guardian, April 6, 1713, quoted in Barrell, The Dark Side of the Landscape, 1.

their work, others carried piggens of milk to the dairy house (fig. 2). Hancock’s engravings were published in popular design books, such as The Ladies’ Amusement, or the Whole Art of Japanning Made Easy and The Artist’s Vade-mecum during the 1760s and 1770s. This further disseminated the milkmaid imagery to craftsmen, artists and gentry readers.7

Curiosity in the delightful side of rural activity also inspired large outdoor fetes, known as pastorals. Women and men attended wearing costumes that evoked simplicity and innocence. Albina Hobart, a country house resident, decorated for her pastoral of the 1790s with ornamental bowls of cream, probably made of porcelain, and donned a milkmaid guise for the party. Unfortunately, inclement weather put a damper on Mrs. Hobart’s fete; it was recorded that rain fell into her bowls of cream and she was left to entertain a house full of soggy cupids, nymphs and shepherds.8

Satirical prints and literature of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries attacked the urbane curiosity in provincial life. “The London Beau in the Country, or the Dairyhouse Gallant,” published in the Covent Garden Magazine of 1773, and William Combe’s comic poem, The Tour of Doctor Syntax In Search of the Picturesque both relate the experiences of sophisticated gentlemen in the milk house.9 Perceiving the dairymaid as innocent and virginal—qualities they also associated with


8Sara Stevenson and Helen Bennett, Van Dyck in Check Trousers (Edinburgh: The Trustees of the National Galleries of Scotland, 1978), 12.

people and land untainted by modern corruption of the urban environment—these men aggressively pursue her (fig. 3).

For both Doctor Syntax and the Dairyhouse Gallant judgment of their actions waits at the door. The Gallant will meet the wrath of farmers, armed to defend order in the milk house. With distress, the mother of Syntax’s milkmaid eavesdrops and when hears love spoken of exclaims,

Begone, you old, you wanton goat,
Your Heart is black as your coat!
....may Heaven forgive
The wicked age in which we live!
I’ll go and tell my honest spouse
The snake he harbours in his house;
He’ll give such hypocrites their due.10

The Naeve Chinese Export Porcelain dairy set and Bingham’s “china” milk pans express this zeal for rural simplicity and integrity. Like Albina Hobart, these families may have decorated for a pastoral fete with these objects. Or they may have found delightful the evocation of the milkmaid, without the unsightly traces of actual dairy production, in their domestic spaces. To bring the tools of butter making, made aesthetically pleasing to the eye with gilt and porcelain, into an eighteenth-century parlor was to capture the desired essence of the countryside. It was to win the pursuit of the dairymaid.

The sagas of the Dairyhouse Gallant and Doctor Syntax contain elements missing from the pastoral’s vision of the milkmaid: rural inhabitants who were active thinkers, workers and decision-makers. Not far from William Bingham’s Philadelphia parlor, in Chester County, Pennsylvania, lived and worked a vital agricultural

10Combe, The Tour of Doctor Syntax, 154.
community. It included women involved with dairy production whose experiences contrasted dramatically with the pastoral vision of the milkmaid. Many farm women produced butter for local, urban and export markets, as well as for their own household's consumption. Some butter makers were widows who balanced dairy work with farm, family, and domestic responsibilities. After their husband's death, these women managed complex economic systems, redefined the meanings of tools necessary to be successful in a world of exchange, and made individual choices about the paths of their farms and families.  

One such woman was Elizabeth Smedley of Middletown. She was suddenly widowed in 1766 when a boat carrying her husband, William, and thirty thousand barrel staves to the Philadelphia market capsized. Elizabeth was thirty-five years old; her six children ranged in age from twelve years to seven months. The nearly two hundred acre farm included two small houses rented by tenant laborers. Before his death, these tenants had assisted William Smedley in his carpentry, coffin-making and stave-making business, as well as providing farm labor and skilled labor such as shoe making and weaving. Before 1766, one male servant lived with the family and Elizabeth sporadically employed domestic workers for textile production. She also sold over fifty pounds of butter to Middletown residents and others in the thirteen years she was married to William.


Smedley’s life provides evidence to contradict the pastoral vision of the milkmaid. Her equipment was of wood and earthenware, not porcelain. Her work was more taxing than “delightful” and she probably valued her butter-making tools not because they were ornamental, but because they were utilitarian. Smedley ascribed different meanings to her dairy implements than did Bingham and his wife. While it is difficult to uncover all the reasons why this Chester County woman valued her tools, suggestions of how she interacted with these objects can be gained by examining the documentary and material records. Public documents, especially probate inventories, help to reconstruct her butter-making tool kit. Other sources—including museum collections, prescriptive literature and merchants’ account books—help to fill the gaps left by estate inventories.

With a notion of what Elizabeth used in her dairy production, we can move to consider how the tools operated in the process of making butter and how she interacted with these objects during butter production. One level of meaning she may have given her tools probably related to how effective they were in getting the dairy house jobs done and done well. Some objects were more durable than others and this may have contributed to meanings acquired in the butter-making process. The more hardy implements, including churns, were repaired after use, whereas less enduring tools such as earthenware milk pans and cheese cloth were discarded and replaced. Objects also functioned as liaisons between Smedley and the sources from which she acquired them. In a tangible sense they represented interactions with craftspeople, storekeepers, peddlers, and neighborhood artisans. They may have been ascribed

Wickersham Publishing Co., 1901), 106; Chester County Provincial Tax Records, 1766, Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, Pennsylvania (CCHS). Unless otherwise noted, information relating to the Smedley farm is from William and Elizabeth Smedley’s Account Book, Ms. 77049, CCHS. For an examination of the Smedley farm before William’s death, see Paul Clemens and Lucy Simler, “Rural Labor and the Farm Household in Chester County, 1750-1820,” in Work and Labor in Early America, ed. Stephen Innes (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 106-143.
significance because of the individual relationships involved in these transactions. Butter-making equipment also facilitated a different kind of exchange for Smedley—the exchange of her butter for others’ money or labor. These tools may have gained meaning because they helped Elizabeth to earn income and to maintain links with her customers. Churns and milk pans helped to foster economic and social interdependency in rural communities. Finally, Smedley may have regarded her butter-making equipment in relation to personal events and household business. As her family grew, she had less time to churn for the market. These tools contributed to the support of her six children. At this time, they were less effective at helping her earn cash or the time of a laborer. It is also possible that multiple meanings simultaneously existed. Single objects were imbued with many layers of significance. Examining these layers adds complexity to the narrative of rural women’s work. These complex layers also set eighteenth-century working rural women apart from the pastoral milkmaid.

Elizabeth Smedley is only one woman among many Chester County residents whose life contrasted dramatically with the pastoral image of the milkmaid. While others’ stories go untold, it is important to acknowledge that these women did not exist in a monolithic community of butter makers. Their experiences probably diverged—some more than others—from Smedley’s farm, household and family activities. Elizabeth Smedley stands now, until further research is completed, as a suggestion of how some Chester County women interacted with their material worlds. Her story calls to question many of the previously asserted notions about women’s work, widows’ economic roles, butter-making equipment, and eighteenth-century rural life.
One notion stated by many historians suggests that the death of a husband truncated a woman's participation in economic activity.\(^{13}\) Elizabeth Smedley's account book, however, illustrates that her experience was quite the opposite. During the years of her widowhood, from 1766 until her death in 1789, she was actively engaged in the management of tenants, day labor, and commodity trade with neighbors and family. As well, she produced commodities for exchange, received payment for her domestic services, and cared for boarders in her home.

As had William, Elizabeth employed the tenants Thomas Taylor, Richard Sill and Sill's wife for agricultural work. Taylor also wove linen and wool cloth while Sill made shoes. Jane and Prudence, two former Chester County slaves and sisters, rented a dwelling from Smedley for two years in the late 1770s. They paid for this residence by spinning and pulling flax. Day labor also supported the activities of the household. Ann Rogers spun. Joseph Hollen constructed pasture fencing, loaded dung, mended the churn and harvested crops. John Noblit made shoes and was paid for "soaling a pair of pumps." Joseph Heacock did iron work on a churn, plastered, and built an oven. As her children grew older, Elizabeth hired them out as day laborers. Thomas and Ambrose Smedley, William's brothers, employed her sons Peter and Joseph for cutting wood, cleaning wheat, and harvesting and dressing flax. Likewise, Elizabeth charged Thomas Smedley, Joshua Smedley—William's unmarried brother—and other men for her services of washing, mending, and sewing trousers and shirts.

The composition of Elizabeth’s household changed over time. After William’s death, her mother, Elizabeth Woodward, also a widow, joined the family on the Middletown farm. Elizabeth Smedley charged her mother fifteen pounds a year for “diet” and during the last year of Woodward’s life billed her estate a large sum because “she being that year very helpless.” Woodward was also charged for the cloth she used in making her shifts, petticoats and aprons. Thomas Smedley, her son George and at least one other single adult male were also charged for boarding with Elizabeth and her family.

Commodities produced on Smedley’s farm were frequently exchanged for cash, labor or other goods. These commodities included potatoes, lard, candles, cider, mutton, dry apples and soap. On a regular basis, Elizabeth sold calf and sheep skins to Nathan Yarnall and William Peters. These tanners then sold back to her “soal lather” and “upper lather.” It was probably this leather that tenant Richard Sill and hired laborer John Noblit manufactured into shoes for the Smedley family.

Elizabeth also sold butter during her widowhood, but at much less regular intervals and smaller quantities than before William’s death. In the twenty–three years of her independent business activity, she sold less than fifteen pounds of butter to neighbors or family members. Before William’s river accident, Elizabeth sold more than three times that amount in half the number of years. Possible reasons for this change include an increase in her family’s consumption as the children grew older and the household grew larger with relatives and boarders. The Revolutionary War impacted agricultural production in the 1770s because it interrupted market activity in and around Philadelphia. Travel routes to the city from rural areas were sometimes deemed unsafe. Declines in trade importation reduced urban merchants’ stocks and they had fewer goods to exchange for agricultural products. This lowered the incentive for
local merchants and farmers to trade with the city markets. Elizabeth’s own butter making may have been compromised by other farm and management responsibilities. Her dairying continued after William’s death, but for a different audience and perhaps on a smaller scale. Less time spent at the churn and in selling the butter meant more time negotiating labor relations, dealing with local tanners and caring for an elderly mother.

An examination of this decline in a single area of production might lead one to believe that Elizabeth did sever her ties with economic activity. However, the variegated nature of rural women’s responsibilities deny this narrow look at their experiences. The composite of Elizabeth’s activities reveal that she was most certainly engaged in trade, but one wonders if these exchanges, and the necessary means of production, took on new meanings as the context in which she performed tasks and decision-making changed. The material objects involved with production, especially butter-making equipment, may have acquired different significance for Elizabeth as she developed new social and economic strategies in widowhood.

If Elizabeth’s butter churn imparted a variety of meanings during her lifetime, it is also possible that butter chums may have held a multiplicity of meanings in the agricultural community of Chester County. From farm to farm, and widow to widow, where material objects facilitated social and economic relationships by different methods, individuals interacted with their material worlds in unique ways. As Ian Hodder has noted, individuals improvise with the tools of their daily lives, leaving for

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the archaeologist (or any student of the past) "a multiplicity of readings" to be gathered from the text of that group's material culture.¹⁵

Hodder's emphasis on the active individual is useful in considering Elizabeth Smedley's butter-making experience. Other studies of women involved in dairy production have not considered the possibility of diverse experiences. Nor have they allowed eighteenth-century rural women to ascribe meanings, without the agreement of a consensus, to their butter-making equipment.¹⁶ The presence of objects used in dairying and the ways in which they functioned in social strategies are important windows into understanding the complexity of rural experiences.

To open these new perspectives on to Smedley's butter-making experiences (and on those of Chester County farm women in general), it is necessary to reconstruct the tool kit she used in dairy production, the level of her market activity, and the size of her dairy herd. Evidence from her account book, tax records, probate inventories, and the material record suggests that Elizabeth Smedley's cow herd and barrel churn may not have been different from those of her neighboring farm women—but this does not necessarily indicate that all Chester County women ascribed the same meanings to their butter-making implements.

The material record provides essential information for rebuilding Smedley's tool kit. It supplements what documentary sources tell us and, in some cases, even contradicts the written evidence. Surviving barrel churns reveal that large-size models advocated with enthusiasm by prescriptive writers were used by only a very few producers. Many more women used smaller barrel churns. Probate inventories and


¹⁶Other views are offered in Jensen, Loosening the Bonds; Oakes, "A Ticklish Business."
prescriptive literature do not account for this diversity from the advice texts. As well, these objects carry vital information—signs of wear, scourings, and repair—that further suggests the interaction butter makers may have had with their equipment. In this evidence, we find clues relating to the multiple meanings ascribed to a rural woman’s butter-making tools.

Unlike that of most eighteenth-century farm women, the material world of Elizabeth Smedley is surprisingly well documented in public records. An inventory taken at the time of William’s death indicates that the household owned a churn, a butter print, and tubs, pails, earthenware and trenchers which may have been used in butter making. Nearly twenty-five years later, at Elizabeth’s death, her “barrell churn,” tubs and pails were recorded in an inventory of her personal estate. From this evidence alone it is difficult to ascertain if the churn listings represent the same object. Inconsistencies in descriptions are common to probate inventories, especially if recorded by different assessors. Her account book notes two repairs to the churn; one for the iron work and the other for “a mending.” This indicates that decisions were made to repair before exercising the option to purchase a new churn. Matching the 1766 churn with the later “barrell churn” remains a conjecture but one that seems reasonable based on the available evidence.17

It is also difficult to hypothesize, using only the inventory listings, about Elizabeth’s involvement in the butter market. Both butter prints and barrel churns have been associated with individuals who produced on a large scale for the market. Writers of prescriptive literature believed that the bigger the dairy herd, the greater the need for a barrel churn. In 1750 William Ellis recommend that dairies keeping a dozen cows or

17Chester County Archives (CCA), West Chester, Pennsylvania, Wills and Administrations, 2255; CCA, Wills and Administrations, 4008.
more use a barrel churn “two feet (in) diameter and three feet long on a wooden stand and fitted with two handles to turn.” John Spurrier, of Wilmington, Delaware, suggested a large dog–powered barrel churn to service herds of one hundred cows. He may have been referencing equipment used earlier in the century by Dutch butter makers—horse–powered barrel churns.¹⁸

Tax lists and probate inventories demonstrate that Elizabeth Smedley did not keep one hundred or even a dozen milking cattle. At William’s death the farm owned five cows, two calves, two “heffers” and a bull. Twenty–three years later, in 1789, the count had grown to ten cows and two calves. The entire herd was probably not milked at the same time. Some cows’ milk was consumed solely by their own calves, and other cows may have been “drying off” in preparation for calving. A number of the cattle listed in these records probably were not used for dairying. Instead they were fattened and slaughtered for beef or employed as breeding stock. Dairy cows were used for meat at the end of their milk producing years as well.¹⁹

James Lemon’s extensive statistical research on agriculture in eighteenth–century Pennsylvania suggests that the Smedley dairy herd was not unusual. Lemon estimated that the average farm kept seven to ten cows. Middletown was more heavily populated with cattle than its neighboring towns, but Lemon still concluded that, “large herds were not common.” A sampling of approximately 160 Chester County probate


¹⁹CCA, Wills and Administrations, 2255; CCA, Wills and Administrations, 4008; Chester County Provincial Tax Lists, 1766, 1767, 1768, 1779, 1774, 1775, CCHS; Oakes, 196.
inventories from 1770–1820 indicates that the Smedley’s butter churn was also not unusual for average-sized dairy farms. Slightly less than fifty percent of the decedents owned churns; fourteen inventories specifically listed barrel churns. None of the farms using barrel churns owned more cows than Smedley did in 1789. In fact, most were relatively small producers by Lemon’s standards and kept only three to five cows.20

The material record indicates that Elizabeth Smedley and producers on farms of similar size did not own barrel churns identical to those described by prescriptive writers. Instead they used a smaller version; a barrel measuring approximately twenty inches in length and fourteen inches in diameter (fig. 4). Set horizontally on a wooden stand, the barrel remained stationary while the butter maker turned a metal crank projecting from one end of the barrel. This rotated, inside the churn, two sets of crossbars flanking four horizontal wooden paddles. Each end of the paddles was pegged into a wooden cross bar. The paddles, a few inches wide, travelled on a circular path slightly smaller in circumference than the dimensions of the barrel’s interior. Each paddle was pierced by two large holes. This allowed air and cream to pass through and around the paddles during churning. Wooden cylinders connected each set of cross pieces to the barrel ends; iron pins held one in place while the other cylinder functioned as a crank shaft.21

The stand raised the churn to a comfortable working height. Butter makers stood next to the churn and turned the crank without having to bend over, stoop or reach above their shoulders. Most stands were of a relatively simple construction; each pair of


21This description is based on a survey of the barrel churns in the collection of the Mercer Museum of The Bucks County Historical Society, Doylestown, Pennsylvania.
legs crossed in a notched and doweled joint. One or two stretchers stabilized the legs and formed a cradle into which the barrel sat. Only a few barrel churns included turned stretchers. Most were undecorated.

One poured cream into the churn by opening a small circular door cut from one of the barrel’s staves (fig. 5). This was attached to the churn by a wrought iron strap riveted to the door in two places. Each end of the strap terminated in a small, tightly closed loop. Iron hooks were attached to each loop. This piece—strap with looped ends and corresponding hooks—functioned as a single unit. The hooks fit into wrought iron staples connected to the barrel’s side. With both hooks securely fastened to the staples, the door shut tightly. This prevented leaks during churning. By releasing one hook, the door swung open and pivoted on the other hook’s connection with the looped strap appendage. Both hooks could be released and the entire door removed for cleaning or dislodging the butter from the churn.

A survey of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century barrel churns in the collection at the Mercer Museum of the Bucks County Historical Society reveals evidence about how these objects were maintained during their careers as working implements. The interior surfaces and the dashers bear this information most effectively. They have acquired characteristics not usually associated with unfinished wood, especially pine. These areas are glossy and smooth. Wear typical to this coniferous wood—recessed areas juxtaposed with high surfaces—is not common among barrel churns’ interiors. Instead these surfaces are very regular and even and probably acquired these characteristics from daily scourings during periods of heavy use. The exteriors of barrel churns, on the other hand, display wear typical to soft woods, such as pine.
This type of churn was regarded as a significant improvement over the “extremely fatiguing” vertical motion of the dasher churn. Still, many butter makers probably used these upright dasher churns and worked the butter by pumping a long pole emanating from a hole in the center of the churn lid (fig. 6). It was harder to maintain a continuous churning, because the motion could easily disintegrate into a segmented up-and-down pattern. Depending on the height of the object, butter makers stood hunched in an uncomfortable position to execute the downwards stroke or sat in a chair and extended their arms above shoulder height when pulling the dasher up from the churn’s base. Barrel churns were clearly valued for the ease they provided butter makers and the sore backs they may have prevented.22

The ideal butter churn, barrel or dasher, was constructed of tightly joined staves made of well-seasoned oak. Snug construction prevented leaks; if the staves were allowed to dry and shrink, the churn no longer held this tight fit. Coopers repaired this condition by either placing flag between the staves or by rehooping the body of the churn. Well-seasoned wood was important for the construction of chums because it reacted less with the butter and caused less spoiling. When John Dickinson ordered two butter firkins in 1778 from a Philadelphia cooper, he requested “well seasoned white oak.” Others had observed that any new wood and especially pine “were ruinous to the butter.” Coopers let wooden staves dry for two to five years before considering them safe to use. Surviving eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century butter chums reveal that some coopers disregarded the prescriptive writers’ calls for the exclusive use of hardwood in the construction of churns. Pine chums exist in many collections and may have been favored because they were relatively lightweight.23

Prescriptive writers also warned about the dangers of metal in butter-making equipment. Iron hoops on churns and storage vessels were distrusted because, “the rust from them could in time sink through the wood, though it be very thick, and injure the colour of the butter.” Copper vessels and the lead glaze used on earthenware milk pans were also assumed to emit poisonous substances.

These vessels...are...destrutive to the human constitution; that we may doubtless attribute to this cause the frequency of paralytic complaints which occur in all ranks of society; and that the well known effects of the poison of lead are bodily debility, palsy, and death.24

Despite these excessive scoldings, butter makers continued to use metal tools and metal attachments on their dairying implements.

If authorities on dairying could not control the use of dangerous materials in butter-making equipment, they at least strove to encourage good butter-making practices. Where materials failed, habits of cleanliness were seen as farm women’s only route to safe production. Thorough scourings of all equipment were deemed crucial after each use. This was especially important for those who owned barrel churns. Cream left on the interior of the churn quickly soured and caused the next churning’s batch to go rancid. Scrubbing the inside of the churn, rinsing with hot water and soaking with scalding water for fifteen minutes eliminated “the bad effects” of soured cream. This treatment also helped to further season the wood, reducing its bad influence


on the butter. Many writers suggested reviving old butter-making equipment with this method before resorting to the purchase of new tools.  

The material record shows that butter makers agreed with prescriptive writers on the importance of cleanliness and employed the advocated methods. Glossy surfaces on the interiors of barrel churns are the result of frequent scaldings and scrubbings. The enzymes of the cream and the salt used in the process may have also contributed to this condition. Other wooden objects—butter prints, butter scoops, and trenchers—bear the same evidence indicating that these cleaning techniques were used on a wide variety of implements. 

The barrel churn was only one of the tools Smedley and her peers needed to facilitate butter making. Farm women also employed a variety of other tools, including cheese cloth, pails, milk pans, trenchers, butter paddles and storage vessels. One especially well-furnished New York dairy of the 1790s housed three wooden pails with iron or brass hoops, several iron pails,... three churns (one large plunger churn, a barrel churn, and a small hand churn), ...two large glazed, earthenware pots for three to four gallons of cream, one dozen glazed earthenware pans for cooling milk, two cream skimmers, two skimming dishes, a dozen cheese cloths of two sorts, and double hanging shelves (to hold) the utensils. 

This arsenal of tools was owned by a large dairy and most likely Elizabeth Smedley would have made do with far fewer implements in her dairy production. 

What Elizabeth did use as her butter-making equipment is only partially recorded in her and her husband’s inventories. As with many rural household’s inventories, the churn was the primary dairying tool recorded. Also noted were a


27Cheese presses were also frequently noted in estate inventories.
butter print, tubs, pails, earthenware, and trenchers. Other Chester County probate
inventories infrequently listed objects specifically related to butter production: butter
boxes, butter tubs, a butter bowl, butter buckets and butter scales and weights.
Researchers have noted that some objects used in butter production “disappear” in public
documents, and it is very likely that Elizabeth’s tool kit included more than what is
listed. These missing tools gain anonymity not because they were unimportant to their
owners. Instead, the methods by which assessors recorded personal estates have left
many domestic utensils unnamed. Household tools were not always specified by
function; milk pans were listed simply as earthenware pans. Individual tools, such as
butter paddles or storage crocks, were frequently subsumed under categories such as
“lot of woodenware” or “lot of earthenware.” More ephemeral tools, such as cheese
cloth, were probably discarded after use and never even met the appraiser’s eyes.28

Students of rural women’s lives have enlisted other sources—the
archaeological record, widows’ shares, dowries, store account books, and existing
objects—to generate a comprehensive tool kit used by a “typical” eighteenth-century
butter maker. Another view into the material culture of these butter makers can be
gained by considering the process by which they made this commodity. Eighteenth-
century rural women followed a six-part process that transformed milk into butter:
straining, rising, skimming, churning, washing and packing. Tools, ideally, empower
workers to complete tasks. Reconstructing these tasks may offer a more complete
picture of Elizabeth Smedley’s and other butter makers’ equipment.29

28CCA, Wills and Administrations. For a discussion on the challenges in using probate
inventories see Peter Benes, ed., Early American Probate Inventories. Dublin Seminar for New England

29Anne Yentsch, “Engendering Visible and Invisible Ceramic Artifacts, Especially Dairy
Vessels,” Historic Archaeology 25 (1991), 132-155; Jensen, Loosening the Bonds, 93–113; Elizabeth
Powell, Pennsylvania Butter: Tools and Processes, Tools of the Nation Maker Series, II (Doylestown,
Prescriptive literature, surviving objects, store account books, and observation of living history interpreters offer clues to the range of possible butter-making methods and tools used by Smedley and her neighbors. The six-part process of straining, rising, skimming, churning, washing and packing is a general outline of how one may have transformed milk into butter. For each step, there probably existed many implementations and thus a great variety of actual ways to make butter from milk were employed in the community of rural women. Objects may have helped a butter maker to determine how to complete the process. Training and knowledge gained from experience probably also influenced how the procedure was executed.

After milking, Smedley or a fellow butter maker probably strained the pail of warm milk through a piece of muslin or a sieve lined with hair cloth or linen. This removed barnyard debris such as dirt, straw or animal hair. Next she poured the milk from a clean pail into pans and left them to sit while the cream rose, or separated, from the milk. Depending on the day’s temperature and the percentage of butter fat in the milk, this could take between eight and twenty-four hours. The size and shape of the milk pan were equally crucial; the shallower the vessel the faster the cream rose. Writers of prescriptive literature agreed these pans should be no more than two or three inches deep. Both earthenware and woodenware were considered appropriate materials and used by a broad cross-section of society for food preparation.

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30 Unless otherwise cited information on the process of butter making was acquired through observation of the staff at the Colonial Pennsylvania Plantation, Ridley Creek State Park, Ridley, Pennsylvania and by my own experience producing butter and other dairy products.

31 Powell, Pennsylvania Butter, 8; Harriot Pickney Horry, A Colonial Plantation Cookbook: The Receipt Book of Harriot Pickney Horry, 1770, ed. Richard Hooker (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1984),105; Fussell, The English Dairy Farmer, 163; Mason, “Appendix to the Lady’s Assistant,” in The Lady’s Assistant For Regulating and Supplying the Table (London: C.
One could visually and tactiley test for risen cream. As it separated, the cream formed a thick, yellow layer and floated on top of the more fluid milk. When touched, this layer retracted slightly and if thick enough, was difficult to penetrate. A butter maker removed this goopy stratum by gently dipping a bowl-shaped utensil, pierced with small holes, between the cream and milk layers. The bowl collected the cream, while the holes allowed milk to drip back into the shallow pan. Most advice texts encouraged the use of a wooden or tin skimming dish or a ladle for this step.32

During skimming, a butter maker emptied her utensil repeatedly into a large earthenware or wooden container, known as the cream pot. She stored the cream in this vessel until enough had been gathered for a churning—about one half the capacity of the churn. The number of cows being milked and the time of year also determined how long the cream sat in this pot. The spring flush of milk generally increased a farm's production of raw milk. More and new pasture grass and the weaning of calves all usually occurred in the spring, and contributed to greater milking capacity of dairy cows. Some butter makers presumably skimmed enough cream from one rising for a churning, and this eliminated their need for a cream pot.33

Once a butter maker filled her churn half full and started the dasher's movement, a physical change slowly transformed the cream. Agitation gradually separated the globular fatty particles from the buttermilk which was still suspended in

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the cream. When free of the liquid, the fat coagulated, forming a dense mass known as butter. Authorities cautioned butter makers that a steady churning stroke was necessary to “bring the butter” effectively. James Cutbush, a Philadelphia writer, declared, “by no means admit any person to assist.” This would only interrupt one’s established churning rhythm. A brisk stroke also brought butter with the desired smooth texture.\textsuperscript{34}

Because of this attention to stiff and uninterrupted churning, butter makers may have relied on the changing sound of the “coming” butter in the churn to determine its progress. Stopping the motion to remove the lid and visually assess the state of the churning reduced the efficiency and quality of production. In the early stages, the dairymaid expected to hear quick, light sloshings of the dasher in the liquidy cream. As the butter came, it grew thicker and heavier. The dasher strokes became blunt thuds inside the churn and the sounds grew further apart. It took more energy to manipulate the dasher during the final stages of churning. Butter makers also used this change to assess the progress of the butter.

The buttermilk was drained off from the butter. Barrel churn users released the liquid by uncorking a bung hole or by opening the small door in the side of the churn. With her hands or a wooden butter scoop, a butter producer then removed the butter from the churn. Some buttermilk remained lodged in the butter. She gradually worked it out with fresh water rinses and gentle kneading with wooden paddles. The rinses were repeated until the water that was pushed out of the butter ran clear. Authors warned women not to use their own hands for kneading as they were too warm and

made the butter soft. Some producers added salt to preserve the dairy product and as a further means to remove buttermilk.35

How the butter maker chose to store her product largely depended on what use it would serve. Large wooden containers, known as firkins, or earthenware crocks were used as storage vessels for household consumption. One-half or one pound molds were used to form blocks, usually meant to be sold at market. The molds impressed a design onto the butter and some researchers have hypothesized that this functioned as a logo in the marketplace. It identified the maker, and insured the quality of the commodity. While we know that Smedley owned a print, it has not survived. We can not determine what design it bore, but popular motifs at the time included sheafs of wheat, abstracted floral designs and geometric patterns. Wooden butter boxes were used to carry these molded blocks to the market.36

According to Hodder’s model, individual butter makers operated with knowledge of these six elements of the process. However, they devised their own ways in which to achieve well-made butter. Their tool kits played decisive roles in these improvisations, as did knowledge gained through practice. Making butter was not a universally experienced process, although butter makers understood the goal of each step in the procedure. How they reached the desired stages of strained milk, skimmed cream and washed butter varied from farm to farm.


It is nearly impossible to determine the range of improvisations used in eighteenth-century butter making. Probate records, if taken at face value, indicate that a variety of tool kits were owned in Chester County, and this may have, in turn, influenced a diversity of production methods. Another suggestion of the variety of butter-making experiences is found in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century prescriptive literature. While some authors advised behavior in their books, others reported what they saw as exemplary methods of agricultural and domestic production. Enthusiasm for scientific rationalism in the last quarter of the eighteenth century encouraged these writers to observe farming practices as if they were experiments. Some even supervised their own test stations, as did John Bordley on his sixteen hundred acre farm near the Chesapeake Bay. His 1801 Essays and Notes on Husbandry and Rural Affairs, published results from these trials and has been called “the first note in scientific agriculture to be heard in America.”

Even writers who observed butter makers at work reported diverse methods for executing the same phases of the process. Bordley, adamant that “the best butter (he) ever saw, had never at all been wet with water” described two methods by which buttermilk could be purged from butter using as little water as possible. He also observed that gentle working of the butter made for a superior flavor and color. The first method, “from the practice of a butter maker near Philadelphia,” let freshly churned butter sit overnight “in a wooden tray or bowl; (with)...a good quantity of fine salt ...thrown over it.” In the morning she drained the buttermilk extracted by the salt and quickly “dashed” the butter with cold water to remove the salt.

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The second of Bordley’s methods was apparently executed by butter makers working on a large scale, or by those who could afford costly equipment. Salt was sprinkled on the butter and gently mixed in. The butter was left to stand on a “cold marble table” consisting of a “slab of smooth if not polished marble, on a stout oaken frame.” A drawer “close under the slab, filled with ice” cooled the butter “whilst (it was) cleaning.” Slow and gentle pressings of the butter also helped to extrude the buttermilk. Bordley added that “nice butter makers (use) marble.”

Harriot Pinckney Horry, in her receipt book of 1770, recommended quite the opposite techniques for purging buttermilk; she suggested rinsing and beating the butter. She wrote, “take (the butter) out of the churn, spread it thin in a shallow tray and work it well with clean cold water to get out the Butter milk, salt it, let the salt be work’d in, so wash it, and beat it till the water comes off unsullied.” To further remove the buttermilk,

- take a cheese cloth or strainer and being wash’d in hot and then dip’d in cold water it must be wrung as dry as possible and the lump of butter must be beaten with the cloth, as the pat of Butter becomes flat role it up with the cloth and again beat it flat and work it well with the cloth, and as the cloth fills with moisture it must be rewash’d and wrung, each pound of Butter requires in cool weather 4 or 5 minutes.

Horry’s receipt book notes the procedures in which her domestic servants were trained for work in her South Carolina home. She also travelled through the northern colonies, noting observations of agricultural and domestic production. Like Bordley, her procedures were devised from the practices of butter makers and her own experience in dairy production.

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38 Bordley, Essays and Notes on Husbandry, 275.

Horry and Bordley had both recognized that buttermilk left in the butter encouraged premature spoiling. It was crucial to expel this unwanted debris, but there was more than one way to achieve its removal. There were various tool kits that effectively brought on the same results. These writings illustrate that butter makers' experiences could be individualized. The process allowed improvisation and the development of preferred techniques. Elizabeth Smedley may not have implemented her butter production in exactly the same manner as her neighbors. A framework of six necessary steps guided her and a basic tool kit, including a churn, milk pans, a skimming dish and a trencher, enabled her to carry out the tasks.

Butter makers may also have individualized their experiences with the ways that they acquired their equipment. While more research needs to be done on this topic, merchants' account books and craftsmen's records suggest that rural families bought tools from local stores, from peddlers, or directly from the artisans producing the objects. Local craftspeople probably supplied the market for butter-making tools. Wills, widows' shares and records from public vendues divulge that some butter makers received equipment through inheritance or at auctions. It is possible that some farm families constructed their own dairy implements. Elizabeth Smedley did not record how she acquired her butter-making tools, but we can hypothesize that she worked within these options. Her accounts note two repairs made to the churn. This indicates that some butter makers did not perceive their tool kits solely in terms of tossing out the old or broken pieces and buying new goods. The local store and the peddler's cart were only some of the ways to rejuvenate the fittings of the dairy house.\(^{40}\)

\(^{40}\)For a discussion on home manufactured butter-making equipment, see Pallett, "Dairy Farming in Chester County."

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Merchants' records contribute another layer to our understanding of how people interacted with their material worlds. Probate inventories typically focus on individuals' possessions at the end of their lives—and for many this corresponded with the de-accessioning of objects to children or grandchildren. (William Smedley's sudden death was fortuitous; it allows a glimpse into a family and farm presumably during their acquisition period.) Store records show the patterns in which people bought goods, the frequency with which certain objects are consumed, and the correlations among purchases of different objects. The seasons in which butter-making tools were bought, and how often specific items were purchased indicate these consumer patterns. The evidence further suggests that ceramic butter-making tools were considered replaceable; churns were deemed repairable. Meanings may have been ascribed to implements in light of their durability.41

Chester County merchants rarely sold churns in the late eighteenth century. At Warwick Miller's East Caln store, customers purchased only four churns in two years. It was probably the most expensive tool used in butter making; consumers paid about seven shillings for a churn in 1773–1775, when a butter tub cost half as much and a "strainer boale" sold for nine pence. While its price was significant, its function was specific. Other domestic tasks could not be performed with the churn. It was one of the few butter-making objects that did not serve double duty. This increased its cost to the household, and raised the incentive to carefully maintain and repair it.42

In contrast, Miller's customers more frequently bought earthenware, and wooden vessels and utensils. It is likely that the ceramics were utilitarian, probably


42Warwick Miller Store Account Book, East Caln Township Business Houses, CCHS.
redware. Milk pans were a large part of redware production of late eighteenth-century potters. These and other unrefined or undecorated earthenware vessels were used by a wide range of households for food preparation and storage. They were relatively inexpensive and may have been perceived as expendable, if broken. Chester County shoppers had ample opportunity to acquire household ceramics; stores kept healthy stocks of earthenware. Francis Armstrong, a West Nottingham merchant had sixteen “Milch pans,” fifty-five “erthean potts,” and fifty-three “erthean dishes” on his shelves in 1792. Almost fifty years earlier, Thomas Morgan’s store in Chester stocked twenty-seven milk pans and thirteen butter pots. Similarly, treen, or woodenware, was used by a diverse cross-section of the Chester County population and often for utilitarian purposes. Trenchers and strainer bowls were for sale at Samuel Worth’s store in West Bradford Township.43

Miller, Armstrong and Worth may have been supplied by local craftspeople.44 Earthenware production began in Southeastern Pennsylvania by the mid-eighteenth century and at least fifteen artisans had or were practicing in Chester County by the end of the 1700s. Most operated on a part-time basis, juggling farming with potting. This was especially problematic because ceramic manufacturing, like raising crops, occurred on a seasonal basis and both demanded substantial investments of labor during the springtime. Miller’s customers purchased most of their earthenware in April, May and June indicating that buying patterns at least dovetailed with local


production cycles. Purchasing wooden utensils and vessels was less confined by seasonality but at least one local craftsperson did supply Miller with goods. In July of 1774 he bought dozens of trenchers, “straner Boles” and skimmers from Sarah Morgan, the “trencher maker.”

The absence of certain objects, especially churns, butter prints and tin implements, from merchants’ accounts reveals that tools were acquired from other sources. Peddlers and public vendues provided opportunities for customers to buy locally-made and imported goods. Travelling salesmen became associated with what the small town store generally did not carry: tinwares. By the late eighteenth century, Philadelphia tin workers produced butter kettles, milk strainers, cream skimmers, and butter scales and may have relied on peddlers to sell their goods in the country. Tin plate workers were recorded in Chester County as early as 1753 and also may have been selling their wares via peddlers. Second-hand equipment was available at the sale of a deceased person’s estate, known as a public vendue. At one early nineteenth-century Bucks county vendue buyers found a panoply of objects specified for butter making: two butter “joums,” butter “stylards,” two butter boxes, a pair of butter pails, and a butter print. In some cases the widow of the decedent was forced to buy her own butter-making equipment at the estate auction. At least two Chester County women secured churns in this way; one even purchased two cows to accompany her churn.


46Jeanette Lasanski, To Cut, Piece & Solder: The Work of the Rural Pennsylvania Tinsmith, 1778-1908 (Lewisburg, Pennsylvania: Oral Traditions Project of the Union County Historical Society, 1982), 44; Book of Prices of Journeyman’s Wages for Making Tinware, (Philadelphia, 1796); Schiffer, Arts and Crafts of Chester County, Pennsylvania, 162. For Vendue
Other husbands planned ahead, and compiled widow’s shares as part of their wills. This insured that after a husband’s death, the widow owned household items, or even property and buildings that could not be sold to pay the estate’s debts. Rural men made complex choices about the life of the farm after their own passing. Those who left widow’s shares generally bequeathed to their wives the tools necessary to survive in an agricultural community. Butter-making equipment, especially churns, was for some families a way to gain access to this viable agricultural production. Jacob Minshall, one of Smedley’s Middletown neighbors, recorded in 1783 that the widow’s share of his mother included earthenware, tinware, ironware, cedarware, a butter tub, a butter churn and a cow. Ten years later, William Kirkwood left to his wife a churn, some tubs, “crockery ware” and a cow. Early nineteenth-century will writers more explicitly stated that barrel churns were to be inherited by their families. Some evidence suggests that parents who gave their children dowries provided butter-making equipment as part of “a good start” in their married lives.

Rural women also worked directly with local craftspeople in securing their equipment. The absence of dairy tools, especially churns, butter prints and wooden butter paddles, from store account books raises this possibility. As well, previous research has shown that some rural potters in New England exchanged ceramics for

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accounts see 77 x 529.2 and 77 x 529.3, Joseph Downs Manuscript Collection, Winterthur Museum (JDMC); CCA, Wills and Administrations, 3495.


48 Jeannette Lasansky, A Good Start: The Aussteier or Dowry (Lewisburg, Pennsylvania: The Oral Traditions Project of the Union County Historical Society, 1990), 44; CCA, Wills and Administrations, 4412; CCA, Wills and Administrations, 5759; CCA, Wills and Administrations, 5815.
their neighbors' agricultural products. These exchanges occurred in the artisans' shops. The business activity of Elizabeth's husband, William, illustrates this artisan–butter maker exchange. In the 1750s and 60s he made two pairs of butter boxes, presumably upon client's requests. Wet, or white coopering serviced the dairy industry with churns, pails and tubs. The evidence suggests that wooden tools were most frequently bought outside the domain of the local store. More rural craftsmen's account books, especially coopers' account books, need to be located and studied in regards to this producer–consumer trade.49

It is unclear how many rural families produced and repaired their own arsenal of tools. Farmer/artisans were not unusual in eighteenth–century Chester County. The myth of American rural self–sufficiency has lead many to believe that farms were independent of neighbors and cities. It implies that these farmer/artisans were skilled in a large variety of tasks and that all the family’s needs were met by one or two extremely talented individuals. Some folklorists have explained these abilities as so natural that the farmer/artisan could hardly help but express them in self–sufficiency.

Every farmer, against the time when he might feel an urge to whittle, had laid away a bit of walnut or a small chunk of pale, smooth, seasoned wood saved from an ancient apple tree. From it the wielder of the pen knife cut the (butter) mold and its handle in one satisfying piece, shaping it skillfully so that it fit the hand comfortably. Into its flat face, with sharp, unerring strokes, he cut in intaglio the invariable tulip, star, heart, and all the motifs so familiar to him. Once the household was well equipped, when the powerful urge for whittling overcame him, the farmer occasionally carved objects for pure love of the craft.50

49 For a discussion of rural potters, see Worrell, "Ceramic Production in the Exchange Network of an Agricultural Neighborhood."

It is indeed possible that William made the butter print listed in his estate inventory. However, the “powerful urge for whittling” did not control his output. He was a trained artisan, had served an apprenticeship and worked from knowledge gained by experience. In the same way, some families may have produced the cheese cloth or muslin used for straining the milk and working the butter. Although the textile required no visual appeal, the weaving process demanded that a skilled individual control the loom’s shuttle. Most families were not self-sufficient in textile production; many could not afford weaving equipment or did not include a trained weaver. If Chester County farms relied on home production for butter-making tools, it was only for one or two objects used in the process. Not every household furnished the services of a cooper, a weaver, a potter, a woodworker and a metal worker.51

Elizabeth relied instead on a community of experienced craftspeople to produce her equipment. During his lifetime, William may have contributed wooden objects such as the butter print, and perhaps butter boxes to her tool kit. Although he made thousands of barrel staves for the Philadelphia flour trade, he may not have produced her butter churn. Flour casks were the work of dry coopers while churns, tubs and pails were made by wet coopering. Dairying vessels required extremely tight fits between the staves and along the bottom rim in order to be water tight. Executing these types of joints demanded that the cooper know specific techniques and only some rural craftspeople had gained the experience to perform both types of coopering. Thomas Taylor, a tenant on the Middletown farm and professional weaver, may have

woven cheese cloth that was used to strain the fresh milk. Neighbor Thomas Pilkenton, a whitesmith, may have produced tin strainers or butter scales for Elizabeth's use.\(^{52}\)

Elizabeth's material world was also influenced by artisans carrying multiple skills. Her brother-in-law and neighbor John Haycock "did the iron work on the churn." Tax records list him as a joiner, and this indicates that Haycock's work involved carpentry and cabinetmaking, not fabricating metal objects. He may have acquired rudimentary blacksmithing skills in the management of his one hundred acre farm.\(^{53}\) Joseph Hollen "mended the churn" two years earlier. His other contributions to the Smedley farm were not related to any craft tradition; he made fencing, loaded dung and assisted with the crop harvesting. Elizabeth may have valued his labor in part because he was not especially skilled in any one area.

Butter makers picked from a variety of available options in securing churns and milk pans. Farm women employed their preferred and individualized methods in obtaining and maintaining their tool kits, just as they did in making butter. The significance of Elizabeth's strategies in acquiring dairying equipment lies in the relationships facilitated by the methods she chose. Employing craftsmen who were neighbors or relatives created circumstances in which a butter print spoke of a business exchange as well as social affiliation. Purchasing tools at the local store connected the Smedley farm to producers of non-locally made goods. For those women who inherited butter-making equipment, these bequests related families' past histories with future dairying ventures. These objects communicated social processes among people.

\(^{52}\)Salamon, Dictionary of Woodworking Tools, 187.

\(^{53}\)Chester County Provincial Tax List, 1769, CCHS.
Their meanings were fluid; they could change over time and vary from one person to the next.\textsuperscript{54}

Objects may also have acquired another layer of meaning in light of their durability. Repair efforts were focused on churns—the largest and most expensive butter-making implement. Ceramic milk pans may have been seen as temporary members of the tool kit. Merchants’ records show that these were readily available at local stores and purchased during peak times of butter production. It was relatively easy, and inexpensive, to replace earthenware milk pans. Cheese cloth was probably considered the most ephemeral of tools, and perhaps, as a result, butter makers viewed it differently from their wooden churns.

The acquisition of equipment was one area in which eighteenth-century butter makers imbued meaning to their objects. Another was butter sales. The tools of dairying laid the foundation for a butter maker’s interaction with customers. Without the churn, there was no butter to be exchanged. By allowing participation in the market economy, these implements accessed social ties for rural women who may otherwise have been isolated from a bevy of local news and fellowship. They also facilitated economic interdependence. Smedley and her fellow butter makers relied on customers for the labor, goods and money they brought to the household. Churns and milk pans may have been valued because these tools fostered the relationships that accessed other commodities.

Commercial ventures were not limited to butter makers working on above-average sized farms or with the prescriptive authors’ version of the large barrel churn.

\textsuperscript{54}For a discussion on the meanings imparted to objects and how people assign these meanings, see Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, \textit{The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
Participation was broadly experienced and butter was traded in a variety of arenas. Export trade, the Philadelphia market, local stores, and exchanges with neighbors offered butter makers outlets for their commodity production. These farm women balanced the needs of domestic consumption with market opportunities. Elizabeth Smedley’s accounts reveal that some butter makers pursued many options during their careers. They sold butter locally, to members of extended families, and to city markets, while also supplying their household pantries.55

Philadelphia led other colonies in the export of butter. Nearly fifty thousand pounds were sent to the West Indies between 1770 and 1772 and special orders requested that shipments of Pennsylvania butter arrive in Jamaica for Christmas. Peter Kalm, a Scandinavian traveler remarked that Philadelphians “ship almost every day a quantity of flour, butter, flesh and other victuals...In return they receive either sugar, molasses, run, indigo, mahogany, and other goods or ready money.”56 The trade with North American coastal ports was almost three times more brisk than the exchange with the West Indies. Halifax, Quebec, Savannah, and St. Augustine relied on Philadelphia for its dairy products.57

Some farm women sold their butter at the twice-weekly urban markets. Late eighteenth-century improvements in transportation between rural areas and Philadelphia made this a more viable option for many farmers. Most city residents did not own the cow or the equipment necessary to make butter; they were eager consumers.


of Chester County dairy products. Urban merchants also relied on the market as a means to lure hinterland residents into purchasing imported goods from their shops. This was a significant factor in farmers’ participation. Blockades on British trade contributed to decreased business at the Philadelphia commodity market in the late 1770s.58

Local shopkeepers accepted butter and other agricultural commodities as payment for goods bought at their stores. Shoppers chose from a wide variety of domestic utensils, foodstuffs, textiles and ceramics at these village stores; many of the items were imported as well. Wallace and Davis’ shop in the Philadelphia area received a large number of butter payments in 1797 and 1798. Samuel Martin purchased cups, saucers, cotton lawn, crepe and a mug with nine pounds of butter. Christopher Grosch bought building supplies, including flooring nails, three hundred and fifty sprigs and whiting on the promise of butter payments. At William Brown’s East Nantmeal store, Daniel Spencer bought a quart of rye whiskey and molasses “with a balance of butter.”59

Store account books indicate that shop owners sold most of the locally made butter to village customers. One store keeper’s record, however, helps to illuminate how the port of Philadelphia became a prominent exporter of butter. Samuel Rex, a merchant working in Heidelberg, Lebanon County at the turn of the nineteenth century, accepted butter as payment. Some was sold to local shoppers but the majority of this butter was stored in wooden kegs manufactured for Rex by Peter Moore, a Heidelberg cooper. After collecting at least one thousand pounds of butter, Rex hired transporters –


59Doerflinger, “Farmers and Dry Goods,” 170; Wallace and Davis Store Account Book, 1797-1798, 60 x 99–101, JDMC; William Brown Store Records, 1795–1805, Col. 73, JDMC.
usually village craftsmen— who delivered the butter to Philadelphia. Other merchants probably also acted as middlemen serving butter makers and exporters. Little documentation has been unearthed to describe Rex’s colleagues and the impact of their business activity.  

Eighteenth-century butter makers appear to have carried on a substantial number of transactions with their neighbors. Butter was valued at the market price and compensated by the customer’s labor, other commodities or with money. This level of trading has been considered inconsequential by some historians. They have even commented that it was noncommercial, just a “sideline” activity that distributed one or two pounds of surplus butter. Benjamin Hawley’s diary includes extremely detailed accounts of commodity purchases made by one Chester County resident. It reveals how dependent one family was on these weekly purchases of small quantities of butter. He frequented just over fifteen butter makers during four years, sometimes even buying from two different women in one week. This level of exchange may have been more significant to both the consumer and the producer than recent study has allowed.  

Butter trading outside the usual arenas of the urban market, local stores, and neighborly exchanges probably occurred in the eighteenth century. These transactions have evaded researchers because they are not well represented in traditionally studied documents, such as travelers’ accounts, newspaper reports, men’s diaries and merchant account books. One female urban diarist noted that a sale of butter took place in her Philadelphia home. Sarah Logan Fisher, a wealthy Quaker woman, commented that this

60 Samuel Rex Account Book, 60 x 3.1-10, JDMC.
61 Oakes, “A Ticklish Business,” 201; Typescript Index to Benjamin Hawley’s diary, Ridley Creek State Park Library, Ridley, Pennsylvania.
transaction of 1771 occurred despite forces that had kept agricultural products from entering the city.

But now, after feeling and being very much discouraged at the prospect of want, and having lost our cow and no milk scarcely to be procured, not any butter or eggs at any price and the prospect of my little children having nothing to eat but salt meat and biscuit, and but very little of that, sunk me almost below hope, I say after being in this situation, Neida Preston came almost at the risk of her life (she living several miles without the line) with 3 pounds of butter and 3 dozen of eggs. My heart revived at the sight of them, and I could not but think it was an encouragement to me not to distress the care and kindness of Providence.62

It is hard to estimate how many of these urban/rural exchanges took place both outside commercial arenas and beneath the public level of documentation. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich has located this sort of activity—"a separate female economy"—in late eighteenth-century rural Maine. The women involved in this female-centered system traded commodities that "left little trace in written records, things like ashes, herbs, seedlings and baby chicks." While evidence has not been found to establish a female economy per se in eighteenth-century Chester County, Ulrich's model offers a compelling picture of yet another "market" for rural butter makers.63

Market activity was balanced with a butter maker's household consumption. While recent estimates of eighteenth-century domestic consumption remain highly speculative, they suggest that Americans ate between twelve and fifteen pounds of butter a year. Traveler's accounts recorded the lavish use of butter in Pennsylvania and the Philadelphia area. Although we may never know exactly how much rural families consumed of their dairy house products, recipes and personal documents indicate that

butter was the most widely and frequently used milk-based commodity in Chester County.64

Smedley’s account book reveals that she did employ her butter-making tools to create social and economic interdependence. In butter sales, she entered relationships with neighbors, a local storekeeper, extended family members, laborers, and perhaps even a peddler. Despite this great variety of customers, most were Middletown neighbors. Her accounts, combined with tax, probate and genealogical records, help us to identify these customers and their relationships to Smedley. This evidence only begins to define the interdependence surrounding butter exchanges for money, labor and goods. Her equipment gained meaning in the ways it accessed these commodities and social commerce. These meanings co-existed with other layers of significance relating to objects’ effective functioning, durability and acquisition.

During Elizabeth Smedley’s first year of butter sales, 1755, she was frequented by two regular customers. Together they purchased thirty-two pounds. One was a long time Middletown neighbor, Thomas Pilkenton. Like other townspeople, he purchased butter only in small quantities. His exchanges occurred on a near weekly schedule from April to July and continued during the next year. Pilkenton was by far the most loyal of the Middletown customers.

Elizabeth’s other 1755 customer provided a dramatic contrast to neighbor Pilkenton. William McMath made weekly acquisitions during a month-long period in February and March. They were of relatively large size, ranging from three pounds to six pounds. Other historians have noted that this butter compensated McMath for

fulling—a process of cleaning and pressing, similar to felting, by which woolen fibers are made into a dense textile. The Smedley farm raised sheep and employed workers for many aspects of textile production, especially spinning and weaving the wool. A fulling mill operated in Middletown at approximately this time, and McMath may have been an employee there. Earlier research has not questioned how McMath consumed these large amounts of butter. Six pounds would have fed twenty to twenty-six people over seven days. It is unlikely, even if he lived with extended family members, that McMath’s brood was this large. Perhaps McMath and his family stored the butter in wooden firkins for future use.65

McMath did not stay long in Middletown, nor in any residence in Chester County. He had a penchant for the road or was forced into transiency by economic circumstances. Birmingham Township tax rolls listed him first in 1749 as an inmate—a married or widowed landless laborer. The next year he was excused from paying taxes, probably because he was poor and still landless. By 1754, McMath relocated to Middletown, where his taxes were less than one-tenth of that paid by William Smedley. Business dealings with Elizabeth Smedley are the last we hear from him; he disappeared from, or successfully avoided recognition in Chester County public documents after 1755.66

McMath the poverty-stricken fuller may have moonlighted as a peddler, selling butter to the weekly Philadelphia market or to local stores. Smedley recorded

65Clemens and Simler, "Rural Labor and the Farm Household," 123; Florence Montgomery, Textiles in America, 1650–1870 (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1984), 243; Lemon, The Best Poor Man's Country, 200. Clemens and Simler interpret Smedley's handwriting to read William McMinn. I do not agree and my reading is supported by name listings in local and county tax records.

66Chester County Tax Lists, 1749–1755, CCHS. For a definition of an inmate see Clemens and Simler, "Rural Labor and the Farm Household," 112.
exchanges of butter with McMath every seven days during their month-long business term. This regularity further suggests that McMath made weekly trips to the urban market with Chester County butter. Unfortunately, this venture probably failed to release the grips of poverty and McMath left Middletown for another venue of work. His brief appearance in Elizabeth Smedley’s story illustrates another group of active agents in the rural economic landscape; a group that has largely remained mysterious to historians of the eighteenth century. Underrepresented in documents and elusive by their own transiency, these peddlers may have been an essential link between rural women and the city. While their wagons transported commodities, their discourses transmitted ideas, news and gossip between their diverse clientele.

Elizabeth’s barrel churn not only acquired meanings in the ways that it facilitated relationships with individuals, but also in the ways that it promoted the activities of the farm and household. Farm employees, William Taylor and John Morgan, received butter as payment for their work. John Noblitt, a local shoemaker, traded his products for butter. Smedley also exchanged butter with the local store owner, Bartholomew Sutton, probably for credit to buy dry goods. These supplies aided the workings of Elizabeth’s domains.

Smedley’s accounts show that relationships fostered by her barrel churn changed over time. The amount of butter Elizabeth sold dramatically reduced during the trajectory of her career. This shift corresponded with events in her personal life, indicating that Smedley and other butter makers realigned their work according to family circumstances. As the tools of this work received a new rung on the priority ladder—the churn was used primarily to feed a growing family, not access business deals outside the home—different meanings were ascribed to them. Butter-making
implements may have been valued over other domestic tools because they adapted well to new household demands.

During widowhood, Elizabeth continued to keep cows on the farm but halted butter sales for long periods of time. These long gaps, of up to seven years, were broken only by infrequent market activity and of transactions of only one or two pounds. Smedley, instead, employed her churn to meet the household's butter needs. By this time the household had grown to include paying boarders: Elizabeth's mother, William's brothers, and farm laborers. Eleven people lived in the Middletown farm house during 1772 and may have consumed over one hundred and thirty pounds of butter that year. Elizabeth's butter-making tools not only sustained the family's needs at this time, but supported her own profit-bearing activity of caring for boarders. As well as taking in boarders, Elizabeth sewed, mended and washed clothes for unmarried men. Some were family members or boarders and others were Middletown laborers. She may have concentrated on these tasks for exchange purposes because they were easier to interrupt than butter making. They may have helped Smedley to juggle the responsibilities of farm management, single parenting, parent care and large-quantity cooking. As the pieces of the Smedley family puzzle shifted and fit together in new ways, Elizabeth realigned the fragments of her working day. In doing so, she also reascribed meanings to the tools of butter making.

Elizabeth utilized a variety of market options in her thirty years of butter making. Most of her recorded sales were of small quantities sold to Middletown residents. Some of these neighbors were laborers or craftsmen whose work for Smedley was compensated in butter. On a limited basis Elizabeth supplied the urban market and a local store. In acquiring and maintaining butter-making tools, the objects communicated social processes among people. However, in exchanges of butter for
labor, goods or money, these tools facilitated people's interactions. Churns, trenchers and paddles acquired meanings in the context of each transaction, depending, in large part, on what individuals participated.

These meanings are extremely difficult to ascertain. Furthermore they can only be partially understood from documentary sources. Probate inventories offer a place to begin this search for meanings. They offer a preliminary identification of the objects used in butter making. Prescriptive literature suggests what farm women may have employed, although it does not describe accurately the practices and tools of everyday life. Widows' shaves indicate that some women inherited churns. Store accounts, craftsmen's accounts and public vendue records offer even more detailed evidence about how individuals acquired their tools and, in some cases, who constructed the objects. Additionally, these sources help us to understand consumption patterns; certain tools, especially churns were repaired before they were discarded and replaced. Other implements were purchased more frequently and had shorter lives in the dairy house.

Sources previously under-utilized in the scholarship on eighteenth-century butter making add important clues to this search for multiple meanings. Observations on the process of dairy production—a consideration of how humans physically interacted with their implements—contributes a tactile dimension to our understanding of making butter. It is only good sense that informs us to ask how it feels and how it sounds to churn butter. Unfortunately, far too few scholars have paused to reflect on these questions, or to offer their own hands for pumping the churn dasher and skimming the cream. Even more ripe for study is the material record, especially if approached as evidence, not simply as illustrative material to accompany documents. These objects carry vital information about the maintenance, wear, repair, craftsmanship, and the use of butter-making equipment. Like the process of butter making, a serious examination
of this evidence base is crucial to reconstructing the many meanings assigned to implements. If we study a process, understanding its tools only furthers our intimacy with the experiences of those who worked the process.

All these sources provide us with tantalizing bits of evidence. As with much research on women's work, the historian's job is to rebuild these shards of eighteenth-century life into a full story—one that both shows how specific individuals lived and hints at deeper significances about attitudes, thoughts and behavior of a larger group. The Elizabeth Smedley story narrates the role of dairy production in a woman's life. It tells how butter was made and how relationships were formed around the exchanges of butter and tools. But it also reveals the complex layering of meanings assigned to one tool kit, or a few objects in that kit. Butter-making equipment simultaneously embodied the many meanings of thoughts and actions in Elizabeth Smedley's daily life: the ways in which implements were acquired, who made them, how well they performed desired functions, their durability, the economic advantages they brought to the user, social networks accessed by their use, and a flexibility in response to changing household and personal demands. We may never know if Elizabeth Smedley was able to sort out these significances or recognize only one at a time when she produced butter. It is more likely that Smedley's objects carried all or many of these meanings. Events of her life may have encouraged her to emphasize certain meanings over others, but the totality of assigned significances was never removed from these objects. Her barrel chum represented the work of craftsmen, her market sales, effective butter making, and the means by which she fed family and boarders. The larger group of Chester County farm women may have imbued meanings to their butter-making equipment in ways resembling that of Smedley. However, evidence suggests that no two butter makers followed the same process in using,
acquiring and maintaining their dairy tool kits. Thus barrel churns held different significance for different producers.

The pastoral dairying equipment also carried multiple meanings. Although its function was drastically different from the equipment of Smedley and her colleagues, these porcelain objects were not devoid of significance. The Neave set, in particular, is loaded with overlapping associations. Its coat-of-arms and the cause for its manufacturing celebrate a marriage. These expensive, imported objects signify wealth and a relationship to the international community of merchants. Furthermore, they are related to the eighteenth-century fashion of the pastoral. Their evocation of rural simplicity gives these milk pans and skimmers meaning in the realm of social status and style. As with Smedley, it is difficult to know if Neave and his family chose to emphasize certain meanings during their interactions with these items.

What the London Beau found in the dairy house was a far cry from Elizabeth Smedley and the farm women of Chester County. The contrast is distinct; the pastoral view of rural life focused on simplicity and innocence, the working inhabitants of rural landscapes negotiated complex systems with their tools and knowledge. However, both worlds contained butter-making equipment. Some was of expensive and fragile porcelain. The other was utilitarian and made from earthenware and wood. One group used these objects to evoke the pastoral mood and to set themselves apart as owners of status items. Chester County women employed butter-making tools to make links with individuals, families and communities. Nevertheless, both groups assigned meanings to their material worlds. These meanings overlapped, represented complex social and economic strategies, and were flexible alongside the events of daily life.

This study raises the possibility that multiple meanings were assigned by butter makers to their tools. Such a conjecture asserts that eighteenth-century farm life
included a diversity of experiences. Life was not simple, nor was it governed solely by a cultural mind set. This study also advocates the use of material culture where documents tend to remain silent. So few written sources relating to farm women exist, making the material record an especially crucial evidence base for the study of rural work. These voids of information can be mistaken for cultural homogeneity. However, the material record shows otherwise. This evidence invites future scholarship in the quest to describe rural women's work and to locate even more meanings in the material worlds of Chester County farms.
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Appendix
### Table 1
**Elizabeth Smedley's Butter Sales**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Pounds Sold</th>
<th>Customers</th>
<th>Personal Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1753</td>
<td>No records</td>
<td></td>
<td>Married William Smedley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1754</td>
<td>No records</td>
<td></td>
<td>Jan. – son Peter born</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1755</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Pilkenton, McMath</td>
<td>Oct. – dau. Mary born</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1756</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Pilkenton</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1757</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Monroe</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1758</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Talbot</td>
<td>March – son George born</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1759</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Talbot</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1760</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>W. Taylor, Greentree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1761</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>W. Taylor, Greentree</td>
<td>April – son Joseph born</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1762</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Massey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1763</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Nesbit</td>
<td>June – son Samuel born</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1764</td>
<td>1/2</td>
<td>W. Taylor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1765</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>Aug. – son William born</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1766</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>March – husband killed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mother boards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nov. – father-in-law dies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>sewing for M. Bresland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1767</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>sewing for J. Smedley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“” “” M. Bresland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mother boards</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1768</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>washing for T. Smedley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>sewing for J. Smedley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>mending for M. Bresland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mother boards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1769</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>sewing for J. Smedley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mother boards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1770</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>sewing for J. Smedley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mother boards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1771</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>John Taylor boards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>sewing for John Taylor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mother boards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1772</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>J. Taylor, Pilkenton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>John Taylor boards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>sewing for John Taylor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Thomas Smedley boards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>washing for T. Smedley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Peter Wade boards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>sewing for Peter Wade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mother boards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1773</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>J. Taylor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mother boards</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Peter Wade boards</td>
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<tr>
<td>1774</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mary Smedley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mother-in-law dies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1775</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1776</td>
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<tr>
<td>1777</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1778</td>
<td>9 1/2</td>
<td>Sutton, Robeson, Noblitt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>1779</td>
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<td>Mother boards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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### Table 1 Continued

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<td>1782</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Mother boards, son George boards</td>
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<td>1783</td>
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<td>Mother boards, is “very helpless”</td>
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<tr>
<td>1784</td>
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<tr>
<td>1785</td>
<td>1 1/2</td>
<td>J. Morgan</td>
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