

Section 4: Daily Life

Read the following letters by Sister Rose White, one of the earliest members of Mother Seton's community, to find out what daily life was like in the early 1800s.



LETTER 8 from Sister Rose White's journal 1809

May 10- “[Father Dubourg’s] last words were to cultivate plenty of carrots...for coffee, which we used. That and rye were our morning and evening beverage for breakfast and supper... We walked every Sunday to the mountain [Mt. St. Mary’s College]... Then there was no bridge or road to the mountain. We had to go over one by one on horseback when the water was high, and when [it was] low, we walked over the creek on stones, climbed the fences, and often lost our way through the thick woods. We carried our dinner in a sack and often fried our meat at the mountain, took it from the frying pan, and placed it on a piece of bread without a knife or fork, ate standing, took a good drink of water, and went up to church... Often we were caught in the rain coming home, and at this time we never wore a shawl, much less [carried] an umbrella. When we came to the creek, we would meet a horse... sent to take us across. The oldest Sister remained standing in the rain by the oak tree until all had passed over; then, in her turn, she was taken and sometimes continued her ride to the farm house door....Our shoes were heavy with mud and our clothes so that we had to change them.”

“ While sleeping at the Stone House, the snow would drift in. One morning Sister Sally and Sister Rose shovelled out nearly two cart-loads of snow in a garret where two of the Sisters were sleeping and did not discover that their beds were partly covered also...until day began to dawn through the cracks of the boards, the only fastenings for the windows...”



LETTER 9 from Sister Rose White's journal 1809

July 30- “Our washing place was at the creek where we took our clothes early in the morning and remained the day. [There was] not a plank to stand on or [any] covering but the tree under which we would place our tubs. If rain came on, we would have to bring [in] our clothes, all wet and heavy. [We had] no accommodations, no water to wash with at the house.”

LETTER 10 from Sister Rose White's journal 1810

January 9- “We became so crowded that it was...necessary that some of us should come up to the new house [known as the White House] to sleep... [We] would often rise at two, three or four o'clock and go down to the farm [house] thinking it was time for morning prayers. The ground was rough plowed and often very muddy. Sometimes we were forced to stay all day up at the new house [because] the rain was so heavy. One would go down and bring up something to eat. We had spinning wheels and kept ourselves employed.”



LETTER 11 Elizabeth Ann Seton's letter to Julia Scott 1810

January 24- “Mr. Cooper [benefactor]... brought me for Cecelia a barrel of honey, one of treacle [molasses] which we make great use of, a box of Smyrna figs, one of raisins, one of prunes, and seventy or eighty yards of flannel besides pieces upon pieces of India chemise muslin...”



LETTER 12 from Sister Rose White's journal 1810

May 14- *“Our school increased in numbers, both borders and day scholars. We had great difficulty in accommodating the boarders. The Sisters slept in the garret on the floor in the same place where the hair was for plastering. [The work on the new house was not complete yet]. Often we passed the night carrying our mattresses from one place to another to find rest, and we were so bitten by the fleas that our skins wore a purple appearance. We begin to take sewing from the Mountain to pay a debt that we owed. We made mattresses, quilted quilts and made all the boys' clothes and mended. We did all our washing yet at the creek.”*

ACTIVITIES

1. If Mother Seton could visit us in the 21st century, how would you prepare her for all the changes? Do you think the changes are good? Why?
2. Research recipes of foods that colonists in Maryland might have enjoyed. Follow the recipe to create several tasty items to share with your classmates.
3. Write a daily journal for a friend, as Mother Seton did, to tell of your day.
4. What did Mother Seton and her Sisters eat for meals?
5. Where would they get their meat, flour, sugar, and other supplies? How would they keep the food fresh?