

From the Journals of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg (1777)

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The Christian ministry has a number of occupational hazards, some of which are particularly threatening during the winter. I personally can attest to that this winter, as an ice storm allows me to stay at home this morning to prepare this column and nurse a bad cold. Old Father Muhlenberg certainly wasn't immune to those challenges; in fact, they could be absolutely life-threatening. One big difference: he didn't benefit from modern science and technology. He didn't reach for the hand gel before breaking the communion bread; he didn't smile approvingly as the children coughed and sneezed into the bend of their elbows; he didn't rush to wash his hands after shaking hands with his congregation; he didn't put his 4-wheel drive into gear to get through the snow banks or across the swollen creeks. Let him describe one especially rough spell in early 1777:

January 28 - In the morning our children and relatives set out on their return journey to Philadelphia. Mr. Kuntze, his wife, their three-months-old child, and my youngest daughter Salome drove off in a stage-coach, and Mr. Hall and his wife, Henrich Mühlenberg's parents-in-law, drove away in a chaise. The roads are very bad for driving. Friedrich Mühlenberg is their driver. Those of us who now remain here are we two oldsters, Henrich Mühlenberg's wife and child, Friedrich Mühlenberg, his wife, and their children.

Jan. 29 - I was ill, took some medicine, and wrote.

Jan. 30 - Not yet improved. Had a visit from Dr. Bodo Otto, of Reading

Jan. 31 - Am severely afflicted with catarrhal fever. I have not had it for a long time, and it worries me especially because I have promised to preach in New Hanover next Sunday and have no voice left.

Fortunately Friedrich Mühlenberg came back in the evening from Philadelphia with the stagecoach. They had an uncommonly difficult journey to Philadelphia on Tuesday; they were stuck in the mud twice, finally had to proceed on foot, and did not reach the city until ten o'clock in the evening

Feb. 2 - Candlemas. Friedrich Mühlenberg rode to New Hannover over unusually bad roads and in wet weather, in order to conduct divine service there. I was unable to go because I am still suffering severely from catarrhal fever and cannot speak. He visited

Mr. Voigt after the service and dined with him. He returned safely in the rain, splattered with mud from head to foot. His horse fell under him only once. Uninjured, thank God!

Feb. 4-5 - Am plagued with the catarrhal fever and a hectic cough

Feb. 6 - My malady continues stubbornly

Feb. 8 - My catarrhal condition continues, yet I have progressed so far that I can write and read somewhat and can force some sounds to make myself heard. My son Friedrich rode to the other side of the Schulkiel today in order to conduct divine service in Peikstown tomorrow. The roads are muddy, the water is high, and, to make matters worse, it is raining today.

Feb. 9 - In the morning I rode [a neighbor lent me a horse in order that I might ride] the half-mile from our house to Augustus Church, for I was unable [did not venture] to go so far afoot on account of my weakness and the bad condition of the road

After the service I prepared to set out for home. In spite of the help which the deacons and elders rendered in getting me onto the horse, the stirrup broke [unexpectedly] and I fell down on my side. As a result I injured [bruised] the short ribs on my left side, and this caused severe pain. Toward evening Friedrich Mühlenberg returned home safely. The Schulkiel was so high that the water reached to the saddle of his [tall] horse

February 10 - In the afternoon H. Mühlenberg, Jr., arrived from Philadelphia in order to take his dear family down with him. Friedrich Mühlenberg at once offered to take me and them down in the stagecoach with his horses. It is true that I was asked to go to Philadelphia in order to attend the congregational meeting for the accounting, which is usually held in January, but was not held then on account of the disturbances of war, but I cannot go now owing to my physical infirmity. Moreover, Heinrich and his family cannot get through, either, because the roads are still very muddy and difficult to negotiate.

Feb. 14 - During the past night almost a foot of snow fell. Today it is melting again, and the roads are more impassable than ever.

Feb. 11 - I am still suffering from the catarrhal fever. My *massa fluida* is losing the little fire [salt] which

still remained and is being transformed into phlegm, which will disappear naturally [leave behind a *caput mortuum*] in the next month of March—i.e., in the equinoctial season.

Feb. 12 - My catarrhal fever continues

Feb. 14 - More than a foot of snow has already fallen since last evening, and it is continuing to snow. The weather is severe for the poor fellows in the army camps.

Feb. 15 - My catarrh still continues In the evening several companies of soldiers returned here to Providence from Ticonderoga [from Canada after serving their stipulated time]. It was difficult for them to find quarters. Friedrich Mühlenberg took in seven of them, gave them a warm room for the night in the adjoining house, and supplied them with supper [with sauerkraut, which pleased them very much and for which they were thankful because they had not had anything warm for a long time]

Feb. 16 - I am still suffering from catarrhal fever. Friedrich Mühlenberg rode to New Hannover over very bad roads to conduct divine service there and to present to the congregation the new deacons, Johannes Reichard and Matthias Wartman, who had been elected in the congregational meeting on January 20 - He returned toward evening. Owing to my catarrhal fever, which is holding on, I cannot even sing and pray with my family at home.

Feb. 18 - The roads are more muddy, bottomless, and full of holes than they have been for many years

Feb. 19 - Still suffering from chest fever and cough

Feb. 20 - Resorted to my old remedy - an *emeticum* in order to try to break up the viscosity in the *massa fluida*.

Feb. 22 - The severe cold continues. In the evening Friedrich Mühlenberg returned from Philadelphia with the wagon and horses. He brought my writing desk with him, and also three doses of *tartarum*

emeticum. Each dose is to be accompanied by a half-pint of water as a *vehiculum* Feb. 23 - I am still suffering from catarrhal fever

Feb. 24 - From early this morning until late at night we had an extraordinary snowstorm. Perhaps as much as two feet of snow fell

March 1 - The snow which fell before has not disappeared, and today a heavy snowfall has been added

March 2 - My neighbor, Mr. Müller, was so good as to take me in his sleigh to Augustus Church, and my voice was sufficiently recovered to enable me to preach, after a fashion, on the example of the Ethiopian chamberlain, Acts 8

March 9 - I conducted domestic devotions, but am still unable to sing on account of my catarrh.

March 11 - All kinds of petitions for the sick. [Had all sorts of English and German visitors who sought help for the sick, for there are no practitioners in the art of conjecture in this whole region inasmuch as they have gone to the military hospitals.] I cannot help them because the Halle medicine is exhausted. What there is left of it is so expensive that poor people cannot afford it As long as the Halle medicines lasted, I used them according to the accompanying printed directions. But since I must do without these medicines on account of the closed doors (importation ban because of the war), I give people, who ask for it, counsel from the blessed Dr. Johann Samuel Carl's *Apotheke* and Dr. Tissot's *Haus-Arzenei-Buch*, and I show them the remedies which the great Benefactor causes to grow on their land or before their doors without payments or interest. Perhaps the physicians will soon return and I will be relieved of this burden.

Father Mühlenberg's words and experiences are humbling indeed.