

Daily Living in the American Colonies

The Table of Contents represents my attempt to organize the huge amount of notes I have made and information I have gathered over the years. It was a daunting task.

In some sections, I made lists of miscellaneous information that I found extremely interesting and useful but that don't lend themselves well to any particular category.

In most instances where I used a large bulk of information from a particular source, I have acknowledged that source.

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Anecdotes

GENERAL GEORGE WASHINGTON

Gen. Washington, many years after the end of the war, on a visit to Camden, inquired for the grave of De Kalb. After looking on it awhile, with a countenance marked with thought, he breathed a deep sigh, and exclaimed, "So there lies the brave De Kalb; the generous stranger who came from a distant land to fight our battles, and to water with his blood the tree of our liberty. Would to God he had lived to share with us its fruits!"

DeKalb's exit was marked with unfading glory, and his distinguished merit was gratefully acknowledged by Congress, in ordering a monument to be erected to his memory.

A MISTAKE TURNED TO A GOOD ACCOUNT

Some time previous to the evacuation of Charlestown, Colonel Menzies, of the Pennsylvania line, received a letter from a Hessian officer within the garrison, who had once been a prisoner, and treated by him with kindness, expressing an earnest desire to show his gratitude, by executing any commission with which he would please to honor him. Colonel Menzies replied to it, requesting him to send him twelve dozen cigars; but, being a German by birth, and little accustomed to express himself in English, he was not very accurate in his orthography, and write "sizars."

"'Twas no sooner said than done; "twelve dozen pairs of scissors were accordingly sent him, which, for a time, occasioned much merriment in the camp, at the expense of the Colonel, but no man knew better how to profit from the mistake. Money was not at the period in circulation; and by the aid of his runner, distributing his scissors over the country, in exchange for poultry, Menzies lived luxuriously, while the fare of his brother officers was a scanty pittance of famished beef, bull-frogs from ponds, and cray-fish from the neighboring ditches.

HONESTY OF LEVINGSTONE

A soldier of General Marion's brigade, named Levingstone, an Irishman by birth, meeting with an armed party, on a night profoundly dark, suddenly found a horseman's pistol, applied to his breast, and heard the imperious command --Declare, instantaneously, to what party you belong, or you are a dead man." The situation being such as to render it highly probable that it might be a British party, he very calmly relied, "I think, sir, it would be a little more in the way of civility if you were to drop a hint, just to let me know which side of the question you are pleased to favor." "No jesting," replied the speaker, "declare your principles, or die." "Then --" rejoined Levingstone, "I will not die with a lie in my mouth. American to extremity, you spalpeen; so do your worst and ----to you." "You are an honest fellow," said the inquirer; "we are friends, and I rejoice to meet a man faithful as you are to the cause of our country."

Bible: 1782 Aitken Bible: First English Bible printed in America

A leaf from the first Bible printed in the English language in America. These leaves are 224 years old. Called "The Bible of the Revolution", Robert Aitken's little Bible was small enough to fit into the coat pocket of the Revolutionary War soldiers. The leaves measure only 6 inches tall by almost 4 inches wide. The only Bible printing ever called for by an act of the United States Congress; this King James Version Bible helped meet the need for scriptures while England refused to allow their Bibles to be imported by the rebellious colonists, during the embargo of the Revolutionary War.

These little treasures also come with a lovely black leather, gold-stamped, numbered limited-edition presentation book detailing their history, and containing their Certificate of Authenticity. The book shows what many of the other pages of the Aitken Bible looked like, offers a great historical overview of this "Bible of the Revolution", shows the entry in the Journals of Congress calling for the printing to be done, and also offers the text of George Washington's letter, commending Robert Aitken for helping to meet American soldiers' need for Bibles, and being the first to print an English Bible in America.

As a curious side note: Robert Aitken's daughter, Jane Aitken, went on to become the first woman in the history of the world to ever print a Bible. Jane published a translation into English done by the Secretary of the United States Congress, which was itself actually the first non-King James version English language Bible ever printed in America (or the Western Hemisphere for that matter).

Robert Aitken's Bible was printed at his Philadelphia print shop, using an early American movable-type press. The paper stock is a thick grade of wood-pulp paper, as cotton was deemed to be too expensive for this production. We also have beautiful frames available for these leaves. Imagine ...having a leaf from the first English Bible printed in America: The 1782 Aitken Bible.

Baby Bottles/Pap Feeders & Feeding Cups

Changes in infant feeding practices necessitated creation of new devices for delivery to the baby. The term "pap," allegedly derived from the Scandinavian for the sound made when a baby opens his mouth for nourishment, was probably introduced before its first recordings in literature in the mid 18th century. Recipes for pap usually called for bread, flour and water. A more nourishing mixture, "panada," was a pap base with added butter and milk, or cooked in broth as a milk substitute. Variations on the ingredients included Lisbon sugar, beer, wine, raw meat juices and Castile soap. Drugs were sometimes added to "soothe the baby."

The "pap boat" was designed to feed the mixture to babies and invalids. Resembling a sauce boat (or sometimes a small bed-pan), they were made of wood, silver, pewter, bone, porcelain, or glass. They ranged from very plain, for poor families or foundling homes, to highly decorated pieces for wealthier clients. Although intended as a supplemental invalid or post-weaning food, this "dry" form of artificial feeding, often inadequate, became very popular, significantly contributing to the infant mortality of the period.

Implements for feeding proliferated in the 18th century as new materials and methods of production became accessible. Shapes were clever and varied. Some pap boats were closed, others looked like animals, most often a duck. Feeding cups of such design are still manufactured in some countries today.

Liquid feedings could be administered through sucking pots made of pewter. These were later replaced by ones made of porcelain. Some stood upright, others were submarine-shaped and would lie flat.

In 1770, Dr. Hugh Smith invented the "Bubby pot," (in some sources, referred to as a "bubbly pot"). It was made of pewter and resembled a gravy pot or tea pot. The bubby pot came at a time when there was a strong move to make artificial feeding safer, and reduce dependency on the wet nurse. The perforated spout was covered with cloth, which served as a nipple. Dr. Smith, in recommending his idea, stated, "Through it, the milk is constantly strained and the infant is obliged to labour for every drop he receives." It is amazing how much this device resembled the previously mentioned Cypriot feeding bottle of 1900 B.C., which Dr. Smith never saw.

Although his pot underwent many variations and existed in porcelain, it never replaced the sucking bottle. An American equivalent, the nursing can, used by the Pennsylvania Germans, may have been copied from the bubby pot. This gained little popularity and, by the 19th century, the sucking bottle was almost the rule. Glass rapidly replaced the porcelain successors of pewter. They were now easier to clean and their acceptance coincided with understanding of bacteria, contagion, and improved sanitary conditions. Increasing cleanliness, reliance on milk as the chief "artificial dietary source," and diminished use of pap and panada helped to lower the devastatingly high infant mortality rates in urban foundling homes which often approached 100%.

Campfires & Trail Signs

From: <http://scoutbase.org.uk/library/hqdocs/facts/pdfs/fs315001.pdf>

Below is a list of the most common woods for burning, there are more. It is worth remembering that ALL wood will burn better if split.

- Alder: Poor in heat and does not last,
- Apple: Splendid/ It bums slowly and steadily when dry, with little flame, but good heat. The scent is pleasing.

- Ash: Best burning wood; has both flame and heat, and will burn when green, though naturally not as well as when dry.
- Beech: A rival to ash, though not a close one, and only fair when green. If it has a fault, it is apt to shoot embers a long way.
- Birch: The heat is good but it burns quickly. The smell is pleasant.
- Cedar: Good when dry. Full of crackle and snap. It gives little flame but much heat, and the scent is beautiful.
- Cherry: Burns slowly, with good heat. Another wood with the advantage of scent Chestnut. Mediocre. Apt to shoot embers. Small flame and heating power. Douglas Fir. Poor. Little flame and heat.
- Chestnut: Mediocre. Apt to shoot embers. Small flame and heating power.
- Douglas Fir: Poor. Little flame or heat.
- Elder: Mediocre. Very smoky. Quick burner, with not much heat.
- Elm: Commonly offered for sale. To burn well it needs to be kept for two years. Even then it will smoke. Vary variable fuel.
- Hazel: Good.
- Holly: Good, will burn when green, but best when kept a season.
- Hornbeam: Almost as good as beech.
- Laburnum: Totally poisonous tree, acrid smoke, taints food and best never used.
- Larch: Crackly, scented, and fairly good for heat.
- Laurel: Has brilliant flame.
- Lime: Poor. Burns with dull flame.
- Maple: Good.
- Oak: The novelist's 'blazing fire of oaken logs' is fanciful, Oak is sparse in flame and the smoke is acrid, but dry old oak is excellent for heat, burning slowly and steadily until whole log collapses into cigar-like ash.
- Pear: A good heat and a good scent.
- Pine: Burns with a splendid flame, but apt to spit. The resinous Weymouth pine has a lovely scent and a cheerful blue flame.
- Plane: Burns pleasantly, but is apt to throw sparks if very dry. Plum. Good heat and scent.
- Plum: Good heat and aromatic.
- Poplar: Truly awful.
- Rhododendron: The thick old stems, being very tough, burn well.
- Robinia (Acacia): Burns slowly, with good heat, but with acrid smoke.
- Spruce: Burns too quickly and with too many sparks.
- Sycamore: Burns with a good flame, with moderate heat. Useless green.
- Thorn: Quite one of the best woods. Burns slowly, with great heat and little smoke. Walnut. Good, so is the scent.
- Walnut: Good, and so is the scent. Aromatic wood.
- Willow: Poor. It must be dry to use, and then it burns slowly, with little flame. Apt to spark.

- Yew: Last but among the best. Burns slowly, with fierce heat, and the scent is pleasant.

Trail Signs (by Ernest Thompson Seton)

First among the trail signs that are used by Woodcrafters, Indians, and white hunters, and most likely to be of use to the traveler, are axe blazes on tree trunks. Among these some may vary greatly with locality, but there is one that I have found everywhere in use with scarcely any variation. That is the simple white spot meaning, "*Here is the trail.*"

The Indian in making it may nick off an infinitesimal speck of bark with his knife, the trapper with his hatchet may make it as big as a dollar, or the settler with his heavy axe may slab off half the tree-side; but the sign is the same in principle and in meaning, on trunk, log, or branch from Atlantic to Pacific and from Hudson Strait to Rio Grande. "This is your trail," it clearly says in the universal language of the woods.

There are two ways of employing it: one when it appears on back and front of the trunk, so that the trail can be run both ways; the other when it appears on but one side of each tree, making a *blind trail*, which can be run one way only, the blind trail is often used by trappers and prospectors, who do not wish any one to follow their back track. But there are treeless regions where the trail must be marked; regions of sage brush and sand, regions of rock, stretches of stone, and level wastes of grass or sedge. Here other methods must be employed.

A well-known Indian device, in the brush, is to break a twig and leave it hanging.

Among stones and rocks the recognized sign is one stone set on top of another and in places where there is nothing but grass the custom is to twist a tussock into a knot. These signs also are used in the whole country from Maine to California.

Surveyors often three simple spots and a stripe to mean, "There is a stake close at hand," while a similar blaze on another tree near by means that the stake is on a line between.

Stone Signs

These signs done into stone-talk would be as in the top line of the cut.

These are much used in the Rockies where the trail goes over stony places or along stretches of slide-rock.

Grass and Twig Signs

In grass or sedge the top of the tuft is made to show the direction to be followed; if it is a point of great importance three tufts are tied, their tops straight if the trail goes straight on; otherwise the tops are turned in the direction toward which the course turns.

The Ojibways and other woodland tribes use twigs for a great many of these signs. The hanging broken twig like the simple blaze means "This is the trail." The twig clean broken off and laid on the ground across the line of march means, "Here break from your straight course and go in the line of the butt end," and when an especial warning is meant,

the butt is pointed toward the one following the trail and raised somewhat, in a forked twig. If the butt of the twig were raised and pointing to the left, it would mean "Look out, camp, or ourselves, or the enemy, or the game we have killed is out that way." With some, the elevation of the butt is made to show the distance of the object; if low the object is near, if raised very high the object is a long way off.

These are the principal signs of the trail used by Woodcrafters, Indians, and hunters in most parts of America. These are the standards--the ones sure to be seen by those who camp in the wilderness.

Smoke Signals

There is in addition a useful kind of sign that has been mentioned already in these papers--that is, the Smoke Signal. These were used chiefly by the Plains Indians, but the Ojibways seem to have employed them at times.

A clear hot fire was made, then covered with green stuff or rotten wood so that it sent up a solid column of black smoke. By spreading and lifting a blanket over this smudge the column could be cut up into pieces long or short, and by a preconcerted code these could be made to convey tidings.

But the simplest of all smoke codes and the one of chief use to the Western traveler:

- One steady smoke--"Here is camp."
- Two steady smokes--" I am lost, come and help me."
- Three smokes in a row--" Good news."
- Four smokes in a row--"All are summoned to council."

Signal by Shots

The old buffalo hunters had an established signal that is yet used by the mountain guides. It is as follows:

Two shots in rapid succession, an interval of five seconds by the watch, then one shot; this means, "where are you?" The answer given at once and exactly the same means "Here I am; what do you want?" The reply to this may be one shot, which means, "All right; I only wanted to know where you were." But if the reply repeats the first it means, "I am in serious trouble; come as fast as you can."

Clothing

Well-to-do:

Ladies and young women:

- Aprons were pinned to the front of the dresses (thus the name "pinafore")
- Bodices usually closed with hook fasteners down the front

- Busk—a wedge-shaped piece of thin wood covered in cloth, slipped in the bodice front to hold the corset lacings
- Capes were lined with fur
- Chemise—underdress, often doubled as a lounging or morning dress
- Corset—tied in front and worn with panniers (a hooped framework often made of cane, whalebone or wire), worn over a muslin camisole that doubled as a nightgown; corsets and shoes were often made of embroidered damask
- Creped hair—curled hair tightly with an iron, teased it out until it stood high, and then powdered
- Fan—many women carried fans
- Kerchief and mobcap—head coverings; mobcaps were usually made of sheer white lawn with lace trim and ribbon
- Shoes – made of silk brocade were worn by fashionable ladies
- Skirt and corsets were separate pieces of clothing; skirts were slit at the sides to provide access to pocket-type garment that was tied around the waist underneath the skirt

Children:

- Diapers—because of a shortage of pins were tied together
- Clothes closely followed those of the adults

Men:

- Banian—similar to a modern bathrobe, worn at gatherings or in public for dining; worn over waistcoat and knee breeches
- Drawers of natural linen and white hose
- Shirt was worn as shirt, undershirt, and night shirt
- Stockings-- white silk thread stockings cost more than coat
- Tam-o'-shanter—worn when not wearing a wig
- Trousers (the opening in the front was called a “front fall”)

Farmers, settlers, and the poor:

- Capes were made of wool or fashioned from old quilts
- Dress –bodice attached to corset and decorated with ribbon, elbow-length sleeves with shaped cuffs
- Felt cocked hats
- Gauze aprons covering the dress and wrapped around the waist with streamers were for dress up
- Man’s apron—square yard of fabric, cut off at the top corners to make a bib and attached to the coat button with a buttonholes and belted with a leather cord
- Men sometimes wore Indian inspired attire of soft leather, moccasins and leggings or garments made of homespun cloth in dark colors; drop shoulder shirt, if ruffled, the ruffles were turned under for everyday wear
- Powder horn and shoulder pouch for carrying shells
- Shoes—sturdy for walking

Miscellaneous:

- Armbands—black crepe armbands were worn instead of traditional all black mourning clothes; Continental Congress had asked people not to discard good clothes
- Gloves were gifts at funerals
- Linen woven by flax growers in Kingstree, sturdy, hickory colored ordinary
- Uniforms

Colonial uniforms during the early years of the war were smocks and hunting clothes; regiments from different areas were distinguished by different colors. Later in the war, American uniforms were rebel blue, medium blue with buff colored facings. American partisans—the unofficial uniform was described as "a little low cocked hat, pea jacket, and canvas petticoat trousers not unlike a kilt, tight stockings and shoes with pinchbeck buckles." British Soldiers wore a woolen red coat with voluminous folds buttoned back to form lapels. A cocked hat, stiff stock, waistcoat, small clothes, and gaiters reaching just above the knee completed the standard uniform.

Household Items

Table cloth or board cloth – made of huckaback (coarse cotton or linen fabric); dowlas (Used chiefly for aprons, pocketing, soldiers' gaiters, linings, and overalls. The finer materials are sometimes made into shirts for workmen, and occasionally used for heavy pillow-cases.) or damask, trimmed with lace

Language and Phrases

“a dog in a dancing school”—awkward

“blockhead”—stupid

“linsey-woolsey”—flax and wool material

“pint root” – herb used to kill intestinal parasitic worms

“Sons of Sediton”; “Liberty Boys”; “Minute Men”; “Partisans”—colonial forces

“swamp tackies” – interior horse

“swan shot”—buck shot

Lighting (candles, stoves, fires)

betty lamp – shaped like antique Roman lamp; made of pewter; burned mostly whale oil; wick laid across the spout and draped down into the oil; push the wick further down into the oil for a lower flame; pull the wick out further for a higher flame



candle – sconces were called candles; had arms and prongs; within several days to a week's time, usually once a year, women created 200 to 400 candles; about the number of candles the average colonial family burned in twelve months' time.

skewer-shaped piece of wood dipped in sulfur/sulphur was called a “spunk” and was used in tinderboxes or mills (as they were called in the South) to start a flame (The first practical friction match, “congreve,” was made in England in 1827. You could buy a box of 84 for 25 cents.)

Franklin Stove or the New Pennsylvania Fireplace – invented by Benjamin Franklin in 1742

Dutch oven – used for baking bread; a strong, thick-walled iron/cast iron kettle standing on stout, stumpy legs, with top and long handle

Meals

In the American colonies, the mid-day meal wasn't called lunch, but instead was called dinner, and was considered the main or biggest meal of the day. The evening meal was called supper and was usually a much lighter meal than lunch. The quality of and amount of foods and the times served were based a great deal upon level of wealth and status.

The settlers, the poor, ate breakfast early—a hastily drunk cider or beer and a bowl of porridge cooked slowly all night over the embers—then went straight to their chores. The rich ate later in the morning. Townspeople usually had an alcoholic beverage upon rising followed by cornmeal mush and molasses, with more cider or beer.

By the late 1800s, breakfast was served at 9 or 10 a.m. and consisted of coffee, tea, or chocolate, toast, wafers, muffins with butter. Poor southerners ate cold turkey and cider. More affluent southern planters ate more leisurely breakfasts of breads and cold meats. In the Northeast, people also ate fruit pies and pastries. In the Middle Colonies, people ate scrapple, a mixture of cornmeal and headcheese, and sweet cakes deep fried in fat.

Colonial Americans ate dinner in the early afternoon, served in the hall or common room. Poor families ate from trenchers filled from common stew pots. A trencher was a long wooden table with a v-shaped “trough” cut along the center of the table. Stews comprised pork, sweet corn, cabbage, vegetables and roots, eaten with slabs of bread. Richer families might have a two-course meal of soups, meats, meat puddings or meat pies containing fruits and spices, pancakes and fritters and side dishes of sauces, pickles and catsups. Salads or “sallats” were served more often with supper and also added as a table decoration. Desserts were the second course—custards, fresh cooked or dried fruits, tarts sweetmeats, pound cakes, gingerbread, spice and cheese cakes.

Affluent Northerners ate shortly after noon, and Southern planters ate later after the slaves and laborers had been fed.

Supper for the early settlers was either non-existent or a light bedtime snack of leftovers or gruel, a mixture of boiling water and oats or corn meal. Some ate roasted potatoes prepared with salt and no butter. Richer people had side dishes of eggs.

Licensed Colonial American taverns or “public houses” were regulated by law. Food, which was usually included with the price of the room, consisted of whatever the tavern keeper had available for his family. Meals were designated “good” or “common.”

Eighteenth-century taverns served such fare as peanut soup, corn bread-stuffed quail and wild boar sausage, bubble and squeak, which was puffs of whipped potatoes and cabbage fried crisp with browned flour gravy, and syllabub with fresh berries, a favorite colonial Virginia dessert featuring wine-laced cream whipped to a froth, seasoned with lemon zest and garnished with seasonal berries.

Congressman Samuel Read wrote his wife in 1775: “We sit in Congress generally till half-past three o'clock, and once till five o'clock, and then I dine at City Tavern, where a few of us have established a table for each day in the week, save Saturday when there is a general dinner....A dinner is ordered for the number, eight, and whatever is deficient of that number is to be paid for at two shillings and six pence a head, and each that attends pays only the expense of the day.

Mary Chew, who became the wife of William Paca (a signer of the Declaration of Independence) wrote the following in her journal in 1765: “As good a test of flour as can be had at sight, is to take up a handful and squeeze it tight; if good, when the hand is unclasped, the lines on the palm of the hand will be plainly defined on the ball of flour. Throw a little lump of dried flour against a smooth surface, if it falls like powder, it is bad.”

Bread Recipe

"Take Three Pounds of Double-Refined Sugar beaten and then sifted, and Four Pounds of Fine Flour; Mix together and let them dry by the fire as the other materials are prepared. Then take Four Pounds of Fresh Butter, beat with Wood Spoon until Soft and Creamy. Then beat Thirty-Five Fresh Eggs, and leave out Sixteen Whites, Strain off Eggs from the Shells, And Beat them and the Butter together till all look like Butter. Then Put in Four or Five spoonfuls of Orange-Flower Water or Rose Water, and Beat more. Now take the Flour and Sugar, with Six Ounces of Caraway Seeds, and Strew them in by degrees, Beating it up all the while for Two Hours together. Put in as much as you want of Amber-Grease or Tincture of Cinnamon. Butter your Hoop, and leave to Stand three Hours in a Moderate Oven. Carefully Observe Always, when Beating Butter, to do it with a Cool Hand and Beat it Always one way in Deep Earthen Dish."

Meats and fish found in Early American Recipes – beef, mutton/lamb/veal, ox, pork/ham/bacon, turkey, deer, dunghill fowls, chicken, goose, duck, wild duck snipes, partridge, pigeons, hair, leveret, rabbit, turtle, flounder, bass, cod, haddock, eel, oyster, lobster, shad, salmon

Fruit—pears, apples, currants, black currants, frost/chicken grapes (native to America), muscadines, scuppernongs, gooseberries, raspberries, blackberries, plums, strawberries, quinces, figs, mulberries, apricots, peaches, cherries

Herbs—thyme, sweet marjoram, summer savory (used in sausages, beef and legs of pork), sage, parsley, Penny Royal (aromatic used in cookery and medicine)

Roots and vegetables—potatoes, onions, beets, parsnips, carrots, garlic, asparagus, parsley, radish, artichokes, cucumbers, melons, muskmelons, lettuce, cabbage, beans (clabboard, Windsor, crambury, frost, lazy, English, white calivance), peas (Crown Imperial, Crown, Rondeheval, Carlton, Marrow Fats, Sugar Pea, Spanish Manratto), pumpkin

Indians ate mostly corn, squash, and beans—called the “three sisters.”

Miscellaneous

- bladder and leather were stretched over the mouths of jars to secure contents against air and bugs
- bread peel was a universal gift to a bride (luck-bearing)
- “frumenty” – hulled wheat cooked in milk and seasoned with spices and sugar
- “going a-leafing” was a phrase used for baking bread; bread was often baked in pans or sometimes set on cabbage leaves or oak leaves
- “jagging iron” or “doughspur”—instrument used for ornamenting pastry in the form of a toothed wheel, set in a handle
- “lade”—to transfer as with a ladle or scoop
- “orange flower water” – a liquid distilled from orange blossoms
- “pearlash” – a salt obtained from the ashes of plants
- “pippin” – a variety of apple
- “syllabub” or “sillabub” – mixture of milk or cream with wine, cider or other acid, usually whipped to a froth
- “grog,” also called “draught”—mixture of water, beer, and rum and served in navies (Colonial and British) twice a day
- hogshead of rum—63 gallons

Money/Currency

- In 1770, the American colonies were British, so they used pence, schillings, and pounds
- 12 pennies or "pence" equal one schilling.
- 20 schillings make up a pound
- 240 silver pennies equal a pound of silver or pound sterling

Ship's Bells

(wikipedia)

Bells would be struck every half-hour, and in a pattern of pairs for easier counting, with any odd bells at the end of the sequence.

<i>Number of bells</i>	<i>Bell Pattern</i>	<i>Hour (a.m. and p.m.)</i>		
One bell	.	12:30	4:30	8:30
Two bells	..	1:00	5:00	9:00
Three bells	1:30	5:30	9:30
Four bells	2:00	6:00	10:00
Five bells	2:30	6:30	10:30
Six bells	3:00	7:00	11:00
Seven bells	3:30	7:30	11:30
Eight bells	4:00	8:00	12:00