

## New Salem (Mass.) General Store Daybook

1841 June-1845 Aug.

1 vol. (0.2 linear foot)

Call no.: MS 1090 bd



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A town at the eastern periphery of Franklin County, Mass., New Salem was incorporated in 1753 and has never strayed far from its rural roots. In the 1840s, agriculture supplied much of the town's work, supplemented by lumbering, hide tanning, and a cottage industry in palm-leaf hats, of which over 79,000 were manufactured in 1837 alone.

Although this daybook covers only a brief span of four years, it offers a fascinating glimpse into the vibrancy of a country store in antebellum Western Massachusetts. The store's owner is not recorded, however the names of dozens of men and women from New Salem appear as purchasers of small quantities of consumable goods and the occasional luxury items like peppermint and candy. The last several pages of the ledger include accounts for particularly active customers, including several who supplied the

store with large numbers of palm-leaf hats, which the store's owner may have exported, and records of receipt for various kinds of paper, almanacs, toy books, and textbooks in mathematics and spelling.

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## Background on New Salem

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## Scope of collection

Although this daybook covers only a brief span of four years, it offers a fascinating glimpse into the vibrancy of a country store in antebellum Western Massachusetts. The store's owner is not recorded, however the names of dozens of men and women from New Salem appear as purchasers of small quantities of goods such as tobacco, tea, sugar, molasses, saleratus, oil, flour, butter, and cheese, durable goods such as shot, powder, and caps, and occasionally nails. The store did a smaller, but regular custom in perishable goods such as rhubarb, grapes, lemons and oranges, ginger, eggs, cod, mackerel, and shad; along with occasional luxury items like peppermint and candy. The last several pages of the ledger include accounts for particularly active customers, several of whom traded large quantities of hats (presumably palm-leaf hats), suggesting that the owner of the store may have been had a role in trading the hats more extensively. Interestingly, the store also sold moleskin hats at \$3 each.

Two sets of entries in the volume stand out for particular interest. First, several of the accounts are established under the names of women. These typically center on the sale of cloth (flannel, Cambric, drill, gingham, sheeting, and in one case, cashmere), buttons, and thread. Secondly, the store dealt large quantities of bags to the firm S. and W.G. Cutting, who returned almanacs, reams of paper, wrapping paper, "Emerson spelling books," toy books, "Emerson arithmetic book," and copies of the Worcester Banner.

Despite uncertainty over the identity of the store owner, the customers' names suggest strongly that the store was located in New Salem, and perhaps in North New Salem. Several of the customers in the volume appear in the 1840 census, including Edward Bullard (a particularly frequent customer), Asa S. Adams, Bliss Curtis, Salmon Curtis, Moses Drury, Emerson Fay, William W. Pierce, Dexter Phillips, Amos K. Smith, William Woodbury, and Lowell Vorse. Bullard, Adams, and Fay all lived in North New Salem along with Haskells and Haskins, who also populate the ledger.

Among the few customers who can be shown not to have lived in New Salem in 1840, Levi Pratt and Perez Furbush lived just over the border to the north in Orange, while Chaney Morse was a resident of Prescott, the town immediately south. One individual, Obed H. Washburn, was listed in Springfield, however his daughter Lucy M. Washburn was living in New Salem in 1840, and is recorded as dying there that September.

## Administrative information

### Access

The collection is open for research.

### Provenance

Acquired from M&S Rare Books, May 2006 (2006-072).

### Bibliography

Florence Cogswell Cox, *History of New Salem, Massachusetts, 1753-1953*. Amherst, Mass. : Hamilton I. Newell, 1953.

### Processing Information

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### Language:

English

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