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John Breck Account Book

1801-1810

1 box (0.1 linear feet)

Call no.: MS 196 bd



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A prominent storekeeper in Northampton, Mass., at the turn of the nineteenth century, John Breck was born on April 20, 1770. Starting in business with his father as Robert Breck and Son from their store at the corner of Main and King Streets, Breck thrived dealing in "English and Hardware Goods" and "crockery and Glass ware." According to historian Nancy Goynes Evans, he was recorded working with blacksmith Seth Pomeroy in 1800 supplying chair makers with imported and domestic turning tools..

Labeled on the cover "Petty debts B, Iron Accounts," this volume of accounts includes records of a substantial business in selling iron and steel at the turn of the nineteenth century. Although the owner of the book is nowhere recorded, it has very tentatively been assigned to John Breck based on his signature on p. 101 (and p. 49), settling an account with the clockmaker Nathan Storrs. Most of the entries are brief, often for petty sums and often cryptic in nature, however a significant number note the sale of iron or occasionally steel.

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Background on John Breck

A prominent storekeeper in Northampton, Mass., at the turn of the nineteenth century, John Breck was born on April 20, 1770. Starting in business with his father as Robert Breck and Son from their store at the corner of Main and King Streets, Breck thrived dealing in "English and Hardware Goods" and "crockery and Glass ware." According to historian Nancy Goyne Evans, he was recorded working with blacksmith Seth Pomeroy in 1800 supplying chair makers with imported and domestic turning tools. Breck also invested in land in the Western Reserve, where his family helped settle the town of Brecksville, Ohio.

Active and ambitious, Breck served as the first postmaster in Northampton (1792-1797) and he was associated with the Second Aqueduct Company in 1809. He and his wife Clarissa Allen had four children before his death in 1827.

Scope of collection

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Although the location of the account book is also not recorded, it can more certainly be located in the Connecticut River Valley of Massachusetts and almost certainly in Northampton. Many of the clients recorded in the volume are clustered in the area in and around Northampton, including in Westhampton, Easthampton, Southampton, Williamsburgh, and Worthington; with others located east of the River (Amherst, Belchertown, Hadley, New Salem); northward to Whately, Greenfield, and Conway; and into the Berkshires at Cummington, Chesterfield, Goshen, and Pittsfield. Several notable Northampton residents appear -- notably without the town being noted -- including the physician Harvey Frink (p.33), Maj. Seth Pomeroy (p.71), Col. Charles Chapman (p.62), and the clockmaker Storrs (p.101). The accounts indicate the Breck rented his shop to Frink.

Administrative information

Access

The collection is open for research.

Provenance

Gift of George Chigas, Sept. 1987.

Bibliography

On Breck, see James Russell Trumbull, *History of Northampton, Massachusetts: From Its Settlement*, Vol. 2. Northampton, 1902.

Nancy Goyne Evans, *Windsor-chair Making in America: From Craft Shop to Consumer*. University Press of New England.

Related Material

Three of John Breck's daybooks (1794-1795, 1803-1808) are part of the collections at Witnerthur

Processing Information

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Search terms

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