



## Champion and Stebbins Family Account Books

1753-1865

5 boxes, 8 volumes (2 linear ft.)

Call no.: MS 228

### Collection overview

Account books from the Champion and Stebbins families of Saybrook, Connecticut and West Springfield, Massachusetts, who were involved in various businesses and professional activities. Includes lists of accounts by surname, services rendered, methods of payment, entries for treatments and remedies, lists of patients, and lists of banking activities. Volumes were kept by Reuben Champion (1720-1777), Jere Stebbins (1757-1817), and Reuben Champion, M.D. (1784-1865).

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### Scope of collection

The account books kept by members of the Champion and Stebbins families of Saybrook, Connecticut and West Springfield, Massachusetts document account transactions of various businesses and professional activities. The ledger (1753-1777) of general store merchant, medical practitioner, shipping and marine merchant Reuben Champion lists accounts by surname, services rendered and method of payment. Daybook (1785-1787) of businessman and general store merchant Jere Stebbins of West Springfield, Massachusetts chronicles transactions with store customers, many of whom were women, and his activities as a local banker lending and collecting cash. Account books (1809-1865) of physician Reuben Champion of West Springfield, Massachusetts include entries for treatment and remedies listed chronologically with little patient information, in addition to personal account information relating to boarders in his home, farm services accepted as credit, and pasture rentals.

Champion recorded very little personal information about patients in these books and usually noted simply that he had been called in, without recording the reason. The cases which he did note frequently include broken bones, "ulcers" (swellings), "parturition" (childbirth), and extracting teeth. Champion followed the homeopathic school of medicine, which relied on purges, emetics, and bleeding, and frequently recorded his treatments. His medicines ranged from asafetida to zinc powders, including arsenic, hemlock, magnesia and mercury. He also

prescribed patent medicines such as "Bateman's Drops," and occasionally treated horses.

Patients or their families frequently earned credit by working Champion's land. He also profited from loaning out horses or oxen, and by selling wood. Many transactions were cash, but he accepted a variety of goods as credit. "Strained honey" appears frequently, as do shoes and clothes.

Champion's list of patients remained fairly steady over the years, among them some African-Americans and many women. Frequent patients included Elijah Ashley, Aaron Bagg, Petatiah Bliss, Reuben and Moses Champion, Martin Ely, and Jere Stebbins families.

### **Arrangement**

This collection is organized into three series:

- Series 1. Reuben Champion Ledger, 1753-1777
- Series 2. Jere Stebbins Daybook, 1785-1787
- Series 3. Reuben Champion Daybooks, 1809-1865

## **Detailed contents**

### *Series Descriptions:*

<b>Series 1. Reuben Champion</b>	<b>1720-1777</b>	<b>1 volume</b>
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**Contents:** The account book of Reuben Champion covers twenty-five years of activity in Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts. He was a general merchant, medical practitioner, and marine merchant. Champion's activities centered in Saybrook, Connecticut, where his family had originally settled in the 1640s. Stephen Champion, Reuben's father, appears in the accounts, but there is little information about the family's history. Reuben married Lydia Duncan, and the couple had six children. He served as a surgeon in the Revolutionary War, dying at Fort Ticonderoga in 1777.

Champion's single-volume account book covers the years from 1753 to 1777. Only fragments of the covers remain, and many of the pages are torn. At least three are missing. The pages are numbered in the upper left corners, from 1-130. The last six pages are unnumbered.

The types of accounts vary widely. Each is headed with the date, and sometimes with the place of the transaction. The accounts are listed under individual's names. They are not chronological, as in a daybook. Rather, each entry may cover a period of time ranging from a week to several months. Some include credits and debits in the same listing. Each account was "reckoned" and totaled at some point, and signed by Champion and the customer/patient. Some entries cover a single business venture, such as the building of the sloop "Dolphin." Many of the accounts deal only with Champion's medical charges. He also used the book for his personal accounts.

The book shows a wide range of activities. Champion spent many days and nights with patients. His practice covered sore feet to injured heads. As a merchant, he sold almost anything, from sheep to tea. Chocolate was popular with his customers. Champion was also involved with shipping and shipping trade. With Captain Elijah Atwood, he organized and financed trips to Rhode Island. Several sloops besides the "Dolphin" appear in the accounts. In Saybrook, Champion also listed payments for timberwork and for building houses.

Goods, services, and cash were all accepted as payments. Champion listed feathers, sugar, and barrels as credits. Sewing and timbering also earned credits. The accounts reflect a confused currency situation. At least three different currencies are mentioned: "old tenor," "boston," and "yorck." The account settlements specified which type of currency should be used to pay the balance.

Names appearing frequently include Elijah Atwood, Edward Beebe, Hezekiah Buckingham, John Dennison, and Samuel and Benjamin Pratt. Only two women signed the account balances, at least one of whom was a widow.

In the early 1800s the blank spaces in the book were filled by Champion's grandchildren. They practiced their alphabets and signatures, and copied out letters and legal forms. Sometimes they wrote over the original entries. Champion left the last six pages blank, and they were entirely filled by his grandchildren.

This account book is an excellent source of economic information. It gives a clear picture of economic life and activities in the late colonial period. It is especially valuable given Champion's wide-ranging activities.

**Contents:** Jere Stebbins played an important role in the economic life of West Springfield from the 1780s to the 1810s. He was born in 1757, the son of Benjamin Stebbins. He married Elizabeth Brewster in 1779, and they had seven children. One daughter, Pama, married into the Champion family. Stebbins died in West Springfield in 1817.

As a businessman, Stebbins invested in many different ventures. With Moses Day he shipped goods (including his own) up and down the Connecticut River. He owned a pottery which produced earthenware crockery and building tiles. His crockery was sold locally and shipped to Connecticut. Stebbins owned a store and a tavern as well. There are also references in the account book to a potash mill, which probably produced soap, salt and saltpeter (used to make gunpowder).

The account book covers the years 1785-1787. It deals mostly with Stebbins' store, though it does contain information about his other businesses. It is a daybook, with final debits and credits recorded elsewhere. Only the first twenty-six pages are numbered. The accounts are calculated in pounds, shillings and pence, with one reference to "New York currency." The book is strictly for business, containing no personal notations.

Stebbins sold a wide variety of goods. Rum, tea, earthenware, molasses and soap were the goods most frequently purchased. Fabrics were also in constant demand. Stebbins sold goods produced by others, such as books and shoes. He sometimes sold the materials for a product to one person, and the finished product to another. He accepted almost anything in credit, including one orange and mugs of toddy. Grain, ashes, and work were the predominant means of credit. His accounts give a clear picture of the variety of goods and services available at this time. Cash transactions were infrequent; in effect, Stebbins was part of a barter economy. He did act as a local banker, lending cash and collecting on notes. Accounts were sometimes debited to cash, which may indicate a withdrawal from credit accounts. Many credit entries specified a date for repayment, and the specific means. Again, grain was the most common means.

A list of Stebbin's customers represents some of the oldest families in West Springfield. These include Moses Ashley, Petatiah Bliss, Reuben and Moses Champion, Jacob and Moses Day, and Israel Willston. Military titles were common, a reminder of the Revolutionary War. Personal notes on the accounts indicate that Stebbins knew some of his customers well. He usually noted who placed or received an order. Women appear frequently, some listed as widows, some under "Miss." Others are simply named, and it is unclear if they were independent. Some are identified only as wives of customers.

This account book is an important source for studying the economic life of the Connecticut River valley. It illustrates a range of economic activities, for both Stebbins and his customers. Yet it also emphasizes the importance of agriculture. The accounts could be used to chart prices and spending habits over these years.

**Series 3. Reuben Champion, M.D.**

**1784-1865**

**6 volumes**

**Contents:** Dr. Reuben Champion was born in West Springfield in 1784. His family moved there during the Revolutionary War, settling into farming and business. Champion attended a private academy in Westfield and then went on to study medicine. In Westfield he studied with a local doctor. He also took courses at Dartmouth and in New York City. In 1809 Champion opened a practice in West Springfield. Problems soon developed with patients who objected to his innovative medical techniques, but Dr. Champion eventually overcame their objections and became an important figure in the town. In 1815 he married Pama, the eldest daughter of Jere Stebbins. The couple had two children. Champion became involved in local and state politics, serving as a justice of the peace and in the state senate. He acquired substantial property, which was valued at \$5000 in the 1850 census. In his later years, Champion spent less and less time with medicine, though it is unclear if this was by choice. He turned his attention to farming. He died in 1865 at age 81.

The six account books span fifty-six years, from the opening of his practice to his death. The series is not a continuous one, with the biggest break between 1841 and 1857 (see below). The first book (1809-1812) was later used as a scrapbook and newspaper articles were pasted over the original entries. This book has been unbound, the newsclippings removed, and the pages placed together in a separate box. Some of the clippings have been retained as examples. The books are all daybooks, with chronological entries. The last pages of all the books were used to figure boarding accounts and pasture rentals. There are fragments of bills scattered through the five books, and a letter which was used as scrap paper in the sixth volume (1857-1865). The books also contained dried flower and plant specimens. These have been removed and placed in a separate box.

Volume 1	1809 Sept. 1- ca.1812 June 1
Volume 2	1812 May 7- 1814 Jan. 9
Volume 3	1815 July 8- 1817 Feb. 8
Volume 4	1820 Sept. 28- 1823 Dec. 8
Volume 5	1837 July 17- 1841 Dec. 25
Volume 6	1857 Nov. 4- 1865 Oct. 2
Letters	1809-1820

## Administrative information

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### Access

The collection is open for research.

### Provenance

Acquired from Louis Greenbaum

### Processing Information

Processed by Lisa May, May 1989.

### Language:

English

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## Search terms

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### Subjects

- African Americans--Massachusetts--West Springfield--History
- Agriculture--Economic aspects--Massachusetts--History
- Atwood, Elijah
- Barter--Massachusetts--West Springfield--History
- Champion, Reuben, 1727-1777--Finance, Personal
- Champion, Reuben, 1727-1777.
- Champion, Reuben, 1784-1865
- Connecticut River Valley--Economic conditions--18th century
- Connecticut--Economic conditions
- Farmers--Massachusetts--History
- General stores--Massachusetts--History
- Homeopathic physicians--Massachusetts--History
- Homeopathy--Materia medica and therapeutics--History
- Massachusetts--Economic conditions
- Medicine--Practice--Massachusetts--History
- Pottery industry--Massachusetts--History
- Rhode Island--Economic conditions
- Saybrook (Conn.)--History
- Shipping--New England--History
- Stebbins, Jere, 1757-1817
- West Springfield (Mass.)--Economic conditions
- West Springfield (Mass.)--History
- West Springfield (Mass.)--Social conditions
- Women--Massachusetts--West Springfield--History

### Contributors

- Champion and Stebbins Families **[main entry]**

### Genres and formats

- Account books
- Daybooks

### Link to similar SCUA collections

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