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Bela Burnett Accounts

1801-1842

1 volume

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A storeowner, farmer, and citizen of Granby, Mass., Bela Burnett was born October 4, 1778, the second of seven children of Jonathan and Mehitabel (Dickinson) Burnett. Having relocated from Southampton, New York, to Battleboro, Vermont, in 1770, Jonathan and Mehitabel settled in Granby in 1774, purchasing the farm of Aaron Nash where in 2010, Burnett descendants still live. Burnett had at least five children by two marriages, first to Clarissa Warner (1801) and second to Sally Allen (1808). Burnett died in Granby on April 16, 1846.

The Burnett account book includes careful records of goods sold, customers' accounts, and the form and method of payment (cash, credit, or barter), as well as some information on family members and boarders, along with a handful of miscellaneous items laid in, such as calculations, notes, and a remedy for yellow jaundice.

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Background on Bela Burnett

A storeowner, farmer, and citizen of Granby, Mass., Bela Burnett was born October 4, 1778, the second of seven children of Jonathan and Mehitabel (Dickinson) Burnett. Having relocated from Southampton, New York, to Battleboro, Vermont, in 1770, Jonathan and Mehitabel settled in Granby in 1774, purchasing the farm of Aaron Nash where in 2010, Burnett descendants still live.

In 1801, Bela married Clarissa Warner (ca.1780-1807), with whom he had a daughter, Clarissa, who died in infancy, and two sons, Bela Jr. and Stoughton (b.1807). A year after Clarissa's death, Bela married Sally Allen, with whom he had two daughters, Clarissa and Sallena, and less certainly, two more sons. Burnett died in Granby on April 16, 1846.

Scope of collection

Burnett's account book includes records of transactions for a typical general store in rural western Massachusetts. Many of Burnett's customers were credited by doing farm work for Burnett, including hoeing, planting, picking corn, carting, threshing, mowing, and chopping wood. He sold a wide variety of goods, ranging from dairy products such as cheese, milk, and butter to veal, mutton, bacon and beef, fruit and vegetables like cucumbers, onions, apples, turnips, watermelons and pumpkins according to season. Burnett also sold an array of other goods, such as ox bows, weaving cloth, plaster, tallow, brick, bushels of oats and rye, straw and cider, mittens, woolen shirts, and feathers. One customer, Stephen Burnett, seems to have been a shoemaker as his usual purchases were shoelaces and upper leather and calfskin.

Customers paid in cash as well as kind and many of his customers performed farm work as credit. Some kept yearlings and other animals for Burnett; David Smith kept 31 hogs once. He accepted credit in the form of horse and cart transport to the neighboring towns of Ludlow or Belchertown. Other customers traded shirts, mittens, or stockings as payment for purchases. Along with the income from his store, Burnett also took boarders; only Mary Nash boarded for more than a year and in 1836, he paid for Dr. Ingram to see her while she was sick. Burnett and each customer signed every transaction but on several occasions there is the signature of Tim A.P. Marsh who was also a customer, and apparently either a trusted confidante or partner.

Burnett assigned most customers a number, and the ledger lists 38 regulars among a total of approximately 50 customers. Although Burnett or his store do not appear in published Granby histories, a few of his customers were prominent men in society. Asa Robbins, customer 31, owned the first woolen mill in Granby until it failed in 1837 due to his involvement in the building of the West Church. The same David Smith that kept hogs for Burnett was also Representative of Hampshire County in 1820 and postmaster. Joseph Dickinson, Chester Smith, Joseph Mason and Giles Montague were all Selectmen of Granby sometime during the period from 1815-1835.

A number of loose pieces of paper include calculations by Burnett regarding his accounts, with a few containing other bits of information, ranging from Burnett's notice that he had discovered a stray pig in his enclosure and requesting the owner to take it away and pay damages, to a newspaper clipping from the *Springfield Gazette* in 1820 with advertisements for imported goods such as Jamaica Spirit, Holland Gin, Souchong tea and English kettles. The reverse side is from "The Retort Romantic" that contains a note of Caution from W.M. Robinson about his 'stray' wife and an answer from her. There is also a summons by George III to Jesse Warner of Wilbraham, who owed Charles 10 pounds. Another loose leaf seems to be a remedy for yellow jaundice that includes ingredients such as goose dung, saffron, Barbary bark and insects.

On the last page of his ledger, Burnet kept account of his family members, and the ledger contains some occasional family notices. Although it remains uncertain whether Burnett and his second wife had children after 1810, the 1830 census lists two males of the household between the ages of 10 and 15. A loose piece of paper in the ledger makes note of the death of one Jonathan Burnett who died in May of 1826, and this same piece of paper makes note of the death of the widow Mary Nash in 1839 at the age of 85. Mary Nash was listed in the ledger as a boarder and the 1810-1830 censuses list an elderly female in the household.

Administrative information

Access

The collection is open for research.

Provenance

Processing Information

Processed by Sihla Tumkaya, 2003.

Language:

English

Acknowledgments

Encoding funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

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Cite as: Bela Burnett Accounts (MS 385 bd). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

Search terms

Subjects

Agricultural laborers--Massachusetts--Granby--19th century.

Boardinghouses--Massachusetts--Granby--History--19th century.

Burnett, Bela, 1778-1841.

Farmers--Massachusetts--Granby--19th century.

Food prices--Massachusetts--Granby--19th century.

General stores--Massachusetts--Granby--19th century.

Granby (Mass.)--Economic conditions--19th century.

Jaundice.

Marsh, Tim A. P.

Medicine--Formulae, receipts, prescriptions.

Produce trade--Massachusetts--Granby--19th century.

Contributors

Burnett, Bela [main entry]

Genres and formats

Account books.

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