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Ebenezer Bailey Papers

1852-1882

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Ebenezer Bailey was a wholesale shoe purchaser and distributor from Massachusetts. The collection comprises just over 100 items, the bulk of which are receipts for the purchase and sale of shoes and slippers, covering the period from 1852 to 1882.

Background on Ebenezer Bailey

As far back as Colonial times, the manufacture of boots and shoes was an important industry in New England. Over time, shoe production evolved from a home industry to a fully mechanized factory industry, stimulated by the invention in the late 1850s of machinery used to attach soles to footwear. Massachusetts was home to major shoe production centers, predominately in Essex, Norfolk, Plymouth, and Worcester counties. As the number of factories increased, a concomitant growth in labor occurred, resulting in the birth of labor unions and culminating in "The Great Shoemakers' Strike" of 1860, which originated in Lynn.

A parallel evolution took place within the industry itself, as the need for footwear changed. Demand for working-man's "brogans"

was followed by demand for soldiers' boots in times of war, and eventually supplanted by a call for everyday and luxury footwear for women and children.

Boston, once renowned for its leather industry, ceased to be a center for shoe manufacturing by the turn of the 19th century. Nonetheless, the outlying towns of Beverly, Lynn, and Marblehead remained centers of shoe manufacturing for some time. It has been estimated that around 1890, one-third of Beverly's work force was employed in the manufacture of shoes.

Scope of collection

Ebenezer C. Bailey was a wholesale shoe purchaser and distributor. The collection comprises just over 100 items, the bulk of which are receipts for the purchase and sale of shoes and slippers, covering the period from 1852 to 1882.

A number of dealer names appear repeatedly in the records. Bailey appears to have done frequent business with J. J. Dearborn in the 1850s, with William C. Lefavour of Boston and Marblehead from 1876 to 1877, and with W. W. Deming of Boston from 1877 to 1878. Lefavour's letterhead boasts "Manufacturer of All Kinds of Misses' and Children's Boots and Shoes." The Hooper family business in Marblehead appears in multiple receipts from 1876 to 1878.

Although the collection sheds little light on the full extent of travel involved in Bailey's business, correspondence indicates that he made trips as far outside New England as St. Louis and St. Paul, for example a St. Paul dealer articulates a need and desire for prime ladies "sheneille" slippers. A note on letterhead from the Carnahan, Earl & Co., Book Shoe and Leather House in Lafayette, Indiana, refers to Bailey's "next" visit.

A few notes address debt collection in an interesting way. An 1861 note from Emory Walker describes the difficulty of collecting payment: "...here it is impossible to get a debt of a good man when it is due, but friend Bailey if the money is not there in season I will satisfy you for all your trouble." Demonstrating the timeless nature of excuses, an 1875 plea from L. H. Emery requests extra time to remit payment because he is tending to his mother who is ill.

Particularly striking about these financial records is the element of respect and even comradarie which appears periodically. An 1855 note from J.J. Dearborn of Deerfield warns Bailey to avoid specific parties who would make poor business risks: "Hold on for the best of customers," advises Dearborn. This same wholesaler further advises "Friend Bailey" to price certain boots at about \$75, "But don't miss selling these if you have a fair offer." Another note laments a missed connection in Salem but looks forward to a future visit and a water excursion, while a different note acknowledges receipt of damaged goods, but promises to set them aside for Bailey's inspection at a later date.

Also of interest is an 1870 invoice from Charles B. Lord, Slipper Manufacturer, Lynn, which includes the following solicitation: "My goods without doubt will seem the best for the money of any ... in the country ... Your orders will be attended to and filled to your entire satisfaction every time."

The sales and purchase receipts as a whole provide information about the price of slippers and shoes in the three decades covered by the collection. Nonetheless, a pattern emerges in Bailey's business of movement away from men's shoes and boots and towards shoes for women and children. Whether this is a winding down of his own business or merely a reflection of a natural shift remains unclear. It is also unclear whether the sporadic clusters of dated receipts indicate anything about Bailey's business status, or is simply the result of uneven record-keeping. Still, some information is available. In terms of pricing, an 1873 receipt puts the retail cost of ladies kid button shoes at \$5.50 and \$7.50. Most of the receipts, however, are for wholesale amounts, in case quantity. Late 1870s receipts reveal the cost of 10 cases of misses and children's shoes and slippers to be \$21.00 per case, and a purchase of 72 pairs of children's calf button gloves at \$.45 each totals \$33.00.

Very few items in the collection illuminate Bailey's personal life, but a couple of items offer enticing possibilities. While no specific mention is made of family life, a letter to Bailey from Clara B. Perry professes a daughter's love for her "papa" and accepts his invitation to shop with him in Boston. Some receipts for personal household items in the name of Clara B. Perry and Clara B. Griffin - possibly her married name - indicate gifts or support. Moreover, some items suggest that periodic payments were made to Richard Woodhull of Bangor, Maine. The tone of a letter from Woodhull suggests these payments were a kindness as much as an obligation: "... for your favor of July 1st [1873], inclosing check for one hundred dollars on account of Mrs. Mary E. Perry." Woodhull's letter proceeds to request that future payments be directed to Sarah F. Woodhull, "mother of Mary E. Perry," because of imminent death: "Indeed it seems probable that before the end of another month I shall be gone. May the blessing of God abide with you and with all who survive."

Inventory

Correspondence and Receipts, Personal

1862-1880

Box 1: 1

Receipts, Business

1852-1859

Box 1: 2

Receipts, Business

1860-1869

Box 1: 3

Receipts, Business

1870-1882

Box 1: 4

Receipts, Tax

1873-1880

Box 1: 5

Administrative information

Access

The collection is open for research.

Provenance

Purchased from Peter Masi in March 2005.

Processing Information

Processed by Jane Babcock, December 2005.

Bibliography

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Language:

English

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Search terms

Subjects

Bailey, Ebenezer

Dearborn, J. J.

Shoe industry--Massachusetts--Lynn

Shoe industry--New England--History--19th century

Contributors

Bailey, Ebenezer [main entry]

Genres and formats

Business records--Massachusetts

Receipts (Financial records)--Massachusetts



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