

A Guide to the Mercer Salt Works Business Records, 1851-1856

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A Collection in the Library of Virginia Augusta County (Va.) Reel 247/Barcodes 1178180, 1178188, 1178317, 1178337, 1178921, 0007278958

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Descriptive Summary

Collection numbers

Augusta County (Va.) Reel 247/Barcodes 1178180, 1178188, 1178317, 1178337, 1178921, 0007278958

Language

English

Collector

Augusta County (Va.) Circuit Court

Physical Characteristics

6 v. and 1 microfilm reel

Location

State Records Center - Archives Annex, Library of Virginia

Repository

The Library of Virginia

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

Use Restrictions

For Wood Account and Negro Clothing Ledger, 1851-1856, use microfilm copy, Augusta County (Va.) Reel 247.

Acquisition Information

These items came to the Library of Virginia in transfers of court papers from Augusta County under the accession numbers 43658 and 43836.

Preferred Citation

Mercer Salt Works Business Records, 1851-1856. Local government records collection, Augusta County Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Va. 23219.

Historical Information

The Mercer Salt Works, one of the major suppliers of salt to West Virginia, was located at the junction of New River and Lick Creek in Mercer County, West Virginia, which is now in Summers County, West Virginia. The salt works employed white laborers and hired slaves to work the furnace. Several slaves were hired from Augusta County, Va. residents, including slaves hired of Thomas J. Michie and Alexander Turk. The salt works was destroyed on 10 August 1862 by the 23rd Ohio Regiment under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Rutherford B. Hayes, who was stationed at Camp Green Meadows near the Bluestone River.

Scope and Content

The Mercer Salt Works Business Records consist of a daybook, a Salt A Ledger, a Ledger E, a cashbook, a Wood Account and Negro Clothing Ledger, and an account ledger.

Daybook, 1851-1856, records transactions on a daily basis as they occurred. Transactions recorded document purchases of salt and cash received to settle customer account balances. Information found in each entry includes the date and type of transaction, name of customer, and monies credited and debited to the customer's account. Each transaction was recorded under the customer's name in the corresponding Salt A Ledger. In addition, the amounts of cash received for salt on a given day were totaled and entered into the corresponding cashbook. Included in the back of the ledger is a listing of the dates that it snowed in 1853 and 1854.

Salt A Ledger, 1851-1856, records the accounts of individual customers. Each customer account includes separate entries for purchases and payments. Purchases were not detailed, as they were recorded in the daybook, but rather include the amount purchased, the price per unit, and the total purchase price for the transaction. However details were provided for the payments toward account balances. Mercer Salt Works accepted cash and the occasional bartered item such as tobacco for payments. Several customer accounts include notations that payments were sent out for collection, and unpaid accounts were noted with such details as "absconded" or "dead and estate insolvent." Also, company entries are recorded throughout the ledger under entries for cash accounts and produce accounts. Specific details for company expenditures can be found in the corresponding daybook and cashbook.

Ledger E, 1852-1856, records the purchases made at the salt works' store by customers and employees. Information found in each account includes the date of transactions, merchandise purchased, and the monies debited and credited to the account. Items purchased at the store include bacon, flour, coffee, cloth, tobacco, hardware, and shoes. Customer accounts often document the salt purchases transferred to the customer's salt account which can be located in the corresponding Salt A Ledger and daybook. The Mercer Salt Works store accepted cash and bartered items (produce, livestock, eggs, etc) as payments from its customers. Several customer accounts also contain information concerning slaves hired by the salt works. For example, Thomas J. Michie's account includes a notation where Michie paid the medical bills for his slave Boston and Archibald Turk's account includes a credited amount for the hire of a "girl." Ledger E also records the purchases made by the company's employees. These employee entries are identical to the customer accounts with the exception that labor was the most prominent payment toward account balances. Employees performed such duties as working at the furnace, working at the store, driving cattle, cutting wood, etc. The employee accounts included in the ledger appear to only belong to white laborers employed

at the salt works.

Cashbook, 1852-1856, records the cash received and cash disbursed on an almost daily basis. In each pair of facing book pages, the left page is used to record cash received, while the right page documents cash disbursed. Each entry includes the names of individuals or accounts that the company received cash from and paid cash to. Expenses recorded for the company include the hiring of Negroes (these entries include the owner's name but rarely was the slave's name listed), employee wages, and freight and storage costs. Also, the front of the cashbook chronicles the purchases made for 1852. Entries were arranged according to the item purchased (bacon, corn, beef) and include date of purchase, amounts bought, and amount paid.

The Wood Account and Negro Clothing Ledger, 1851-1856, documents the accounts of slaves hired by the salt works. Slaves who performed work beyond their required tasks were often compensated in cash or in goods purchased from the company's store. Individual accounts record both the work performed by the slaves and items purchased by slaves with their extra wages. Each account lists transactions in chronological order and includes the date, details of the work performed or items purchased, and monies debited and credited to the account. Slave accounts include the slave's name along with their owner's name. One account for "Henry Alexander's woman Susan" includes the conditions of her hire at the rate of thirty dollars and she would be "furnished the usual winter clothing" and the salt works "has the privilege of returning her at any time." Many of the entries for work performed are listed only by the number of days of work, but some entries describe the work performed. Examples of work done by slaves include cutting timber, building stables, building chimneys, and working on the furnace. Slaves were described as purchasing such items as tobacco, coffee, clothing, hats, and boots.

Located at the back of the Wood Account and Negro Clothing Ledger is a record of the amounts of wood chopped by the slave workers for 1852 to 1856. The accounts list the name of slave, the name of the slave owner, the number of days worked, and the amount of wood cut. The accounts for clothing supplied to the slaves were also recorded for the years 1852 to 1856. The accounts include the slave's name, the slave owner's name, and the numbers of pants, shirts, coats, shoes, boots, hats, and blankets provided for each slave.

Ledger, 1851-1856, records the accounts of individual employees who were either hired slaves or white laborers. Each account documents the work performed such as repairing furnace, driving cattle, etc. Wages were provided to white laborers and slaves were compensated for extra work. Both slaves and free workers were paid either in cash or goods purchased from the salt works store or from a local business. Examples of items purchased include bacon, eggs, coffee, butter, tobacco, and shoes. Many of the slave accounts were carried over from the corresponding Wood Account and Negro Clothing Ledger. Several customer accounts are also included in the ledger. These customer accounts include the amounts of salt purchased along with payments received in either cash or items bartered. The customer transactions can also be found in the corresponding daybook.

Index Terms

Corporate Names:

Mercer Salt Works.

Subjects:

African Americans--Employment--Virginia.
African Americans--Employment--West Virginia.
African Americans--Virginia.
African Americans--West Virginia.
Salt industry and trade--Virginia.
Salt industry and trade--West Virginia--Mercer County.
Salt mines and mining--Virginia.
Salt mines and mining--West Virginia--Mercer County.
Slave labor--Virginia.
Slave labor--West Virginia.
Slaves--Virginia.
Slaves--West Virginia.

Geographical Names:

Augusta County (Va.)--History--19th century.
Mercer County (W.Va.)--History--19th century.

Genre and Form Terms:

Business records.
Cashbooks.
Daybooks.
Ledgers (account books).
Local government records--Virginia--Augusta County.

Contents List

Barcode number 1178180: Mercer Salt Works Daybook, 1851-1856

Barcode number 1178317: Mercer Salt Works Wood Account and Negro Clothing Ledger, 1851-1856

Microfilm reel number: Augusta County (Va.) Reel 247: Mercer Salt Works Wood Account and Negro Clothing Ledger, 1851-1856

Barcode number 1178337: Mercer Salt Works Cashbook, 1852-1856

Barcode number 1187921: Mercer Salt Works Salt A Ledger, 1851-1856

Barcode number 1178188: Mercer Salt Works Ledger E, 1852-1856

Barcode number 0007278958: Mercer Salt Works Ledger, 1851-1856