

Sussex County

Anonymous Goochland Merchant's 1838 Account Book (Formerly, Sussex County, Va. Merchant's Account Book)

1770-1771

Title Statement

Sussex CountyGuide to the Sussex County, Va. Merchant's Account Book Mss. MsV Ame1u Oversize

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Profile Description

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Descriptive Summary

Unit ID

Mss. MsV Ame1u Oversize

Unit ID

/repositories/2/resources/2991

Unit Date

1770-1771

Language

English

Extent

0.20 Linear Feet

Repository

Special Collections Research Center

Administrative Information

Conditions Governing Access:

Collection is open to all researchers.

Conditions Governing Use:

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Preferred Citation:

Preferred citation: Anonymous Goochland Merchant's 1838 Account Book, Special Collections Research Center, William & Mary Libraries.

Scope and Contents

Formerly identified as "Account book of an unknown merchant, probably from Sussex County, Virginia. Some accounts include people from Isle of Wight County, Virginia and Surry County, Virginia", updated 6/3/2025.

Below is a summary from Introduction of Transcription by Cheryl Copper 1/9/2024, who identified this as "Anonymous Goochland Merchant's 1838 Account Book".

For \$3.00, the College of William & Mary purchased from L. H. Stoneman the 84-page account book of an unknown merchant. Accessioned January 27, 1940, the document was described as the work of "a bartender and general merchant." The original is at SWEM Library which kindly offered a scanned version for this transcription. The material not only captures the merchant's sales, from late January to December of 1838, but identifies nearly 100 customers and their buying habits in a distinct area of rural Goochland 23 years before the Civil War. With luck and a bit more digging, the community members, where they lived and the merchant could be identified. Daily staples sold in the accounts included meat by the pound, herrings per 100, sacks of salt, sugar, molasses, candy, ginger, almonds, bacon, cheese as well as candles, nails, snuff, a plug of tobacco and coffee. Delia Poor paid \$25.38 for a coffee pot, one of the more expensive purchases that year. Gunpowder, shot and flint were sold for households that provided their own game. Thomas T. Davis put a deposit toward a 'pistol' (pistol) valued at \$12 and a knife for 58 cents. (Let's hope this was not in preparation for the illegal yet popular remedy for an insult to one's honor.) Entertaining involved large amounts of food and refreshments like peppermint, rum, cordials, wine and, in highest demand, whiskey--sold by the half pint, pint, quart, cruet, gallon, gill and barrel. Enhancing wardrobes and providing clothing for enslaved people meant obtaining an array of fabrics, like linen and silk, along with padding, drillings, domestic, calico, cambric, osnaburg, jeans and Kentucky Jeans, sail duck and skeins, spools and bales of thread, cotton yarn, shoe thread as well as bags of buttons. Complementing these were palm hats, cologne, boots, shoes, suspenders, socks, handkerchiefs, combs, umbrellas and shaving soap. Even a looking glass and a plow tip were offered. The volume of fabrics purchased by the Davis household suggests the men were tailors or overseers of a cottage industry. As to other occupations, seven customers were doctors, though they were not generally the ones asking for paregoric, camphor or castor oil. The voluminous inventory, few of which were pre-ordered, coupled with small and large quantities of alcohol, make a case for the merchant's business working out of a store, in conjunction with a tavern/inn/ordinary. In fact, three customer's names were known to run taverns: the George's, Edmund Duke, and Haden—all in the western part of Goochland. With no ready cash in the area, the merchant also acted as a bank and offered credit several times. Installments were made on debts and acknowledgment when paid in full. A ducat gold was lent to John Jenkins. (Other curious terms: a 'quire' of paper, a 'mould' or 'paste boards,' and 'bunch tape' are defined along with an index of people). Taken together, a review of customer's names, taverns, ordinaries, stores, court records and maps would narrow the search for the business' location and the likely merchant. The 1863 Gilpin map of Goochland shows resident's names, and western Goochland has an uncanny number of surnames found in the merchant's book. A peek at an 1840 census, if one can be found for Goochland, might identify tavern or store keepers and the people who ran them. (A change in handwriting and spelling suggest a less experienced and educated assistant—perhaps a spouse, friend, son or daughter--helped with recordkeeping.) Learning more about the provenance may be illuminating. L. H. Stoneman lived in Columbia in Fluvanna County, adjacent to western Goochland. He may have been a collector of ephemeral items, and/or came by the account book through his or his wife's lineage. (See notes on provenance.) Included here are transcription notes, a comment on page headings—there's an anomaly with the word Lifton, the question of where the merchant worked—in a tavern or a store or both, and a following the transcribed accounts, a list in alphabetical order of customers and unusual terms.

Keywords

Account books

Ledgers (Accounting)

Isle of Wight (Va.)--History--18th century

Surry County (Va.)--History--18th century

Sussex County (Va.)--History--18th century

Virginia--History--18th century

Merchants--Virginia--History--18th century

Merchants--Virginia--Isle of Wight County

Merchants--Virginia--Surry County

Description of Subordinate Components

Wrapped account book (Fragile, please use transcription in Item 2.)

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/242157

Unit Date 1770-1771

Mixed Materials Wrapped Ledger

Transcription of Anonymous Goochland Merchant's 1838 Account Book (Jan-Dec) by Cheryl Copper (2024). Includes index of people named and terminology.

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/647338

Mixed materials Wrapped Ledger

Scope and Contents

Please use this transcription in place of the original ledger. See a staff member if original ledger is required.