

Connecticut Historical Society
museum & library

Dr. William Adam account book collection

A Guide to the collection at the Connecticut Historical Society

Collection Overview

Repository:	Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford, Connecticut
Creator :	Adam, William
Title :	Dr. William Adam account book collection
Dates :	1748-1875
Extent :	12 linear feet (48 volumes, 1/2 box)
Location:	Ms 100044
Language:	English

Biographical Sketch

Samuel Forbes (1729-1827) was born in Simsbury, Connecticut, the son of John and Lucy Pierce Forbes. When he first moved to Canaan, Samuel went to work for his father's partner, Richard Seymour, in an iron forge. John Forbes bought the forge in 1751; his son Samuel developed it into a major manufactory along the Blackberry River in Canaan. Along with a general store, Samuel Forbes directed production at the Salisbury furnace and iron works in East Canaan. As part of the firm Pettibone & Forbes, Samuel also owned two ore beds in Salisbury. He owned several blast furnaces in Norfolk, Conn. and a nail mill in nearby Washington, Conn.

John Adam (1714-1802) was born in Scotland and immigrated to Boston in 1737. He married Sarah Leonard of Easton, Massachusetts and later lived in Taunton, Massachusetts, where they had sons John (1755-1826) and Robert (1762-1796), among their other children. In 1794 John Sr. moved to Salisbury, Connecticut.

John Adam Sr.'s son John had been a partner in a slitting mill in Taunton before moving to Canaan, Connecticut in 1780, where he married Abigail, the daughter of Samuel Forbes. The partnership of Forbes & Adam was formed shortly thereafter. By 1785 they had a successful rolling and slitting mill in East Canaan. John and Abigail's children included Samuel F. (1783-1854) and Leonard (1788-1835) who followed their father into the iron trade. Samuel F. Adam is credited as the builder of the first blast furnace in East Canaan.

Additional biographical information can be found in the collection file in the archivist's office. Collections at the CHS related to the iron industry in Connecticut include Cornwall Iron Co. furnace records, labor accounts and a daybook, 1836-1901; papers of Forbes & Adam, 1766-1844; Ebenezer Jenks account book, 1788-1823; Holley & Coffing families of Salisbury family and business correspondence, 1786-1837; the papers of Wilson Clark; and an account book of Ore Hill Mine in Kent, 1789-1803.

Arrangement

An attempt was made to separate the accounts of Samuel Forbes, John Adam Sr. and John Adam from those of the firm Forbes & Adam. At times the distinction was difficult to determine. Further research into the individuals and the firm may reveal additional information that will improve identification of the volumes. Account books attributed to Samuel Forbes are arranged chronologically in Series I, those of John Adam Sr. in Series II, John Adam in Series III and those of Forbes & Adam and the various re-organizations of the firm in Series IV. An additional Series was created for two account books that were kept by Samuel F. Adam, and one account book that does not appear to be related to the Adam or Forbes family and two bound volumes of a newspaper were assigned to Series V.

Scope and Content

The value in this collection is the depth of information on rural northeastern Connecticut that can be gleaned from the volumes. Not only is the iron industry documented, but the literacy rate, women's economic role in the community, skilled labor, accounting practices and the lives of free blacks are also part of this record.

The earliest ledger in the collection belonged to John Forbes and his son Samuel, 1748-1760. These entries indicate the men were blacksmiths, shoeing horses, mending tools, making a new chain. Turning the book over and starting from the opposite end, one can find records of the firm Pettibone & Forbes, 1786-1793 which traded in iron ore. Entries in this portion of the volume include a note about the new ore bead "owned by Giles Pettibone and myself," and iron ore from the "bead dug by men that we employed to dig by the day."

A real estate volume, dated 1755-1803, documents the transfer of the forge, mill and ore mine owned by John Forbes to his son Samuel. In 1760, there is an entry about building a forge in the town of Norfolk, and another entry noting the purchase of John Forbes's 999 year lease of 1/32 of Salisbury Ore Hill. In 1784 Samuel Forbes purchases half interest in a forge

and a quarter-interest in a saw mill on the Blackberry River. The volume also reveals that John Adam bought the Ore Hill Lot in Kent in 1796.

The real estate transactions are recorded on the left hand page of the volume. The right hand page was used by Charles S. Adam to record daily and national events such as deaths, births, and marriages, and his financial transactions from 1854-1865. He notes that on Monday, March 9, 1863 he sold all of his rights in the furnace and gristmill.

Charles appears to have scavenged paper wherever he could find it and filled more than one of his ancestor's volumes with these types of entries. He also used pages from 18th century account books and some correspondence and other documents for his figuring, and these were found interleaved throughout the volumes he filled. The loose items have been removed and placed in folders, with the page at which the document(s) was found noted. Charles used straight pins to affix slips of paper where he did his figuring onto pages of his entries. In most cases, these have not been removed although pins that could tear the underlying paper have been removed. His additions to the volumes are noted in the descriptive list of account books.

Samuel's other account books, 1763-1789, record sales of general merchandise from his store. His customers include several free blacks. He also mentions the purchase of mills from John Ensign & Son. An additional volume is entitled "Coppoy of Notes of Hand" The inside inscription reads, "Notes in Hand the Property of Samuel Forbes of Canaan," and covers the dates 1785-1809.

John Adam Sr.'s accounts, 1775-1794, the majority from Taunton, Massachusetts, illustrate his business in nail making and as owner of a slitting mill. He hires someone to improve his 1/16 part of the Easton furnace and has accounts with Simon and Joseph Tisdale, owners of the Mansfield Furnace. He also records, 1776-1777, the number of nails made of each type on any one day.

Items Adam sold include nail rods, nails, horse shoes, and tacks, but the majority of entries are for general merchandise. Among his accounts is an early ledger kept by Ratcliffe Hellon, a shipbuilder of Taunton, from 1754-1767. How Adam acquired the ledger is unknown.

Perhaps the most interesting volumes, number 11, contains this entry: "I begin on Saturday ye 8 of Febry 1794 to sett down a list of the books of acc't that have been used by me & for me since I moved frome Easton to Taunton in September 1749."

The first account book attributed to the younger John Adam is a ledger for the firm Adam & Church, 1786-1806, the owners of a saw mill and a paper mill. Adam was also the agent and then a proprietor of Kent Ore Hill. The proceedings of the proprietors, 1790-1802, who incorporated in 1758, include copies of correspondence, deeds, contracts and articles of

agreement. A ledger kept by the organization, 1796-1806, includes Forbes & Adam among their customers. A fourth volume assigned to John Adam contains additional paper and saw mill accounts, 1798-1799, and the accounts of Adam & Beckley for coal, 1836-1837.

Forbes & Adam account and letter books range in date from 1783 to 1875 and consist of day books, an invoice book, waste books, ledgers, journals, and a pig iron book, among others. The records are for general merchandise bought from the company store, and for bar iron, nails, nail rods, rolled iron, paper and sawn lumber. The firm also sold anchors throughout the northeast.

Of particular interest among these accounts is a volume entitled "Woman's book," 1783-1823, recording the purchases of women, married and single, white and black, and their payments in butter, spun yarn, honey, weaving, cheese making and mending clothing, keeping school, house work and nursing. Most of the women are identified as being the wife of someone; on occasion their own first names never appear in the account.

Also of interest is the number of free blacks who traded with the firm. When a volume has an "alphabet" or index, there is usually an entry under "N" for Negroes. Their accounts also include the label Negro after their names. In addition, many entries include the occupation of the customer and his town of residence, providing insight into the geographic span of the firm's trade and the skilled and unskilled workers who lived in the area, including bloomers, diggers, and anchor smiths. Other customers included the Springfield (Massachusetts) Armory which purchased rolled iron to make gun barrels, and the Proprietors of Newgate Prison which purchased nail rods, presumably to have the inmates make nails.

The purpose of an "alphabet" of accounts dated July 1800 (v. 34) was "to comprise the contents of Forbes & Adams Books into small compass to find an account easy and soon." The inside cover and fly leaf of the volume is covered with detailed instructions as to what records were made, how the data was gathered, and into which new volumes the accounts appear. This is an unusual look into accounting practices of the 18th and early 19th centuries.

Samuel F. Adam attended Yale College and accounts of his expenses while he was a student are included in his small ledger, dated 1785-1790. He and his brother Leonard were also involved in the iron industry, and their blotter, 1825-1833, includes the sale of a furnace crank, a steamboat shackle bar and piston rods, and anchors.

The final Series contains seemingly unrelated items. A ledger that appears to have belonged to William Burrall, an early bloomery forge owner and merchant of Canaan, Conn. dates from 1771-1788. Two bound volumes of *The Balance & Columbian Repository*, 1802, 1803, complete the collection.

Restrictions

Access Restrictions

There are no restrictions on access to the collection.

Use Restrictions

Use of the material requires compliance with the Connecticut Historical Society's Research Center regulations.

Subject Headings

Personal Names

Adam, Charles S.
Adam, John, 1714-1802.
Adam, John, 1755-1826.
Adam, Samuel F., 1783-1854.
Forbes, Samuel, 1729-1827

Corporate Names

Forbes & Adam (East Canaan, Conn.)

Subjects

Iron industry and trade -- Connecticut -- East Canaan.
Iron mines and mining -- Connecticut -- Kent
Merchants -- Connecticut -- East Canaan.

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation

Item, Collection Title, Collection number (Box #, Folder #). Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford, Connecticut.

Processing Details

Collection was processed by Barbara Austen in 2008.

EAD Finding Aid created June 2012.

Accruals

The collection is closed.

Contents:

I. Samuel Forbes accounts

Box Volume

- 1 1 John and Samuel Forbes ledger, 1748-1760, for blacksmith work and Pettibone & Forbes ledger, 1786-1793, of iron ore.
- 1 2 "Real estate" transactions, 1755-1803. Includes entries for John Forbes, John Adam and the Susquehanna Purchases. Also Charles S. Adam diary-type and financial entries, 1854-1869.
- 1 3 "Day book No. 2," General merchandise sold at store, 1763-1773.
- 1 4 "Ledger A", Combines accounts and refers to next, 1771-1773.
- 1 5 Day book, General supplies sold at store, 1772-1773.
- 1 6 "No. 2 Day book", General supplies sold at store; first time nails are mentioned as being sold, 1773-1776.
- 1 7 "Copy of Notes of Hand," 1785-1809.
- 1 8 "Waste book No. J," General merchandise sold at store, 1786-1789.

II. John Adam Sr. accounts

Box Volume

- 1 9 "Ledger No. 6," Includes entries for John Adam, Adam & Crocker, John Adam, Jr., the nailery and the slitting mill. Most entries for general merchandise, 1774-1783.
- 1 10 "Ledger 8", , for nail rods, nails, tacks, and general merchandise, 1775-1791.
- 1 11 Ledger, Nails made, nails brought in, laborers, use of slitting mill, 1776-1777, 1785-1794.
- 1 12 Ratcliffe Hellon shipbuilding account.

III. John Adam account books

Box Volume

1	13	Ledger No. 2, Adam & Church Accounts for paper mill and saw mill, 1786-1806.
1	14	Journal of proceedings of Kent Ore Hill, 1790-1802.
1	15	Kent Ore Hill ledger, 1796-1806.
1	16	Paper and saw mill accounts, 1798-1799; Adam & Beckley accounts of coal, 1836-1837.

IV. Forbes & Adam, etc. account books, 1783-1875

Box Volume

1	17	"Woman's book" ledger. General merchandise, 1783-1823.
1	18	Day book. General merchandise, iron, nails, 1786-1788.
1	19	"Storage of iron left for to slitt into nail rods," 1786-1791; Charles S. Adam diary-type and financial entries, 1884-1889.
1	20	"Invoice book," Items purchased for store, 1786-1792.
1	21	Ledger, General merchandise saw mill, paper mill, 1786-1794.
1	22	Pig Iron Book, 1791-1808.
1	23	"Journal No. J," 1792-1798. Includes entries for Washington Slitting Mill and the saw mill; Charles S. Adam, 1839-1854 diary-type and financial entries.
1	24	Receipt book, for bar iron, 1792-1798.
1	25	"Waste Book No. 1," 1793 February-November
1	26	"Waste book No. 2," 1793-1794.
1	27	"Ledger A," 1793-1796.
1	28	"Ledger H (or II)," 1793-1800.
1	29	"Journal No. 1st," Manufactory of N[ail] Rods & Rolled Iron for Forbes & Adam, 1795-1798.
1	30	"Coppies of letters from Forbes & Adam to sundry persons, since the 5th June 1795"; Charles S. Adam diary-type and financial entries, 1876-1887.
1	31	"No. 14 Journal from 6 December 1796," 1796-1798; Charles S. Adam diary-type and financial entries.
1	32	Day book, "No. 15," 1798-1800.
1	33	"No. 2 Receipts for Bar Iron," 1798-1825.
1	34	"General Alphabet No. 2," To comprise the contents of Forbes & Adams Books into a small compass to find an account easy and soon, 1800 July.
1	35	"Ledger K," 1800-1808.
1	36	Bar Iron purchases, 1802-1805; Charles S. Adam diary-type and financial entries, 1865-1875.
1	37	Ledger, 1805-1817.
1	38	Day book, 1808-1809.

William Adam account books, 1748-1875

1	39	"List of balances of accounts on Forbes & Adam Books taken January 1811."
1	40	"Ledger M," 1813-1828.
1	41	Ledger, 1813-1833.
1	42	Day book, Includes estate of John Adam accounts 1826-1872.
1	43	"Alphabet of towns," no date.

V. Samuel F. Adam account books, 1785-1833

Box Volume

1	44	Small ledger, 1785-1790, Includes Samuel's expenses at Yale, 1799-1803.
1	45	S.F. & L Adam's blotter, 1825-1833.

VI. Assorted volumes

Box Volume

1	46	Ledger of William Burrall, 1771-1788.
1	47	The Balance & Columbian Repository, vol. 1, 1802.
1	48	The Balance & Columbian Repository, vol. 2, 1803.