



Smithsonian

National Museum of American History Kenneth E. Behring Center

Guide to the David Holton Harness-Makers Account Book

NMAH.AC.1226

NMAH Staff

2011

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
Title:	David Holton Harness-Maker's Account Books
Date:	1841-1864
Identifier:	NMAH.AC.1226
Creator:	Holton, David, Jr., 1814-1865 (Creator)
Extent:	3 Items
Language:	English .

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Collection purchased in 2011.

Related Materials

The Transportation Collection of the Division of Work & Industry collects, maintains, and exhibits materials documenting developments in American transportation history. Animal-drawn vehicles form an important part of the division's Road Transportation Collections, totaling almost fifty such vehicles, collected in an effort to document each common type of American carriage, sleigh, wagon, and cart. The Road Transportation Collections also include the James Cunningham, Son & Company collection. This Rochester, New York, company produced horse-drawn vehicles from 1838 to 1915 and motor vehicles from 1908-1931. The Cunningham collection is scheduled to be transferred to the AC in the near future. W&I's horse-drawn vehicle material also includes examples of harnesses and saddlery, harness catalogs, and materials relating to carriage-building.

W&I's Engineering Collections include documentary materials on the Hoopes Brothers and Darlington Wheel Works, a major accessory supplier to the carriage trade. Founded in 1866 and active until 1973, this West Chester, PA, company was one of the largest and longest-lived manufacturers of spokes and wheels for horse-drawn vehicles. The company was the focus of a 1969-1970 Smithsonian-sponsored film project to document wheels manufacture. Associated documentation includes operational photographs, factory blueprints, oral history interviews, drawings, extensive research files, and historic photographs and catalogs. This collection will probably also be transferred to the AC in the near future.

The Archives Center also contains some materials relating to horse-drawn vehicles and the harness-making industry. Most obvious among these are the Hagan Brothers Carriage Works Records, a collection of twenty-one volumes, 1882-1903, documenting a carriage-maker in Frederick, Maryland. This collection was purchased with Jackson Funds in July 2009. These records document the typical shop of the "golden age" of carriage building. In addition, the AC also holds the account book of F. Ayres, a Vermont wagon maker active from 1834 to 1869 --pretty much the same time period covered by the Holton volumes. The Warshaw collection includes series on "leather" (four boxes), "horses" (nine boxes), and "wagons" (ten boxes), dating from roughly the 1840s to the 1920s. Together, these series contain receipts, illustrations, trade cards, and catalogs from hundreds of small and large firms dealing

in harnesses, saddles, whips, horses, wagons, carriages, buggies, and sundry accessories. However, the AC does not have any collections concerned solely with the harness-making industry.

The NMAH Branch Library has an extensive collection of catalogs from manufacturers of harnesses and other leather goods, carriage and wagon makers, and carriage accessory manufacturers.

Processing Information

Collection is unprocessed.

Preferred Citation

David Holton Harness-Maker's Account Books, Archives Center, National Museum of American History

Restrictions

Collection is open for research but is stored off-site and special arrangements must be made to work with it. Contact the Archives Center for information at archivescenter@si.edu or 202-633-3270.

Conditions Governing Use

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Biographical / Historical

Horse-drawn vehicles were crucial to American transportation from Colonial times until well into the 20th century. Although some goods were moved over long distances by canal, river, and ocean prior to the railroad, the majority of goods were moved by horsepower. Horse-drawn vehicles were essential for agricultural work and for short-distance transportation, in rural areas and cities alike. Horse-drawn vehicles continued in service well into the early 20th century. For example, statistics listed in the October 23, 1919, issue of *Breeder's Gazette* showed that New York City had 128,224 horses in 1910 [quoted in Charles Philip Fox, *Horses in Harness* (1987), p. 18]. In 1935, there were still an estimated 17 million horses in the country [Fox, p. 190]. The industries which supplied these vehicles and their trappings were important both for their own sake, in keeping goods and people moving, and as a major factor in the economy in their own right. For example, the 1890 census listed more than 13,000 carriage-making firms, which employed some 130,000 workers and produced products valued at more than \$200 million [Thomas A. Kinney, *The Carriage Trade: Making Horse-Drawn Vehicles in America* (2004), p. 263].

While never quite rising to that level of economic scale, America's harness-makers played an essential role in keeping all those horses hitched to all those vehicles. The industry seems to have followed the same economic developmental arc as the carriage-making industry. Rather than following the path of most 19th century industries towards consolidation and mass production, the harness-making industry seems to have been characterized by relatively small, family-owned firms and partnerships engaged in "short-run, flexible production of rapidly changing goods," a system Kinney refers to as "batch production." While mass production "relies on complex, highly mechanized processes for the creation of large quantities of standardized goods," batch production "turns out small groups of similar or identical goods to order or in anticipation of demand," which provides "flexibility as a means of coping with fluctuating demand and the vagaries of fashion." [Kinney, pp. 4-5.] Like the carriage-making industry, the harness-making industry grew in scope during the late 19th century to eventually encompass everything from one- and two-man shops to large factories that employed hundreds of workers. But large scale factories were the exception and most harness-making operations remained modest in scope, particularly in the period covered by these account books.

Harness-makers were concerned with the manufacture, sale, and repair of three specialized areas of leather work: harnesses, saddles, and horse collars. In each of these areas, complex finished products that formed part of a complicated system were created from a variety of specialized component pieces. Horse collars and harnesses

enabled draft animals to pull vehicles and agricultural implements; saddles enabled horses to be ridden. An important part of the trade was the decorative embellishment of the various leather pieces; the finer the rig, the more decorative it was. In addition, harness-makers also supplied accessories, such as whips, bells, saddle bags, and so on.

Scope and Contents

The collection consists of three manuscript account books dating from 1841 to 1864. They were created by David Holton, Jr. (1814-1865), a harness-maker in Charlestown, New Hampshire. They record all of Holton's business transactions in daybook form. In a daybook, each day's transactions --both sales and purchases --are recorded in the order in which they occurred. Daybooks are very useful to researchers since they list details, including the customers' names, prices, and what was sold or repaired. Such details are usually not found in other account books, such as ledgers.

The entries in these volumes document the work typically performed by a small harness-maker, with most entries being for the manufacture, sale or repair of leather pieces that comprised harness systems. These included harnesses, saddles, harness pads, halters, bridles, reins, saddle girths, and numerous types of straps. In addition, Holton sold whips of various kinds and materials, bells, carriage window curtains, trunks, aprons, and a variety of textiles and hardware for carriage repair and decoration. His products were used with wagons, carriages, stage-coaches, and agricultural implements. They provide a detailed look at the daily business of a typical harness-maker of the ante-bellum period.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

Horses

Container Listing

Box 1	Unprocessed materials
Box 2	Unprocessed materials