



The Historical
Society of
Pennsylvania

Collection 3042

John Sager
Daybook

1805-1817

1 vol., 0.2 lin. feet

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John Sager (1763-1817)

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Abstract

John Sager (1763-1817) was a cabinetmaker in Bordentown, New Jersey. His daybook, 1805 to 1817, records his business transactions, including furniture and sundry goods that he sold and services that he provided.

Background note

John Sager was born in 1763. He had two siblings, David and Catherine. Their parents were John Sager (d. 1799) and his wife (name unknown).

John Sager and his wife Mary (b. 1761), had three daughters: Elizabeth, Ann, and Catherine. The Sagers lived in Bordentown, New Jersey, where John was a cabinetmaker. In addition to making furniture, he also built coffins, dug graves, and did a number of other odd jobs, including repair work and painting. He died in October 1817 with property valued at \$2,500. Mary Sager died in 1834.

Scope & content

John Sager's daybook, consisting of approximately 200 pages, begins on February 18, 1805, and ends on November 10, 1817. Sager died in October 1817 and the final entries are written in a different hand. Entries, which were made almost daily, are clear and detailed, chronicling more than a decade of Sager's business transactions. Sager's spelling is crude, but entries are easy to decipher. Although Sager most frequently did business with men, he had a number of female customers, including Lydia Bunting, Nancy Brooks, and Charlotte Biddle. Several entries are for services rendered for prominent families in the Bordentown region, including the Stocktons, Hopkinsons, Nutts, and Peningtons. Early entries give monetary values in pounds, shillings, and pence, but Sager began using dollars and cents consistently around 1811. It was not unusual for Sager to complete several transactions in a day.

Most of the entries in Sager's daybook are for goods and services that he provided for his customers. He made coffins, dining tables, card tables, sideboards, bedsteads, breakfast tables, and other pieces of furniture, some of which, like a seventy-five-dollar

sideboard, were rather expensive. He used many different types of wood, including pine, mahogany, cherry, oak, and walnut. He also fashioned smaller articles, such as candle boxes and pump handles, and occasionally sold sundry goods, such as putty, nails, and whiskey. Sager also repaired and painted furniture and glazed glass for lamps and windows. Additional services he provided included cutting lumber and digging graves, usually after he had built coffins. Many of the coffins he built were for children; most of these entries simply indicate the parents' names. In some instances, in addition to charging a fee for the coffin and digging the grave, he also included a small charge for "inviting the town." Several entries mention "Cook's Mill," a saw mill, now currently known as Cookstown.

Goods and services received by Sager are noted only sporadically. They include logs and wood, hay, butter, beer, plowing, and chopping wood. These may have served as payments for items that Sager provided. There are several transactions involving cash, including loans that Sager made, as well as loans that he received. A number of entries have the words "paid" or "settled" alongside them.

Separation report

A letter from Mahlon Spragg to Robard King, dated Feb. 28, 1862, was transferred to the Society Collection.

Subjects

Cabinetmakers – New Jersey – Burlington County
Cabinetwork – Accounting – 19th century
Coffins – Manufacture – 19th century
Furniture making – New Jersey – Burlington County

Sager, John, 1763-1817

Administrative Information

Restrictions

The collection is open for research.

Acquisition information

Purchased, Dreer Fund, July 31, 1956.

Preferred citation

Cite as: [Indicate cited item or series here], John Sager Daybook (Collection 3042), The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Processing note

This volume previously had the call number Amb .7586 and was part of artificial collection 2001.

Background information largely obtained from the Burlington County Historical Society and the New Jersey State Archives (John Sager estate inventory, file12952c and Mary Sager's will, file 14318c).

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