



Mary G Maynard launch in 1920 at East Coast Ship Company yard

A Window to the Past

Boothbay Region Historical Society

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This part of a page from the William McCobb blacksmith account-day book shows Caleb Hodgdon's first purchases of ironwork in 1826. The jobs and the cost ordinarily appear on the left-hand Dr (debtor) page. On the facing page headed by "Contra" and "Cr" (credit), payment in goods or rarely cash is recorded.

William McCobb, Blacksmith, Part III

By Barbara Rumsey, 2015

In the last two articles I described the valuable kinds of information contained in William McCobb's 1828-1866 blacksmith account books. His business of more than 50 years was between the Harbor and East Boothbay just west above the road to Oak Lawn Cemetery.

Account books are shorthand notations of commerce laid out on pages clearly enough to figure out who is owed how much for what. They're diaries of transactions with a striking wealth of detail from which one can partially build a picture of a place and time.

I ended last time by mentioning my regret that I didn't have McCobb's first book predating late 1828. Then two friends in history, Scott Hanson of Topsham and Earl Leavitt of Boothbay, emailed me almost simultaneously in late October 2014 to tell me that ledger #1 of Boothbay blacksmith William McCobb, starting in 1811, was on eBay. It had turned up!

The account book was in the hands of a Maine dealer 24 years after the others showed up. Though its cost was very discouraging, it was too tempting to pass up without an effort. I emailed three faithful and generous members, Reid Ervin, Palmer Payne and Henry O'Neill, asking for their help in sharing the cost. The three immediately agreed — our very good fortune! The dealer, pleased to have it go to such a deserving place, delivered it in person from his business a couple of hours away.

The account-day book

McCobb's ledger is laid out in the usual fashion, starting with a roughly alphabetical index of each customer's page or pages, overwhelmingly men, with an occasional woman (widows mostly) and a few vessels. However, McCobb deviated from the norm in running a combination

McCobb had them in the same book. It's a great layout if you're tracking a man's jobs, as I was; I didn't have to switch back and forth from books.

In the first book starting in 1811, there were 184 people listed. I recognized most of them and had a fair idea where they lived. Many of those named in the 200-year-old account book are like old friends, familiar to me from bits of knowledge I've gained about them in the last 30 years.

It is that earlier period of Boothbay history, up to about 1850, I know and like best. Most of the men had between 12 or 24 household or farm-related ironwork jobs done over the years. Those who had many times that amount of jobs employed other men in their businesses, including fishing and coasting fleets, large store businesses, sawmills and gristmills, and shipyards.

A man's page might run for years, such as Samuel Murray's from 1812 to 1836; he had little work done, which was so of the majority. McCobb could cram 55 or more job entries on a page if it was all one man. Some men had only a few entries, so another name might share the page.

Caleb's arrival

As mentioned before, I was eager to see the newly-acquired account book's pages that were devoted to Caleb Hodgdon and his followers from 1826 and 1827, when he moved to the village that is now East Boothbay. I was dismayed when I looked in the book's index and found there were only two pages listed for him. However, those designated pages were the first of many consecutive pages for him, highly unusual; there were nine pages altogether. Phew.

Caleb's pages were chock-full, the first showing 52 entries running from Jan. 16 to Nov. 29, 1826, representing about 150 separate items. The January dates place him here months earlier than I proved in my 1995 book. Most of his pages listed as many jobs.

Curiously, those who Caleb first urged to come to the village had little work with McCobb. Instead, Caleb was handling their needs with McCobb in 1826 and 1827, and it looks like more than a tool here and there. Perhaps he'd promised to underwrite those who followed him to this side of Boothbay, at least getting them started here. Among them were John Sloman of Wiscasset, William Blake from Harpswell, James Preble and Levi Reed of Jeremysquam, and Andrew Adams of the Adams Pond area of Boothbay. Most of them had prior mill experience and some had worked together on Jeremysquam (Westport) with Caleb.

Most of his McCobb jobs were tools or parts of mechanisms to do other jobs: hoops, clasps, staples, bolts, chain, dogs (giant staples to hold things in place), hooks, and bales. His goals seemed to be land-based building; there were few vessel jobs, and he normally paid his bill in

Next time: Caleb Hodgdon's house, mill, and vessel building in 1826 and 1827.

For more articles by Barbara Rumsey about the Boothbay region check our website
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Boothbay Harbor High, graduating class 1917



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