

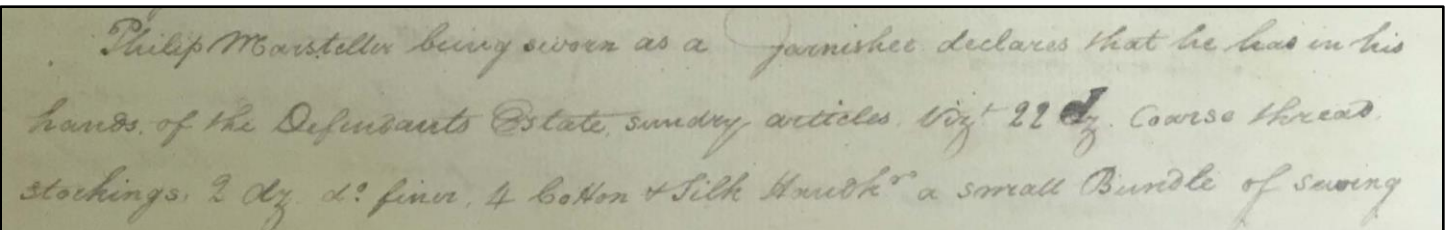
**FOUND IN THE ARCHIVES, no. 53 – July 2019**

**Store Inventories**

**Fairfax Circuit Court Historic Records Center**



In the Records Center, we hold various records that offer evidence of citizens' daily lives, from centuries past. One such record type is the 'store inventory,' which details the goods stocked by storekeepers in the Fairfax area, and sometimes includes the prices. These inventories tell us the wants and needs of local inhabitants, as well as the products that were in vogue at the time. In our records, store inventories are mainly found in the Deed and Will Books.



**Court Order Book 1788, p. 76, December 16, 1788**

The first store inventory that appears in our records was recorded in our 1788 Court Order Book, as part of a creditor case. William Spiegel was a storekeeper in debt to several Fairfax residents, including Philip Marsteller. To satisfy this debt, Marsteller was given permission by the Court to sell the store items that he already held for Spiegel. As seen in the excerpt above, most of these items related to clothing, clothing manufacture and repair, and included many pairs of stockings in various fabrics, pocket handkerchieves, pieces of cloth and thread. The list also included a dozen 'Spye Glasses,' an 18<sup>th</sup> century gentleman's accessory made popular by Fairfax's most famous resident, George Washington. After levying these items, Marsteller qualified for a license to sell goods, to satisfy the debt Spiegel owed him.

1 <sup>1/2</sup> Broom Holland 7 <sup>1/2</sup> yds at 28c	2	10	1. Broom Cloak 2 <sup>1/2</sup> "	"	300 <sup>00</sup>
1. Ticklingburg 18 <sup>1/2</sup> " " 18 "	3	28 <sup>1/2</sup>	1. Blue Ditto 2 <sup>1/2</sup> "	"	200 <sup>00</sup>
1. Blue Capeline 11 <sup>1/2</sup> " " 12 <sup>1/2</sup> "	5	23	1. Light Gray ditto 2 <sup>1/2</sup> "	"	275 <sup>00</sup>
1. Sewelling 9 <sup>1/2</sup> " " 10 "	"	75	1. Dark Ditto do 2 <sup>1/2</sup> "	"	250 <sup>00</sup>
2. " Sail Duck 2 <sup>1/2</sup> " " 28 "	"	43	1. Olive 'Ditto 4 <sup>1/2</sup> "	"	350 <sup>00</sup>
2. Cotton Casimere 26 " " 30 "	7	80	1. Gray Merino do 1 <sup>1/2</sup> "	"	150 <sup>00</sup>
1. Black Casimere 12 <sup>1/2</sup> " " 15 "	1	80	3/4. Hair Soles —	"	25 <sup>00</sup>
2. 1/2. Red Blankets " 40 "	4	"	1/4. Dark Linen 2 <sup>1/2</sup> "	"	50 <sup>00</sup>

**Fairfax Will Book Q-1, p. 396, November 20, 1832, George N. Berkley's Inventory**

Fifty years later, according to Fairfax County Merchant License records, George N. Berkley

held a license to sell goods in Fairfax, for much of the 1810s and 1820s. On his death in 1832, his store stock was inventoried by his Estate's Executors. A significant portion of Berkley's stock was cloth. Cloth-making was a time and labor-intensive process, requiring large equipment and raw materials like wool, cotton and flax (used to make linen). Not surprisingly, many people preferred to buy their cloth, and they had a variety of types to choose from, according to the garment's ultimate use. Berkley's Probate Record Inventory lists 27 different types of fabric, including: cassimere (closely-woven fine wool), bombaset (slightly thicker wool with a sheen), camlet (waterproof wool or silk), cambric (fine white cotton), calico (cotton with a floral print), Holland (finely-woven linen), jaconet (sturdy white cotton), marseilles (cloth with a quilted-looking weave) and sail duck (canvas-like cotton or linen).

Davis & Ball	16 Doz polished buttons	"	40
Manen Coason	9 pocket Combs	50	"
Grigsby & Taylor	15 Wood ditto	40	"
Coason M. Coason	4 pair Spectacles	12 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub>	"
G. & R. Allison	7 papers Shoe nails	70	"
John Taylor	2 " ditto do	90	"
Robert Bencheloe	1 Doz Anvils & files	15	"

Berkley's inventory also lists sewing items such as buttons, thimbles and thread, and items for personal use such as combs, toothbrushes and spectacles. When

*Fairfax Will Book Q-1, p. 402, November 20, 1832, George N. Berkley's Sales Account*

Berkley's Executors held a public sale to liquidate the store stock, merchants from other stores bid on many of these smaller items. The sales account above lists Grigsby & Taylor purchasing 15 wooden combs at 4 cents each, Davis & Ball buying 16 dozen polished bone buttons for 40 cents, and G. & R. Allison paying 49 cents for 7 'papers' of shoe nails which were used to affix soles and heels to the shoe. Shoes were expensive, and people mended them if possible, rather than buying a brand new pair. G. & R. Allison also purchased 5 dozen buttons, netting pins, stock locks and a pair of sheep shears.



*Victoria's Cakery, site of G. & R. Allison's Store*

During the 1820s and early 1830s, Gordon and Robert Allison operated a store on Lot 8 of Richard Ratcliffe's Town of Providence. The store was razed to the ground in 1862, and the lot is now occupied by Victoria's Cakery. G. & R. Allison, as their firm was known, had financial difficulties throughout much of their

tenure of the store, and, in 1837, had to sell their stock inventory to pay their debts.

488 1/4 Yards White Domestics	17 do Brittain Oil
231 1/4 ditto Striped ditto	10 Nids Bateman's drops
92 1/2 Yards Coloured & striped cotton	Lot of Twist & Silk ink box
46 Silk Handkerchiefs	ditto #10 cotton
358 Small Cotton Handkerchiefs	18 Pair Ladies hose
32 3/4 Yards of Black Cambric	24 ditto Coloured Cotton gloves
29 1/2 Yards of Simons & cotton drillings	7 Pair Light Col. ditto
239 Yards Wollen goods including	Lot of Gentlemen's Gloves

Fairfax Deed Book D-3, p. 250, June 20, 1837, G. & R. Allison Store Inventory

G. & R. Allison's stock similarly contained a large amount of cloth, sewing equipment, clothing and accessories. Examples of accessories include linen collars, handkerchieves, gloves, socks, suspenders, belts and

a 'Box of Jewelry (Common)'. For better quality jewelry, wealthier citizens of Fairfax County would have visited the merchants of Alexandria. The excerpt of the inventory above shows us that G. & R. Allison's customers came to the store to purchase proprietary medicine. 'British Oil' and 'Bateman's Drops' were petroleum-based products that originated in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in England; both received Royal Patents and their popularity soon led to their importation into America. British Oil was used as an external liniment for soreness. Bateman's Drops contained camphor and opium and was rubbed on the chest to relieve congestion and lung irritation. The inventory contains one more medicinal rubbing ointment – 'Opedildock'. This was made from soap, camphor, essential oils and alcohol and was used as a liniment for the joints.

4 Doz of Canale ticks	9 Papers Sand
Lot of Common Combs	12 Papers Ink Powder
ditto of Buttons	Lot of pencils & crayons
ditto of Pocket Books (Common)	Supper as lbs of G. H. Tea
ditto of Hinges & Screws	Lot of Ink Blanks
ditto of Plane Bits	Lot of Marbles
4 Razor Strips	Supper as 15 lbs Soap
Lot of Spectacles	Lot of Shot about 12 lbs
8 Bridle Bits	ditto of Tacks &c
15 lbs Black Tea	3 Powder Horns

Fairfax Deed Book D-3, p. 251, June 20, 1837, G. & R. Allison Store Inventory

G. & R. Allison's inventory covered the domestic, to the industrial. They sold children's toys, marbles, pencils and colored crayons, plow parts, carpenters' 'Plane Bits' and 'Bridle Bits' (as seen above). The Court's Debtor Inventory even lists violin strings, a 'bundle of fifes', a barrel of

salted shad and '4 Brass Candlesticks'. These items reflect the varied needs of the growing Town of Providence and its environs.

1	Ground Ginger	1 Do. Rice do.
4	cloves do Nutmegs	1 Keg Allspice
1	Keg Pepper	1 Do Alum
1	Box Mould Candles	1 Do Sulfur
1	Keg Logwood	1 Box Soap
2	Pails Shew-thread	1 Keg Nails
1	Keg Filberts	1 Box Pipes
36	Bottles Snuff	1 doz. Sweet Oil
1/2	Box Castor Oil	1 " Stone Jar

Fairfax Deed Book M-3, p. 76, January 11, 1848, James A. Evans' Store Inventory

In the 1840s, Centreville merchant James A. Evans racked up a \$700 debt to his supplier, McVeigh, Brother & Co. To settle this debt, Evans gave his Trustee the right to sell his 'Groceries, Liquors, Hats, Shoes, Boots, Wares and Merchandize' through Brook, Son & Co. These groceries included hazelnuts ('Filberts'), tea, sugar, corn whisky, molasses, madeira

wine, raisins, ground ginger, cloves, nutmeg and allspice. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century and early 19<sup>th</sup> century, spices had been prohibitively expensive for most people. By 1848, when this inventory was made, the spice monopolies had been broken, and spices such as cloves and nutmeg became accessible to a much wider group of people.

The Evans Inventory contains one noteworthy luxury item: half a box of spermaceti candles. Spermaceti candles were made from oil found in the heads of sperm whales. They burnt longer, brighter and with less smoke than the tallow candles used at the time, but they were much more expensive due to the time and effort expended in catching and harvesting their key ingredient. Evans' spermaceti candles would have been for his wealthier customers.

2	Btles Hair Oil	2.0	40
3/4	Doz Laudanum	1.70	1 28
1	" Stove Blacking	.75	75
2/3	" Vermifuge	1.50	1 00
2	Btles castor oil	12.2	25
4	Btles worm confectionary	12.2	50

Fairfax Deed Book P-4, p. 206, January 24, 1873, George G. Sledge's Store Inventory

In 1873, merchant George G. Sledge found himself unable to satisfy a mortgage. He placed his 'stock of Goods, wares, and merchandize in his

store at the village of Herndon' in the hands of his Trustee, hoping that the sale of his stock would raise enough money. The fabrics listed in Sledge's Inventory are mainly those used to

make work clothing, which reflects Herndon's rural nature in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. An example of this is 'Hickory', a heavy-duty fabric very similar to denim.

As seen above, Sledge's Inventory lists four different types of medicine: laudanum, vermifuge, castor oil and worm confectionary. Vermifuge was a de-worming medicine (a vermicide), and castor oil, which appears on every store inventory viewed for this article, was taken as a laxative and to induce labor.

1 Lot Xmas Toys	2787	1 lot shoes	37660
1 " clothing	11226	1 " Whips & graphophone	2551
1 " drugs, Extracts & paints	19310	1 " Pocket knives	2256
1 " Candy	5213	1 " notions	18648
1 " can goods <del>rest</del> fruit & spices	4697	1 " granite ware	6976
1 " fruit & spices, Tea & crackers	6277	1 " Rubber Boots & shoes	8341

*Fairfax Will Book 4, p. 549, April 5, 1911, E. R. Swetnam's Inventory*

Store inventories of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century reflect changing technologies. When Fairfax Station storekeeper E. R. Swetnam died in November 1910, his Probate Records left his store and all its contents to his wife, Mollie. Mollie continued running the store, taking out a loan against the Estate to replenish stock. These purchases were reflected in the inventory of store goods recorded in April 1911, which explains the 'Lot of Xmas Toys' seen in the Inventory pictured above. The inventory includes staples such as spices, tea, clothing, housewares and candy. A more modern item on this inventory is a 'graphophone'. The Graphophone was an improved version of the phonograph, invented and patented by Alexander Graham Bell at his Alexandria laboratory in the mid-1880s. By 1911, such machines were mass-produced and within the means of the middle-class American. The store stock did not include any recordings for the Graphophone.

As the Court's probate records and creditor cases reflect, the rural general store continued to be an important source of goods for Fairfax farmers and families until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

*For more information on these and other records held at the Fairfax Circuit Court Historic Records Center, please call 703-246-4168 or email [CCRHistoricRecords@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:CCRHistoricRecords@fairfaxcounty.gov).*

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