

The Account Book and Ledger of Simeon Button, Justice of the Peace and Merchant in Early Pittstown 1794 - 1855

The account book and justice of the peace ledger of Simeon Button provide fascinating historic information. Unfortunately, since they number over 500 pages, they are too lengthy to include on our website. However, we wanted to bring attention to their historic significance and also to the fact that we have now digitalized them.

We provide here a brief summary of the account book and ledger, copies of which can be purchased from us at the Merchandise link on our website.

The two volumes include three elements: the account book of early Pittstown merchant Simeon Button from the years 1794-1831; the fragmented business records of Simeon's son Limon (Lyman) from the years 1829-55; and, of greatest historical interest, the justice of the peace records of Simeon Button from the years 1792-1810.

Button, Account Book

The Button account book provides insights into the relative value of physical labor, legal services, farm commodities, implements, household goods, and clothing in late 18th-/early 19th-century rural New York before the establishment of a standard national currency. Although account balances were maintained in the inherited English system of pounds, shillings, and pence, relatively little money changed hands, as local commerce primarily was barter-based. Debts were offset by labor and/or delivery of other goods to the creditor. In some cases, a debtor would hire out his minor children or trade the labor of a slave to balance out his account.

Button, Justice of Peace Ledger

Since Simeon Button was both a merchant/trader and the town's justice of the peace in the late 1700s and early 1800s, he had dealings with nearly all the early residents of Pittstown, and his records are information rich.

Much of the justice of the peace ledger, especially toward the end of Button's tenure, concerns the settlement of suits brought by creditors against delinquent debtors. For example, local merchants Thomas Rattoone & Co. and Michael S. Vandercook & Co. repeatedly had to file suits to collect what was owed them. Often the settlements allowed for "payment by installments." In virtually all such cases, the justice of the peace ruled in favor of the plaintiff, frequently without the defendant even making a "court" appearance. Of greater human interest are the descriptions of misdemeanors such as the willful destruction of property, assault, and theft (typically involving livestock). In the early years of his tenure, Button described these cases in colorful detail, including information on the local residences that served as courtrooms, the names of jurors and "half jurors,"

the verdicts and penalties. Later, it appears that misdemeanor cases were no longer being tried in Pittstown, as Button then described only routine debt-settlement cases.

Although the Button ledger does contain a few historically prominent surnames, such as Van Rensselaer, Knickerbacker, and Ten Broeck, most of the individuals were ordinary folk. The names most frequently appearing, aside from Simeon and Limon Button themselves, are those of constables hired to serve warrants and bring defendants to trial, e.g., Thomas Daggett, Gilbert Eddy, Lewis Keeler, William Ketchum, and the owners of houses that served as courtrooms, e.g., Edward Rawson, John Tarbell, Herman Van Veghten. The attorney Neal McNeal also receives frequent mention. Other names appearing most often (each with seven or more occurrences) as litigants or on jury lists include John Crab, Joseph Deleverge, William Douglass, Robert and Tisdale Eddy, Henry, Isaac, and John Filkin, Jeremiah, John, Thomas and Levy Francisco, Steven Gaston, Levy Gould, George Hoffman, Abijah and Daniel Ketchum, Joseph Klein, Shubael Lewis, Solomon Lockwood, John Mandeville, James McClung, John Merrill, Samuel Miller, John Moon, Jesse Morris, Michael Overacker, Oliver and Stanton Prentiss, William Redner, Jeremiah Reynolds, Joseph Robinson, Francis Romyne, Christopher Sawyer, Caleb Sherman, Cornelius Smith, Jacob Stover, Thomas Turner, Manuel Van Allen, Henry S., Michael S. and Simon Vandercook, John Vanderspiegel, Leonard Wager, John Weatherwax, Gilbert and Thomas P. Williams, Ebenezer Wilson, and Phinehas Wright.

Marriage Records

Of special interest to genealogists, Button listed about twenty marriages he had performed as justice of the peace, identifying the bride and groom and the date of marriage. It is likely that most of these marriages are not documented in any other source. A list of the marriages is provided below.

Simeon Button scrawled the marriage entries on the final two pages of the ledger, which appears to have suffered considerable wear and tear. Several names and dates are not legible on the microfilm copy. It is hoped that one day the NYSL will digitize the original and thereby make the text more legible while preserving this irreplaceable primary source

Marriages Peformed by Simeon Button, Pittstown Justice of the Peace (arranged alphabetically by groom)

<u>Groom</u>	<u>Bride</u>	<u>Date</u>
Andrews, David	Wal-----, Susannah	--
Bristoll, James	Lyan (Lyon?), Mabell	December 31, 1809
Cogsdel (Cogsdale?), William	Hanor (Hayner?), Mary	Marc 4, 1797
Davis, Ezborn	Filkin, Abigail	December 13, 1806
Fox, Nathaniel	Knap (Knapp?), Jerusha	December 8, 1796
Hollenbeck, Michael	Stover, Hannah	September 1, 1796
Jermon (Germond?), Jonas	Wilkinson (?), Hannah	1799
Losee, Battis	Filkin, R-----	March 21, 1805

McDaniels, Henry	Gould, Lydia	March 12, 1792
McNeal, James	DeLong, Rachel	September 1, 1795
Nilson, John	Lion (Lyon?), Betsey	April, 1797
Odell, Simeon	Houser (?), Barbara	January 6, 1810
Potter, Henry	Filkin, Eunice	March 13, 1810
Pratt, Joel	Brookins, Clarisse	October 30, 1796
Prentiss, Oliver	DeLong, Lydia	November 16, 1796
Rowland, Jonathan	Jones, Sylvia	September 24, 1797
Shaw, Daniel	Stover, Mary	1809
Stover, Joseph	Shaw, Fanny	October 26, 1809
Thompson, William	Crelles (?), Dolly	1797
Travis, John	Clark, Sally	July 2, 1797
Van Allen, Daniel	Filkin, Mary Ann	--
Weatherwax, John P.	Cookingham, Catharine	--

Index of Button Records

The index has been produced by Dr. Ronald Bachman of Falls Church, Virginia. Bachman, who had been researching his ancestors in Pittstown, examined the document on microfilm at the NYSL and concluded that the source was potentially valuable but unusable without an enhanced finding aid. He undertook to complete an every-name index to the Button ledgers containing roughly 1,200 entries.