

## SOME SOURCES FOR NORTHWEST HISTORY

### ACCOUNT BOOKS

Despite the increasing emphasis that is being placed upon the economic side of history, many people fail to realize the possibilities of extracting significant information from financial records. Account books often contribute in unexpected ways to the historical student's notes and supply facts descriptive of life in decades past that are not to be found elsewhere. Ranging in size and impressiveness from a farmer's penciled notations in a small notebook to the ponderous ledgers of a large commercial firm, itemized statements of income and expense are source materials that should not be ignored by the searcher for clues to an understanding of social history. A survey of a collection of such volumes, preserved among the manuscripts of the Minnesota Historical Society, will suggest their usefulness.

From specific entries in account books many facts may be gleaned concerning prices of commodities, costs of production and the amount of business done by manufacturing companies, the level of the wages earned by men in skilled and unskilled occupations, and amounts paid for board and lodging. Descriptive information is often included in the items that are recorded. The fact that one Mrs. Herrington bought two brass jew's-harps from Alexis Bailly in 1825 is of as much interest to the historian as the fact that she paid twenty-five cents apiece for them, and the frequent mention of "oysters" in Ignatius Donnelly's personal accounts is chiefly significant because it suggests a picture of hours of sociability after his evening speeches. Thus many account books are valuable because they suggest things about the people who kept them. The expense accounts preserved in the papers of Alexander G. Huggins, Dr.

Thomas R. Potts, George A. Brackett, J. Q. A. Nickerson, and Benjamin C. Baldwin supply details concerning the earnest efforts of a missionary and schoolteacher, the practice of a physician in St. Paul during the fifties, the business interests of men of affairs in Minneapolis and Elk River, and the more humdrum routine of life at Lake City. A record kept by Henry C. Burbank presents a detailed picture of the building and furnishing of his house in St. Cloud. Records kept by John R. Cummins, Edward B. Drew, John P. Fallon, and John K. Wood show the economic side of the life of the small farmer; and Baron Frederick de Freudenreich's accounts reveal that he did a good business in truck farming and dairy products during the sixties, recording in detail the activities of his men and the sales of produce to his customers. One of the baron's record books contains data on butter alone, and indicates that patrons of the Merchants Hotel in St. Paul consumed considerable quantities of it. The trades of the skilled artisan are represented in the account books of William H. Richardson, a shoemaker in Winona, and A. C. Sevey, a blacksmith at Taylor's Falls. The early years of the iron industry are suggested in the records of Moses P. Hayes, one of the operators of the St. Anthony Iron Works, and Francis Gilman, who had a foundry in St. Paul in the late fifties. The business of a brickyard in Stillwater is recorded in the accounts kept by William Willim.

Light is thrown on commerce and communication. An early book of bills of lading records not only the contents of a shipment, but the name of the person to whom it was consigned, the name of the boat in which it was sent, and the name of its captain. Data on express and stage companies and on a livery stable may be found in the records of Wilder, Burbank and Company, and of Cephas W. Carpenter, secretary of the Northwestern Express, Stage, and Transportation Company. Schedules are sometimes in-

cluded, and notations of hay and grain on hand at different points along the routes give a clue as to the location of the principal depots that were maintained. The papers of Franklin Steele contain accounts of a ferry at Mendota from 1857 to 1878, revealing sharply fluctuating traffic from day to day. Rates are given as well as daily totals. The record shows that during three of the first five days in June, 1859, no business was done at all. Another extreme was reached late in September, when a fair held at Fort Snelling led large numbers of people to cross the Minnesota River. On the twenty-seventh and twenty-eighth receipts were realized amounting to \$118.00 and \$119.50 respectively. The construction of a bridge over the Rum River in 1853 is recorded in a time book kept by Levi W. Stratton. Details of the hotel business are set down in the account books of the Clarendon Hotel for the years 1877 and 1878, kept by Robert P. Lewis, the proprietor, and in records kept by J. Q. A. Nickerson of Elk River, and Robert Wyman, whose tavern was probably situated in St. Cloud.

The spread of news can be traced in the books of such newspapers as the *Mantorville Express*, published by John E. Bancroft, and the *Minnesota State News* and the *Falls Evening News*. Subscription lists are arranged by states and towns and exchanges are noted. From these lists the student learns that Alexander Ramsey, Ignatius Donnelly, William Windom, and Cyrus Aldrich kept in touch with events in their home state during periods of absence at Washington by reading, doubtless among other papers, the *Mantorville Express*. All three sheets were sent to New England and the states of the middle Atlantic seaboard and the Old Northwest. The disappointment of an ambitious proprietor is suggested by the blank pages which were set apart for subscribers in Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana but were never used.

The specific mention in account books of names of em-

ployees often makes it possible for the reader to become familiar with the personnel of an organization. Lawrence Taliaferro's accounts contain lists of licenses, which are of special value because they give the names of traders and the locations of their posts for a given year. Moses Adams, Indian agent to the Sisseton Sioux, gives the names and salaries of teachers, farmers, blacksmiths, cooks, physicians, storekeepers, carpenters, and engineers who were under his supervision; and the books of William H. Forbes, agent at Fort Totten during the early seventies, contain entries of equal interest. Account books of fur traders such as Alexis Bailly, Henry Hastings Sibley, Hercules Dousman, and Norman Kittson contain the names of their Indian customers, and the pages show the expenditures of such persons as Le Boeuf Blanc, Le Vieux Favorie, and Le Grand Chasseur. These entries are valuable also for the idea that they give of the system of Indian credits that was in use. Not only is the value of different skins indicated, but the prices of tomahawks, axes, knives, "leggings," red flannel shirts, scarlet belts, and copper kettles are set down in terms of the common unit, the "rat." Two volumes ascribed to the illiterate Louis Provençalle are curious specimens of accounts kept in an individual form of picture writing.

Other forms of commercial enterprise are reflected in the pages of account books. The lumber industry can be carefully studied in the records of the firms with which Frederick W. Bonness was associated, and in the books preserved by Walker, Judd, and Veazie, and Abraham Johnson of Marine, by John McKusick of Stillwater, and by W. H. Houlton and J. Q. A. Nickerson of Elk River. For a study of the general merchandising business in pioneer Minnesota the records of stores run by Sibley and William G. Le Duc in St. Paul, by McKusick in Stillwater, and by Thomas P. Kellett in Zumbrota are of value. The accounts of William F. Davidson and Jason C. Easton contain data on the wheat

trade and give evidence of a lively interest in real estate; those of Bonness throw light upon the business of an investment company in Aitkin of which he was the head.

Accounts kept by societies and associations are of interest. Significant facts in the story of colonization companies, such as the Irish American Colonization Company, stand out in their financial records. The books kept by churches—the First Presbyterian Church of St. Paul and the Forest Heights Congregational Church of Minneapolis—show contributions made by members and salaries paid to ministers, members of the choirs, and other persons whose services were enjoyed only at a price. The activities of charitable organizations, like the St. Cloud Cyclone Relief Committee, which brought aid to the victims of a storm of 1886, and the University of Minnesota Base Hospital Committee, which sought to equip a hospital in Georgia during the World War, can be fully appreciated only after an examination of their accounts. A search in the financial records of patriotic societies, such as the Minnesota Sons of the American Revolution, rewards the investigator with information concerning their membership and activities. The papers of social, literary, and dramatic organizations are also important. An account book kept by the German Society of St. Paul records the expenses of performances sponsored from 1878 to 1885, including items for orchestras, properties, printing, and advertising. The records of the New Century Club, a St. Paul ladies' social and literary society, indicate both receipts and expenditures, mentioning such specific items as housecleaning and repairing, moving a piano for an entertainment, and the purchase of flowers and refreshments for a reception.

The accounts of public servants are valuable for the data they contain regarding the growth of civic life and the ever-broadening responsibilities of state and local officials. Ledgers kept by treasurers and auditors record the extent and

variety of expenditures incurred by governmental units, and special accounts deal with such subjects as tax assessments, bonded indebtedness, expenditures for relief, sales of land and of timber, and salaries and other expenses of publicly supported institutions. In so far as they relate to Minnesota, such records are preserved in the state archives at St. Paul and in city halls and county courthouses throughout the state. They constitute an important body of historical source material.

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