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Boren ledger collection

Title: Boren ledger collection
Collection No: MSS.426
Creator: Martin Bibb Key and John Robert McCallum
Extent: 0.33 cubic feet
Inclusive Dates: 1900-1903

Abstract: The collection contains five ledgers from the Key and McCallum country store in Madison County, Tennessee, used from 1900 to 1903.

Donor: Elizabeth Boren, Jackson, Tennessee, May 1993
Processed by: James E. Montague, October 2002; Gerald Chaudron, February 2014.
Access: Open to all researchers.
Language: English
Preferred Citation: Boren ledger collection, Preservation and Special Collections Department, University Libraries, University of Memphis.

Publication date: February 2014

Administrative information

The Key and McCallum country store was in Claybrook, in the north-east of Madison County, Tennessee. The proprietors were Martin Bibb Key (1874-1952) and John Robert McCallum (1855-1937).

The following is from Jonathan K. T. Smith's *Our Claybrook Heritage*, pp.48-49:

“James C. "Jimmy" Pearson had operated a general store in Claybrook for several years but moved with his family into Jackson and remained there for several years before returning to the rural homeplace and store at Claybrook. Two local men, John R. (Bob) McCallum and Martin B. Key decided to open a store to help fill this void and bought from Jimmy Pearson a 65 acres parcel, some of it fronting the Jackson-Lexington Road and a 35 acre tract adjoining it to the southeast, on April 29, 1899. On a lot on the main road they kept a little store, chiefly a drygoods establishment for several years. Most of their business ledgers have survived serving as social-economic documents, casting insight into the operation of small rural mercantile businesses of that era.

The items most frequently bought in this store were sugar, coffee, smoking tobacco, snuff, sewing thread and small meats. These merchants bought oil stored in big drums from Standard Oil Company. It was before the time of telephones in every home. The "community phone" in the McCallum-Key store was used mostly for necessary reasons. The store's telephone bill for August 1900 was \$2.60; in July 1901, \$28.80; January 1902, \$4.15. Had one walked into one of these country stores, the "sight" would be markedly different from today's supermarkets and convenience stores. On long shelves would be found dishes, drugs, books and drygoods. Customers had an assortment of patented and other drugs to buy for the many real and imagined ailments that afflicted them, including paregoric, rhubarb, turpentine, calomel, sassafras, asafetida and opium mixture. In the fabric line would be gingham, Irish linen, calico, cambric, muslin and nankeen. Coffee, flour, sugar and pickles were kept in big barrels. Guns, saddles, harnesses, leather items, rope, cotton bagging, boots, nails, glassware, a multitude of tools — all these and more were kept on the shelves, counters, racks and in drawers. The place would likely smell strongly of an odd mixture of the prevailing odors produced by these store-bought goods.

The merchant usually had to be content with allowing most of his regular customers long-time credit, perhaps as much as twelve months. This allowed such time for a customer to borrow towards his crop, after the fall harvest and marketing, "settling" with the merchant. Many a merchant "went under," failed, sinking in an ocean of unpaid, partially-paid customer accounts. Bob McCallum sold his interest in this store to his partner, with the two tracts they had bought from Jimmy Pearson, on January 19, 1903, for \$3200. Key continued in business for several more months but he disliked the, confinement of store-keeping, thought that his health would be better if he returned to farming, which he did.”

Source: Jonathan K. T. Smith, *Our Claybrook Heritage (Madison, Tennessee)*, 1993, pp.47-49, 52, 1993. <http://www.tngenweb.org/records/madison/history/claybrook/clayb-03.htm>

Scope and contents

The collection contains five ledgers from the Key and McCallum country store used from 1900 to 1903. The listings furnish comparative prices of mercantile good for the period, and offer an insight into the operation of a country store at the turn of the twentieth century. Interesting aspects include the operation of the telephone, which evidently was used by the community, and payments for oil to the Standard Oil Company.

Provenance

Jonathan Smith, Jackson, Tennessee, arranged for the donation of the collection by Miss Boren, a niece-in-law of Martin Key.

Subject terms

General stores--Tennessee.
Key, Martin Bibb, 1874-1952.
Madison County (Tenn.)
McCallum, John Robert, 1855-1937.

Inventory

Key and McCallum country store ledgers:

1900 August 20-1901 April 12.
1901 April 13-November 4.
1901 November 4-1902 July 19.
1902 July 21-1903 April 15.
1903 April 15-1903 October 7.