

The Volunteer

The 1820 Col. Benjamin Stephenson House



October
2015

Inside this issue:

<i>The Stephenson Probate Records</i>	1
<i>Interpretive Summary for Mourning</i>	2
<i>September Photos Calendar</i>	3
<i>Upcoming Dates Thank You!</i>	4
<i>New to the Wardrobe Voices of the Past</i>	5
<i>News & Needs</i>	6

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Announcement:

This month, the house goes into mourning. Tours will be structured around this practice. Please visit www.stephensonhouse.shutterfly.com to familiarize/refresh yourself with this information.

Excerpt from *The Stephenson Probate Records*

By Sid Deny

Since Benjamin Stephenson died without a will his estate had to go through the probate process. The process started almost immediately when his son-in-law, lawyer Palemon H. Winchester appeared before Justice of the Peace John Y Sawyer and “being sworn made oath he saw Benjamin Stephenson die on the tenth day of October 1822, that he has examined his papers and to the best of his knowledge the said Stephenson died intestate.” The probate process did not end until the 1830s.

The records include a substantial amount of information bearing on the business and legal activities of Benjamin Stephenson and offer a number of insights into the nature of life in the 1820s. The extent and detail of the record is the result of the peculiar nature of the monetary system which existed at the time, and the constraints on business which the system imposed. In the first half of the 19th century the federal government did not print paper money. Money was primarily in the form of

“specie”, gold and silver coins. The coins, frequently produced in other countries, and the Spanish dollar was often cut into “bits”: eight bits to the dollar. Specie was scarce throughout the entire United States, but on the frontier the situation was even worse. Most of the people who came to the frontier were anything but wealthy, and they brought with them a limited amount of money in the form of gold or silver. Most of the new arrivals came to acquire cheap but productive farm land which could be purchased for \$2.00 an acre: however, the original federal law which governed the purchase of federal land created significant problems. First, the law required a down payment of five percent followed by a second payment of 25% within 40 to 90 days. The remainder was generally due within a period of four years. Second, the minimum price was \$2.00 per acre and the minimum purchase was a quarter section or 160 acres: thus the cash strapped settler faced a minimum bill of \$320. The situation would not have been

quite so bad had the specie paid by the settlers for their land been pumped back into the local economy, but that was not the case. Since the land was sold by the government, the money was sent to Washington D.C. Consequently, an economy, which was short of cash to begin with, quickly developed into one where cash was almost non-existent. Faced with this system, the residents did the only thing they could; they developed a system based on barter and credit. Almost everyone, including the relatively well off like Benjamin Stephenson, bought items and services on credit. Thus, when Benjamin Stephenson died he owed money to a very large number of people, and he was owed money by an equally large number of people. In order to settle the estate, the administrators were required to gather all of the accounts. These accounts reveal what was purchased, when, from whom, and for how much, and they cover a wide range of expenditures.

Continued on page 2

Probate from page 1

Details include the cost of constructing the house, buying food, and clothing, and repairing beds, candlesticks, and carriages....

Medicinal purchases were minimal including only 1/4 lb of sulphur, 1/4 pound of "yellow bark" and one ounce of "Lima bark". Both "yellow bark" and "Lima Bark" are sources of quinine for the treatment of malaria. Likewise, purchases of farming and gardening tools were minimal. The inventory and sale record a number of spades and two hoes but the only tool they purchased during the four years was a mattock. They, in fact, spent more on reading material than they did on farming and gardening. They subscribed to the *Spectator*, the local newspaper, at a rate of \$4.00 a year and to *The Western Monitor*

also at the rate of \$4.00 a year.

Since the Stephensons were among the more affluent residents of Edwardsville, they owned a number of luxury items including a carriage which they must have brought with them when they moved. Luxury items were not readily available on the frontier and none were purchased locally. Stephenson purchased a gold watch which cost \$50.00 in state paper which was equivalent to about \$25.00 in specie. He also paid \$16 for jewelry. Both of these items were sold to him by local resident Dennis Rockwell who acquired them while in Philadelphia. Rockwell also purchased "sundry items" in St. Louis for Stephenson. One of the most expensive "luxuries" purchased from Rockwell was a bay horse which cost \$80.00 in state paper. The second horse owned by the Stephensons sold at the public sale for 87 1/2 cents.

Finally, the records also provide details of the cost of Benjamin Stephenson's burial and the legal costs of the probate process. Funeral costs included ten dollars for a "ridge top coffin", three dollars paid to James Watts for "brick and walling the grave," and \$25.00 paid to Watts for building a picket fence around the grave site. The probate expenses including lawyer fees, fees paid to judges and justices of the peace, handbills, and fees for publishing administrative notices and sale advertisements, totaled \$487.92 1/2. The probate expenses were not inconsiderable. The costs were almost equal to the total cost of the Stephenson home and almost three times as much as they spent on food for a four year period.

To learn more about what expenses are in the probate records, go to the Stephenson's Shutterfly page.

Excerpt from Interpretive Summary for Mourning

By Elizabeth Bowling, 2006

The length of time one wore mourning clothes directly correlated to how close they were to the deceased.

According to *The Workwoman's Guide*, mourning times are as follows, with some allowances made for individuals in different circumstances:

- For a husband or wife, one to two years
- For a parent, six months to a year
- For children, if above ten years old, from six months to a year; below that age from three to six months, for an infant, six weeks and upwards.
- For brothers and sisters, six to eight months
- For aunts and uncles, three to six months
- For cousins, or uncles and aunts, related by marriage, from six weeks to three months
- For more distant relations or friends, from three weeks upwards

Other sources note that a husband did not have to adhere as strictly to

the mourning rules, and could marry again at any time. It would have been extremely scandalous for a woman to even come out of mourning clothes early, let alone marry another man before the mourning time was over.

Servants, if financially feasible, were given mourning clothes. In less wealthy households, the servants often wore armbands. Servants would also receive any gifts being bestowed upon mourners.

Mourning was separated into stages. The first stage of mourning required deep black textiles without shine or gloss. This stems from superstitions concerning reflected images of the dead. The Narcissus myth from ancient Greece was based on the fear of looking at one's reflection in the water. If you did, they believed the water spirits could drag your soul away. This superstition led to the customs of covering mirrors and portraits of the dead and using dull fabrics and jewelry. By looking at such objects and seeing your reflection, you could be the next to die. These beliefs became even more popular during the Victorian era (1837-1901).

During the later stages of mourning, clothes could be somewhat shinier. Eventually, lighter colors, such as gray or purple were socially acceptable. Some sources note that the wearing of black stems from people trying to blend in and not be noticed by Death. By being unobtrusive, they will avoid being the next to die.

Women bore the full brunt of mourning, normally wearing all black clothing and accessories, accompanied by heavy black veils or bonnets. Clothing was to be simple and unadorned. The stages listed in *The Workwoman's Guide* call for:

"The deepest mourning clothing to be bombazine trimmed with crepe; and entirely crepe, or silk and crepe bonnet. The next mourning level is black silk trimmed with crepe; silk and crepe bonnet. A third or slighter mourning, is a plain silk dress, with either black or white silk, or even a straw bonnet. Half-mourning is grey or lavender silk in a morning, and the same or white with black ornaments in the evening; bonnet either white or lavender silk, or straw."

Continued on page 3

September Photos



Photos taken by RoxAnn Raisner at Ben's Bluegrass, BBQ and Beer Bash. Above: Keith Dudding and his bluegrass band play at the Bash. Right: Gillen Raisner (second on right) and Angela Otto (far right) practice their sewing. Below: Amy Mullane stands next to the representative from *Recess Brewing*.



Mourning from page 2

Half-mourning is grey or lavender silk in a morning, and the same or white with black ornaments in the evening; bonnet either white or lavender silk, or straw."

They also provide directions on how to make or adorn appropriate mourning clothing. A certain kind of ribbon called a "love-hood" or "love" was a transparent silk and was often used as a ribbon for trim or decorating caps specifically for mourning. It was referred to as a "love-ribbon".

Men dressed in all black also, but as in many of the mourning rituals, this rule was not strictly adhered to, especially mili-

tary men (a black armband would suffice). The cloth often used for men were dense black woolens, especially the variety known as "cloth", which was shrunk or fulled after weaving, then napped and shorn to give a felt like texture. Buttons and other shiny surfaces had to be removed or covered.

Children in mourning could wear solid black or white with black trim. Younger people or people mourning for younger people could incorporate more white into their garb.

In England, "court mourning" was practiced. Common people would go into short periods of mourning for court members. In 1818, the following was an

order for Court Mourning issued by "the Lord Chamberlain's office for her late Majesty, the Queen, of Blessed Memory".

"The ladies to wear black bombazines, plain muslins or long lawn linen, crape hoods, shamoy (sic chamois) shoes and gloves, and crape fans. Undress: Dark Norwich crape. The gentlemen to wear black cloth, without buttons on the sleeves and pockets, plain muslin or long lawn cravats and weepers, shamoy (sic chamois) shoes and gloves, crape hat bands and black swords and buckles. Undress: Dark grey frocks"

To read more, visit Stephenson House's Shutterfly page.

October 2015

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1	2	3
■ = Morning Exhibit All Day						
4 50/50 Antique Auction 9:00 A. M. — 2:00 P. M.	5	6	7	8	9	10
11 Sewing Circle 1:00 P. M.	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25 Sewing Circle 1:00 P. M.	26	27 Board Meeting 7:00 P. M.	28	29	30	31

Upcoming Dates

- October 1 — 31: Mourning Exhibit, All Day
- October 4: 50/50 Antique Auction at 9:00 A. M. — 2:00 P. M.
- October 11: Sewing Circle at 1:00 P. M.
- October 25: Sewing Circle at 1:00 P. M.
- October 27: Board Meeting at 7:00 P. M.

New to the House Wardrobe



Kathy Schmidt's completed Federal Era woman's coat.
Photo taken by Julie Mangoff.

Voices of the Past

On October 10 and 11, Woodlawn Cemetery will have its 2nd annual *Voices of the Past* historical walking tour. There will be costumed actors who will retell stories of Edwardsville's past. The walking tours are 1-3 P. M. both days. The tours are about an hour long and begin every 10-15 minutes with the last tour leaving at 2:30 P. M. There will also be an

evening presentation on Saturday, October 10 at 7 P. M. were the actors will present their stories to visitors seated indoors.

If you are interested in going on the tour, tickets can be bought in advance at the Stephenson House in advanced. The guided tours are \$10 for adults and \$5 for children. You can also buy tickets the day of the event: \$13 for adults and \$6 for chil-

Thank You!

- Bill Eaton, Kathy Schmidt, Joe Galbraith, Pam Farrar, Carol Peterson, Ellen Nordhauser, Pat Perverly, Lisa Shashek, Darla Andrea, Amy Mullane, Riley Threlkeld, Lizzy Rice, Katie and Sherry Turpenoff, Paul Brazier, Jim Zupanci, Sid Denny, Angela Otto, Dwayne, Judy Connelly, and Julie Mangoff for helping make Ben's Bash a success.
- Debbie Cualk and the 8th graders at St. Mary's school for collecting two laundry baskets full of cleaning supplies. Picture below.



Stephenson House Collection

dren. For the evening presentation, advance tickets are \$15 for everybody. There will be no tickets for sale the night of the event and space is limited. To learn more, visit www.WoodlawnEdwardsville.org.

If you have any questions or want to buy tickets directly, contact Barb Pizzini at (618) 910-9929.



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If you have any articles or stories you would like to be added to next month's edition of *The Volunteer*, please contact the editor at: jamangoff@gmail.com.

www.stephensonhouse.shutterfly.com

News & Needs

Needs...

- volunteers to help with the 50/50 Antique Auction
- flour
- unprocessed honey
- volunteers to help with house tours, gift shop, garden & grounds, grant writing & research, as well as special events
- cleaning supplies such as Windex, toilet bowl cleaner, hand soap, disinfecting wipes, bleach, and toilet paper
- seamstresses to sew clothing for the volunteer wardrobe
- bolt of 100% cotton batiste