



THE VOLUNTEER

MAY 2024

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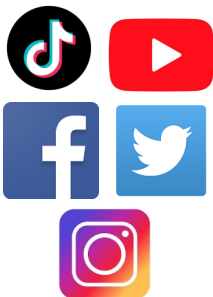
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The Probate Records of Benjamin Stephenson

By Sid Denny



Benjamin Stephenson died without a will requiring his estate to go through probate. 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 several 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 business constraints 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 were 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

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Greetings From the President

Good Day, and Happy Spring!

I hope everyone is doing lovely. My name is Blue and I'm the new President of the Board of Directors of the 1820 Col. Benjamin Stephenson House. I am looking forward to Spring and Summer at the house. I hope you all are also very excited!

All of our volunteers are beloved because there is so much that would not happen without all of you. Your time and presence is appreciated. We hope you all are also as giddy as we are to traipse through the 1820s as we educate our community and region. I must say the series, "Bridgerton", has sparked a bit of interest in this period. It certainly is one of my favorite programs. And we, as Stephenson House volunteers, get the privilege to educate on the correct details of the Federal/Regency Period.

We have programs upcoming and in the works like the "Desserts of the Early 19th Century" happening today, the "Pioneer Summer Camp" and "Mrs. Lucy's Academy for Young Ladies." We hope to have some school tours along with more visitors coming for tours. With all of this, any extra time that you can come and volunteer at the house would so be appreciated by RoxAnn, myself, and the entire Board of Directors. We want to give the best experience to our visitors and we can only do that with your help. In addition, if you know of individuals who love history and would be interested in volunteering as a Historical Interpreter, Gift Shop Attendant Docent, School Tour Docent, Garden and Grounds Docent, and many other volunteer opportunities, please have them call or email RoxAnn. In the meantime, I look forward to meeting you all as we have a wonderful time exploring a time past. And in the spirit of Lady Whistledown...

This is truly yours,

Lady Blue

Happy Spring!!!



Volunteer Training & Hands-on Learning!

You are invited to a volunteer enrichment opportunity at the Stephenson House. A different topic will be featured each month to help expand your knowledge of the past and help you to learn a new demonstration or skill. ALL volunteers are invited to attend. We hope to see you soon!

May 18, Starting a Fire with Flint & Steel, 11 am This activity is easy to do as a demonstration during tours. Historical interpreters should dress in period working garb. Volunteers who do not interpret should dress for comfort and practicality as it can be dirty.

Desserts of the Early 19th Century: Orange Loaves

by Jeanne Spencer

A recipe for the gentry, as oranges were more expensive than other citrus fruit.

Original Recipe as printed in “The Art of Cookery Made Plain and Simple”, by Hannah Glasse, c 1796.

Orange Loaves

Take your orange, and cut a round hole in the top, take out all the meat, and as much of the white as you can, without breaking the skin; then boil them in water till tender, shifting the water till it is not bitter, then take them up and wipe them dry; then take a pound of fine sugar, a quart of water (or in proportion to the oranges), boil it, and take off the scum as it rises; then put in your oranges, and let them boil a little, and let them lie a day or two in the syrup; take the yolks of two eggs, a quarter of a pint of cream (or more), beat them well together, then grate in two Naples biscuits, or white bread, a quarter of a pound of butter, and four spoonfuls of sack; mix it altogether till your butter is melted, then fill the oranges with it, and bake them in a slow oven as long as you would a custard, then stick on some citron, and fill them up with sack, butter and sugar grated over.

21st Century Conversion

Ingredients:

6 medium oranges

1 lb. sugar

1 quart water

4 oz. butter

4 oz. cream

2 eggs

4 tbsp. sherry

Sponge cakes or white bread — the equivalent of two large muffins in size

For topping: 3 oz. each of citron and candied orange peel and a sauce of 2 Tbsp. each of Sherry, melted butter and sugar heated and mixed together.

Instructions:

Take your oranges and cut off the tops of each about one



fifth the way down from the stem.

Scoop out the inside of the orange as best you can including the white. If you use a small tea spoon and hold the orange in your palm, it will be easier to scrape it out.

Boil the orange shells and lids in the water until tender but not folding or falling apart.

Take them out, let them cool some and pat them dry gently with a cloth.

Take half or more of the water the oranges were boiled in, add the sugar and bring to a boil in a medium stew pan.

While it is boiling add the orange shells and lids and let them boil a few minutes.

Take the pot off the heat and let it cool.

Put the oranges and water in a covered container and set them in the refrigerator for a couple of days to saturate with the syrup, stirring them a couple of times a day.

When they have saturated you are ready to fill them.

In a mixing bowl, beat your eggs very well, add the cream, cake crumb, butter and sherry. Mix this together well with a spoon.

Gently fill your orange shells with this “cake” mixture.

Bake the oranges and their lids in a 350° oven for close to half an hour or more. They should not get dark brown on the outside, but a deeper orange color. The “cake” should bake as well.

After coming from the oven, place the chopped citron and candied orange peel on top of each cake. After heating up the sherry, butter and sugar sauce spoon that over each cake to let it soak in. Send them to the table with lids on or next to them on the plate.

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

As might be expected the accounts dealing with the construction of the Stephenson house were among the largest. The bills included 6732 feet of lumber purchased from Abraham Prickett for \$117.98; the lumber purchase included almost all of the wood used in the construction. Construction also required large quantities of nails; eight purchases of nails at J. R. Pogue's store totaled 164.5 pounds and cost \$45.37. Three hundred palings (pickets) and railings for a picket fence were purchased from Abraham Prickett for \$18.37. Locks and hinges totaled \$4.25 and laths for the interior walls were purchased from Isaac Prickett's store for \$23.89. Labor costs included payments to Robert Page, J. Gordon, and William Cummins and totaled \$54.87 ½. Daniel Tolman, a local craftsman, was paid \$17.50 for making the rose blocks used on the window trim, the newel posts and banisters for the stairway, and all the decorative elements of the fireplace mantles. Another local craftsman, William Cummins, was paid \$25.75 for building the chimney and hearth and for providing and hauling the bricks. Minor expenses included the purchase of several lots of small triangular pieces of tin, called spriggs, used to secure window glass in the window frames, and 6 pieces of "glass paper", or

glassine, which probably served as temporary windows or were used in the kitchen windows. The cost of glass paper and spriggs totaled about \$11.00.

The other major construction expense was associated with making the brick for the house. Clearing the ground and constructing a shed for drying the brick and housing the kiln cost \$32.49. Two quarts of Whiskey for the hands who put up the shed cost 50 cents. Eight loads of sand, 4 ½ days of labor digging clay, and labor for eighteen days of cutting and hauling wood to fire the kiln totaled \$40.50; five wooden brick molds made by Daniel Tolman cost \$8.50.

All of these bills together total \$400.97 ½ which would be equivalent to about \$4500 today. The bills do not reflect a number of other costs including shingles, the cost of making the 100,00 or so bricks used in the construction, and the cost of window glass, window frames, or doors. In 1818, the shingles for the Stephenson's first house cost only \$5.50. The inventory of items in the estate in 1822 listed a froe used in making shingles and it is probable that they were made on site for minimal cost. No labor costs were associated with the molding or firing of the bricks and, as is the case with the shingles, the bricks were probably molded and fired by slaves. In the construction of the 1818 house, there is a bill from Thomas Armstrong for making a 12-pane window for \$11.50. Twelve of the windows in the 1820 house are also 12-pane windows in the common six-over-six arrangement. It seems reasonable to assume that they would have cost about the same as the window in the earlier house; thus, the cost of these windows would have been around \$138.00. There was also a

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Palladian window above the front door which would almost certainly have been more expensive than the standard windows. Therefore, we can probably assume that the Palladian window cost on the order of \$20.00. There is no way to calculate the cost of doors, but if one assumes that the front door was of high quality it would have certainly cost at least as much as a window or another \$12.00. Therefore, the cost of windows and doors may be estimated at \$170.00. Added to the \$400.97 ¹/₂ detailed above, the total cost of the house would have been about \$570. While there may have been several additional expenses, the total could not have been much higher since all of the major elements of the house are present in the bills. In today's terms, the \$570.00 would equate to about \$6330, which seems incredibly low given the quality of the home, but cheap

labor and inexpensive local materials probably account for the low cost.

A second major category of expenditure is food. The bills reflect purchases in four years 1818, 1819, 1821, and 1822. The majority of the expenses were in 1822. These costs are summarized in the chart below.

Flour, sugar, beef, and pork constituted 85 % of the food purchases. This figure is slightly inflated by one anomalous purchase of 742 lbs. of pork. It is not clear why so much pork was bought at one time, but other bills indicate that when the family moved to the new house a number of barrels of meat were transported to the house. Perhaps the pork was purchased, salted, and/or smoked. It is interesting to note that this purchase was made in January of 1818. At the time of Benjamin Stephenson's death in 1822, they owned a large

Item	Number of Purchases/Cost per unit/amount	Total Cost
Butter	multiple purchases at 0.10/lb.- 75 lbs.	\$7.50
Flour	5 purchases at 0.04/lb.- 1537.5 lbs.	61.51
Sugar	10 purchases at 0.20/lb.- 63 lbs.	12.00
Loaf Sugar	1 purchase of 5 lbs. 6 oz @ 0.40 per lb.	2.02
Apples	1 purchase of 20 bushels	6.25
Pork	1 purchase of 742 lbs. at 0.06 per lb.	44.52
Beef	28 purchase at 5-8 cents/lb-605 lbs.	38.05
Wine	6 purchases at about 0.60 per bottle	3.60
Pepper	1 purchase of 1 lb.	.50
Vinegar	1 purchase of 1 gallon-no cost listed	?
Nutmeg	1 purchase of one ounce	.50
Cornmeal	1 purchase of 2 bushels @ 0.37/bu.	.75
Salt	1 purchase of 1/2 bushel	.12
Cordial	2 bottles	1.50
Fish	1 purchase of 15 mackerel	1.50
Cream of Tarter	2 purchases totaling 3/4/lb.	1.06
Turkey	1 turkey	.50
Peppermints	1 purchase	.50
Cloves	1 purchase of 1 ounce	.43
	Total Purchases	\$182.81



THE COLONEL NEEDS A NEW FENCE!

Sorry Lucy, but we do need bucks...

but not the four-legged variety. We need doe too, but not female deer. The garden is overrun with those already.

We need your help to replace our teaching garden fence! It was constructed twenty years ago and has finally succumbed to the rigors of time and weather. The deer have taken advantage of the fence deterioration. Unless we are able to replace the fence, the garden, a vital component to our educational program, will be negatively effected.

We will deer-ly appreciate your doe-nations for this project.

Please accept my gift of \$ _____ to help Stephenson House replace the garden fence.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Donations are also accepted on our webpage www.stephensonhouse.org

Send donations to:
1820 Col. Benjamin Stephenson House, P.O. Box 754, Edwardsville, IL, 62025

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number of hogs and no longer needed to purchase pork. Unlike pork, beef was purchased frequently in much smaller lots indicating that it was consumed as purchased rather than being cured. The large purchases of flour and sugar indicate that baking was a major activity at the house. Although the Stephensons owned two cows with calves, they purchased butter frequently. Other foods like fish and turkey were rarely purchased. Equally as interesting as what was purchased is what was not purchased. Except for one purchase of potatoes bought by son-in-law Palemon Winchester and billed to the estate, there are no purchases of vegetables. Likewise, there was only one purchase of 20 bushels of apples. Herbs, spices, and condiments were also rarely purchased. The bills included only one lb. of pepper, one ounce of cloves, ½ bushel of salt, one oz of nutmeg, ¾ pound of Cream of Tarter, and one gallon of vinegar. The relative rarity of vegetables, fruits, herbs, and spices is a strong indication of an extensive herb garden, a large vegetable garden, and fruit trees on the site. Coupled with the hogs mentioned earlier, the Stephensons appear to have grown a substantial percentage of their food.

Sewing was a major activity at the house. Only a few items of ready-made, or "store-bought" clothing were purchased. During the four years represented in the bills, there are records showing the purchase of two "best" coats and one "coat"; a single checked shirt for "Hark"; one vest; one pair of children's gloves; four pairs of gloves; one pair of pumps; four pairs of worsted hose; two pairs of "coarse" shoes; 2 pairs of pumps; 1 pair of ball or long boots; and "one pair of shoes for Dot." Aside from coats, shoes, hose, and gloves, almost every other item of clothing must have been sewn by Lucy Stephenson or by others in the house. Sewing supplies were purchased frequently and in large quantities. Purchases include several "papers" of pins, numerous bunches of thread, tape, hooks and eyes, quantities of buttons, and a thimble. The largest expense was fabric: "1 ¼ yard cloth", 2 ¼ yards "fine flannel", four yards of "coating", six yards of crepe, 26 yards of bombazine, 14 yards of brown cloth, 1 ½ yards of muslin, seven yards of "figured



binding", "silk", two pieces or 52 yards of "sheeting", 11 yards of "domestic", 3 ½ yards of linen, seven yards of "shirting, cambric, and four yards of "steam loom shirting". The total cost of "ready-made" clothing was \$29 while the cost of sewing supplies was \$8.07. By contrast, the total fabric cost was \$61.76 ½. The most expensive purchases were after the death of Benjamin Stephenson when Lucy went to Belleville to the store of James Mitchell and bought crepe, and 26 yards of bombazine at \$0.75 per yard. Bombazine was a fine cloth made of silk and wool used primarily in the sewing of mourning clothes. Added together, the total cost for clothing, sewing supplies, and fabric is \$98.83 ½.

The records indicate that household expenses were fairly low, under \$50 during the four years covered by the accounts. The only expenditures for supplies were two purchases of hard soap totaling five pounds, a single purchase of eight pounds of candles, and two ounces of indigo for dyeing fabric. Soap making and candle making were both normal household activities during the period and the Stephensons almost certainly made their own. They did buy a number of small items: several Dutch oven lids, a wash bowl, a stove pan, some spoons, a frying pan, a bed cord, a mending tub, several hand brushes, some small knobs, and several tinware items like cups, pans, and buckets. Conspicuously absent from the bills are large home furnishing items. Based on the inventory and sale of personal property during the probate process, we know that they furnished the house with numerous large items including a secretary, bureaus, beds, tables, and a large number of expensive chairs. The furnishings also included an expensive silver tea set, a large china set, and a large number of other household items. The fact that none of these appear on any of the bills is an indication that most of their furniture and other expensive items were brought to Edwardsville from Kentucky, or they date from even earlier when the family lived in Virginia. Heating during the winter was provided by the fireplaces and they burned a great deal of wood but the cost was minimal. Late in 1821 when they moved into the house they had seven loads of wood delivered, and in January of 1822 another five loads

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Upcoming Events, Tours & Activities

- **May 1, Desserts of the Early 19th Century**, 6:30-8 pm. *Sold Out*
- **May 10, Lewis & Clark State Historic Site's Education Day**, 10 am-2 pm. We have been asked to provide a cooking demonstration for visiting children.
- **May 18. Volunteer Training: Starting a Fire with Flint & Steel**, 11 am
- **May 31, St. Charles Senior Center Tour**, 1-3 pm, 25+/- Adults. Volunteers needed to help in the gift shop and as interpreters.
- **June 8, Route 66 Festival**, 11 am. Stephenson House will be hosting the 1950s Diner tent. We only be serving history (not food) and promoting the site. Volunteers are needed to help man it.
- **June 19-21, Pioneer Summer Camp**, 9 am-2 pm. Volunteers are needed to teach sessions during this three day camp.
- **July 10-12, Mrs. Lucy's Academy for Young Ladies**, 9 am-2 pm. Volunteers are needed to teach sessions during this three day camp.
- **November 30, Christmas Candlelight Tours**, 5-8 pm

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of wood were delivered. The total cost of delivery was only \$3.00. Writing materials were purchased only once but included two ink stands, 100 quills, two papers of ink powders, and ten quires of paper. The total for all the writing materials was \$7.25.

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. In fact, they 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 various 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 four years.



			1 Desserts pf the Early 19th Century, 6:30 pm	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10 LCSHS 10am-2 pm	11
12 	13	14	15	16	17	18 Volunteer Training, 11 am
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27 	28	29	30	31 Tour, 1-3pm 25+/- Adults	

A Note From the Director

Happy May Day!

It's been quite a while since we published a newsletter for the House. I plan to send it out on the first of each month and welcome submissions on topics dealing with the history of the house, region, gardens, upcoming events and activities, recipes, training opportunities, etc. Submissions should be emailed to me at stephenhouse1820@yahoo.com by the 15th of the month.

RoxAnn



News & Needs

Thank you...

....to everyone who helped plan, implement or attended *Trivia Through the Decades*, April 20. It was another fun night!

News...

- Trivia Through the Decades was a huge success this year. Check out the photos on our Facebook page

Needs...

- Volunteers are needed to help us at the 1950s Diner tent during the Route 66 Festival, June 8. We've been asked to recreate our décor

from trivia night 2023, wear 1950s-style clothing, and promote the House.

- We're looking for volunteers to teach sessions during our upcoming summer camps; *The Pioneer Camp* (June 19-21) and *Mrs. Lucy's Academy* (July 10-12). If interested, let RoxAnn know ASAP.
- historical interpreters for Saturdays and/or Sundays
- a Sunday afternoon gift shop docent
- bolt of 100% cotton batiste

- Gift cards to local fabric stores in order to purchase fabric for house clothing.

