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**Guide to  
Colonel John Ashley Papers, 1755-1818**

**AH.MS.Coll.2**

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## **ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION**

### **PROVENANCE**

Acquired with the purchase of the Colonel John Ashley House, 1972.

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This collection is open for research.

## **COLONEL JOHN ASHLEY (1709-1802)**

John Ashley was born on December 2, 1709, in Westfield, Massachusetts. He was a 1730 graduate of Yale College and was one of the first settlers in Sheffield, Massachusetts, where he owned a grist mill, a cider mill, an ironworks, and more than 3,000 acres. Ashley served in various local and state positions, including judge of the county court.

In 1735, Ashley married Hannah Hogeboom and built a house that same year in Sheffield. (In 1930, the Colonel John Ashley House was moved from its original location next to the Housatonic River to its present location on Cooper Hill Road.) The Ashleys had two children, Major General John Ashley (1736-1799) and Jane Ashley (1738-1814).

In 1773, Colonel Ashley served as the moderator of a group of eleven men (including Theodore Sedgwick) who drafted the Sheffield Declaration at a meeting on January 5<sup>th</sup>, which is said to have taken place in the upstairs study of Ashley's house. The Sheffield Declaration made a statement against British tyranny and for individual rights. It was approved by the town of Sheffield, Massachusetts on January 12, 1773 and was printed in *The Massachusetts Spy* on February 18, 1773.

Colonel Ashley's father-in-law, Pieter Hogeboom, had given the Ashleys two slaves, Mum Bett and Lizzie. In 1781, Mum Bett and another slave, Brom, sued Colonel Ashley for their freedom under the

new 1780 state constitution. Attorney Theodore Sedgwick (1746-1813) successfully argued their case. When Mum Bett won her freedom, she took the name Elizabeth Freeman and worked as a paid employee for the Sedgwicks until her death in 1829. She is buried in the Sedgwick family plot in Stockbridge, Massachusetts.

Colonel Ashley appealed the decision to the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts but dropped the appeal before it reached the court. He died in 1802 and is buried in Ashley Falls, Massachusetts.

## **DESCRIPTION OF THE PAPERS**

The Colonel John Ashley Papers consist of three account books. The first account book, which belonged to Colonel Ashley, contains ca. 133 pages. The entries date from 1758 to 1818 (some entries were made after Ashley's death in 1802), but most of the entries are from the 1770s. The account book details the purchases made by Ashley's customers, information about Ashley's house and property, and information about his employees. Some of the employee information may pertain to slaves or former slaves. There are a number of receipts and notes that were laid in to this account book. The loose documents have been foldered and listed separately, and the page numbers where they were originally laid in have been recorded in the folder list.

The second account book probably belonged to Dr. William Bull (1729-1758), who was married to Colonel Ashley's daughter, Jane Ashley Bull (1738-1814). This medical account book consists of ca. 68 pages, many mentioning the town of Canaan, Connecticut, and some mentioning Sheffield. The book contains entries from 1755 to 1760 (some entries were made after Bull's death in 1758), but most of the entries are for 1757. There is an alphabetical index by last name in the front of the account book. The entries contain the patients' names, treatment, and the price they paid; many entries refer to another account book (not in the collection), "Day book No. 3." There is at least one entry for Colonel Ashley. Loose documents that were laid in to this account book have been foldered and listed separately, and the page numbers where they were originally laid in have been recorded in the folder list.

The third account book consists of ca. 171 pages. The entries, which date from August 20, 1794 to April 26, 1795, include customers' names, the names and amounts of products that they purchased, and the prices they paid. Since there are entries for Colonel Ashley himself, the account book probably did not belong to him.

Box	Folder	Contents	Date
<b>ASHLEY, COLONEL JOHN (1709-1802)</b>			
		Account book	1758-1818
		<p>I v. (p. 40-173). Each page number covers two open pages.                      Bulk dates: 1770s.                      Contains notes on customers' purchases, house &amp; land activities, and employees.                      Some pages missing; some pages partial.                      Barn construction (1771-1772) detailed, p. 75.                      Missing front cover.</p> <p>Stored in: Oversize, Box 2, Folder I</p>	
		Items laid in to Account book	
I	1	Promissory note from Phinchas Taylor to David Walker, Sheffield, laid in, p. 53	1758 Apr 4
I	2	Promissory note from Benjamin [Sheldon?] to Zebulun Richards, signed by Thomas Ashley, laid in, p. 66	1763 Feb 2
I	3	"The amount of Cole. Ashley's hogs," laid in, p. 41	1764 Dec
I	4	Note from Wm. Bement, Great Barrington, to "Colle. John Ashley" regarding iron for Andrew [Nivins?], laid in, p. 128	1767 Apr 27
I	5	Note from John Ashley to "Jm Gossen" regarding iron for "Elixander Gunn," laid in, p. 80	1771 Oct 15
I	6	Account for Ezra Hickock, laid in, p. 47	1771-1774
I	7	Note from John Ashley to "Jm Gossen" regarding iron for "Elex Gunn," laid in, p. 80	1772 Jan 9
I	8	Note from William Sheldon to "Colnl. Ashley" regarding iron for Constantine Noble," laid in, p. 96	1772 Dec 14

Box	Folder	Contents	Date
<b>ASHLEY, COLONEL JOHN (1709-1802)</b>			
Items laid in to Account book			
I	9	Note from Joseph Churchley to “Col. Ashley” regarding iron for Daniel Johnson, laid in, p. 86 #2	1773 May 4
I	10	John Ashley’s account for Ezra Fellows, laid in, p. 81	1773-1774
I	11	Account for Ezra Hickock, laid in, p. 47	1773-1774
I	12	Note from Zenas Wheeler to “Cornl. John Ashley” regarding “oar,” laid in, p. 124	1774 Oct 17
I	13	Note from Jacob Jonson, New Marlborough, to John Ashley regarding iron for Elisha Torry, laid in, p. 124	1774 Dec 10
		Receipt signed on back by Elisha Torry, 1774 Dec 10.	
I	14	Note from Oliver Church, New Marlborough, to John Ashley regarding payment to Elizer White, laid in, p. 125	1775 Mar 24
I	15	Receipt for order given to Constantine Noble for Danl. Sheldon, laid in, p. 115	1775 Oct 17
I	16	Note from Ezra Hickock to Cornl. John Ashley regarding iron for Ezra Fellows and charged to Joseph Church’s account, laid in, p. 123	1776 Feb 12
I	17	Note from John Ashley regarding iron for Mr. Bement, laid in, p. 128	1776 Feb 21
I	18	Amount owed by Mr. Niles of Norwitch to John Ashley, laid in, p. 156	1779 May 25
I	19	Note from Samuel Church to “Cornl Ashley” regarding money owed by Zebulun Richards, laid in, p. before 67	[177-?] Sep 25

<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>	<b>Contents</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>ASHLEY, COLONEL JOHN (1709-1802)</b>			
Items laid in to Account book			
I	20	List of customers' names and amounts, laid in, p. 55	[177-?]
I	21	Note from John Ashley to miller, laid in, p. 61	[177-?]
I	22	Note from John Ashley to miller regarding "rhy" and corn for "Mr. Egelston," laid in, p. 108	[177-?]
I	23	Note regarding John Ashley's iron in store house, laid in, p. 125	[177-?]
I	24	List for "Collo. John Ashley" of items and amounts, laid in, p. 128	[177-?]
I	25	"An account of good got at New York for Major John Ashley," laid in, p. 146	[177-?]
I	26	Loose fragment	[177-?]
I	27	Receipt from John Ashley to Town of Sheffield for wheat delivered to Benjamin Brayman, laid in, p. 119	1782 Mar 5
I	28	Account regarding work of "Adam" for John Ashley, laid in, p. 167 #2	1783-1786
I	29	Receipt from Wm. Bement to John Ashley for list of items and amounts, laid in, p. 128	1784 Feb 29
I	30	Notes regarding work of "Adam" for John Ashley, laid in, p. 160	1784-1785
I	31	Account for General Fellows, laid in, p. 135	1784-1788
I	32	Note from John Ashley to [Jeffrey?] Gossen regarding iron for Mr. [Freeman?], laid in, p. 109	1785 Jan 23

<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>	<b>Contents</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>ASHLEY, COLONEL JOHN (1709-1802)</b>			
Items laid in to Account book			
I	33	Receipt for purchases by John Freeman from Col. Ashley, laid in, p. 109  Contains fragment of another receipt on back.	1785 Mar 18
I	34	Note regarding bushels of coal, laid in, p. before 67	1785
I	35	Order for iron from Benjamin Hansen to John Ashley, laid in, p. 76	1786 Feb 12
I	36	Receipt from John Ashley for order of iron by William Baron, laid in, p. before 67	1786 Feb 16
I	37	Order for wheat from Joshua Fitch to “Corl. Ashley,” laid in, p. 72	1786 Apr 19
I	38	Receipt from [Inesman?] Seymour, Sheffield, to “Corl. Ashley” for rum, laid in, p. 131	1786 Jul 4
I	39	“An account of the iron General Fellows has had,” laid in, p. 135	1787-1788
I	40	Promissory note from Jo[seph] Hickock to William Forist, laid in, p. 62	1789 Mar 25
I	41	Receipt to Stephen Stevens from William Ashley, laid in, p. 55	1818 Jun 26

Box	Folder	Contents	Date
<b>BULL, WILLIAM (1729-1758)</b>			
		Medical account book, probably by William Bull (1729-1758)	1755-1760
		<p>I v. (p.1-13a; 46-93, 98-106).                      Illegible title on front cover, possibly stating "Leger ... of Dr. Wm. Bull," dated [1755?].                      Illegible notes on back cover.                      Missing p.13b-45, 94-97.                      Bulk date: 1757.                      Contains entries regarding treatment of patients.                      Many entries mention town of Canaan, [CT]; some mention Sheffield.                      Contains alphabetical index in front.                      Many references to "Day book No. 3."                      Entry for Colonel Ashley, p.2b: "Novr. 19. By Note to Cole. Ashley. Writ deducted."</p> <p>Stored in: Oversize, Box 2, Folder 2</p> <p>Items laid in to Medical account book</p>	
I	42	"Doct. Bull account [sic]," laid in, p. 54	1755 Aug
I	43	Note from Wm. Bull to Mr. [Joselyn?] regarding a delivery by Mr. Adams, laid in, p. 13	1757 Nov 1
I	44	List of names and possibly medications, laid in, p. 55	[175-?]
I	45	Note, fragment, laid in, p. 47	[175-?]
<b>UNIDENTIFIED AUTHOR</b>			
I	46	Daybook	1794-1795
		<p>I v. (p.3-174).                      Entries from 1794 Aug 20 to 1795 Apr 26, listing customers' names, products purchased, amounts, and prices.                      Missing p.113-116, 127-131.                      Missing front and back covers.                      Entries for Col. Ashley: p.33, 35, 78-79.</p>	



<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>	<b>Contents</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Oversize</b>			
1.50' (1 box)			
<b>OVERSIZE BOX</b>			
2	1	Ashley, Colonel John (1709-1802). Account book	1758-1818
2	2	Bull, William (1729-1758). Medical account book	1755-1760