

**A GENERAL STORE AT SAINT LAWRENCE POST OFFICE  
IN WESTERN CHATHAM COUNTY, N.C., 1851 - 1852  
AND NOTES ON THE HISTORY OF THE COMMUNITY**

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## INTRODUCTION

The main body of this article consists of a list of the merchandise sold by a small store at a crossroads community in western Chatham County in the years 1851-1852. The compilation is of interest as an indication of how far this community had advanced from the state of hard and meager subsistence characteristic of the earliest settlers in the backwoods of Chatham County. While their degree of prosperity was moderately good for the location, it was still very modest relative to that of the big planters in more favorable regions of the South. Some notes on the history of the community have been included as background material.

## SOURCE MATERIAL AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This article is based on the entries in a day book believed to have belonged to Henry C. Luther, who was postmaster at Saint Lawrence, Chatham County, N. C. The period covered is from January 29, 1851 to May 10, 1852.

This day book is in the Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill, N. C. It is listed under Chatham County Miscellaneous Books, Volume 6.

The writer of this article was permitted to obtain a photographed copy of the day book, 166 pages, in order to facilitate the detailed study of its contents. For this courtesy my sincere thanks are here expressed.

## LOCATION AND HISTORY

The subject store was located approximately four miles east of Siler City between the old and present routes of U.S. Highway Number 64 at a point adjacent to the home of Mr. H. H. Whitehead. Some of the foundation stones and the base of the chimney may still be seen in his yard. A post office was established there in 1830 and named Saint Lawrence. Henry C. Luther was postmaster there from July 3, 1851 to September 11, 1852 and is indicated to have been the operator of the store during this period. The Saint Lawrence post office appears to have been moved at a later date to a point approximately two miles east of Siler City near Hackney's mill on Rocky River, where it remained until it was discontinued on November 30, 1903.

The subject area was one of the earliest and most important crossroads communities in Western Chatham County during the ante-bellum period.

The John Collet map of North Carolina published in 1770 shows a road from Crosscreek (near Fayetteville) to Hillsborough as passing near the place where the Saint Lawrence community developed. Later maps, between 1808 and 1870, all show a concentration of roads radiating from the point east of Rocky River and near Varnell Creek at which the Saint Lawrence post office and the subject country store were located.

This crossroads was designated McCarrol on the Price-Strothers map of 1808. The MacRae-Brazier map of 1833 shows it as Ragland's. The name Saint Lawrence appears on some of the later maps.

In 1755 a Granville grant of 500 acres to John James, located in what was to become the Saint Lawrence area, was surveyed. This tract lay on both sides of Varnell Creek and on both sides of a county road (then Orange County). Zacharia Martin and wife, Rebecca, bought this tract from John James in 1765. In 1773 it was sold by the Martins to Dr. James McCarroll.<sup>1</sup>

Dr. McCarroll, born in Ireland in 1734, was living on this land by 1774. The Chatham County Court minutes in May of that year record the granting of an ordinary license to James M. (or Mc) Carroll. They also record the following: "ordered that Doct. James M. Carroll be appointed overseer of the road from Ann Copeland's to his store, and that the hands contiguous thereto work on same". The court minutes of August 1774 record an order concerning a new road to be opened from Chatham Court House to Doctor James M. Carroll's.

Dr. McCarroll died in 1777 and was burried near his home at what was later to be known as the Saint Lawrence area. His monument is a massive slab of soapstone measuring approximately 6 by 4 feet and placed horizontally over the grave. The inscription is now weathered and dim. It was recorded in an article in the Chatham News in 1942 by "Buster" Edwards as follows:

"Here lies interred the body of Doctor James McCarroll. He was born in the county of Armagh in the Kingdom of Ireland in the year 1734 and departed this life on the 93rd day of the year 1777, the 43rd year of his age. Remarkable for his knowledge in the arts and science. This monument erected by Elizabeth McCarroll the 16th day of 1778."

Dr. McCarroll also left a son named Thomas. The widow, Elizabeth, married Patrick Saint Lawrence sometime prior to June 25, 1786.<sup>2</sup> Saint Lawrence was identified mainly with the Pittsboro area, where he built a substantial house around 1787. It is said to be the second dwelling built in Pittsboro and is still standing. By 1797 Patrick Saint Lawrence was bankrupt and had departed from Pittsboro, and probably from Chatham County, by August 13, 1798.<sup>3</sup>

The post office named Saint Lawrence was established in 1830. It was probably named for the above Patrick. He is the only individual of the Saint Lawrence name listed in the deed books of Chatham County. In 1837 when Daniel Hackney sold to William Ragland 750 acres of land on Varnell Creek in the subject area the deed stated that this property was known as St. Lawrence old place.<sup>4</sup>

#### THE SAINT LAWRENCE COMMUNITY AT THE TIME OF THE COUNTRY STORE RECORDS

At this time (1851-52) it had been around ninety years since the arrival of the first pioneer settlers in the area. Some of the farms and homesteads were now in the hands of the second or third generation of their descendants. The items which they were buying at the store during this period give an indication as to how far they had advanced from the state of near self sufficiency characteristic of the earliest settlers in the backcountry of Chatham County.

The stores in Pittsboro at that time offered larger and more varied stocks of merchandise. Therefore the purchases made at the Saint Lawrence store do not give a complete picture of the goods being bought by the

families who traded there. Since this store was at a country post office, many small purchases were probably made incidental to coming there for the mail.

In this rural community of Chatham County during the early 1850's the tallow candle was the main source of household illumination. The firearms were muzzle loading. The percussion lock and cap were in use along with the flintlock. Matches were in limited use. The loom and spinning wheel were active in the home, corded beds were current, key-wound watches were in use and bear's oil was in limited demand.

Calico, homespun, indigo, coffee, molasses, rice, sugar, and chewing tobacco were staples.

Artificial flowers, to decorate ladies hats, and neck ribbons were being bought. There was a brisk sale of ribbons and lace.

A few families indulged in minor luxuries such as broadcloth at \$4.00 a yard, silk bonnets at \$3 to \$5 each, silk handkerchiefs at up to 75¢ each, and French brandy. Fresh lemons and cocoanuts were available on rare occasions.

Fashions of the day penetrated the backwoods of Chatham as evidenced by the purchase of a "California Hat" on April 10, 1851 for \$2.50 by Mr. Samuel B. Perry.

Some farmers of the area were now living in moderately good circumstances and near the height of ante-bellum prosperity.

Prominent among the squirearchy of the community was Philip K. Alston, a son of the late "Chatham Jack" Alston. The 1850 census records him as having 64 slaves and 400 acres of improved land, which yielded 2000

bushels of corn and lesser amounts of other grain. His livestock included 10 horses, 3 mules, 15 milk cows and 90 hogs. Other substantial farmers who were regular customers at the Saint Lawrence store were R. C. Cotten, Samuel H. Crutchfield, and Daniel Hackney. They owned 20, 14, and 8 slaves respectively.

#### NOTES ON THE CUSTOMERS

The daybook records the names of 159 persons as having made one or more purchases at the store. They may be divided into three groups as follows.

Regular Customers: 35 in number. These are individuals who made purchases on ten or more occasions during the period of approximately 15 1/2 months covered by the record. Most of them probably lived in or near the Saint Lawrence community or found it to be a convenient place at which to trade. Their names are listed below.

Alston, Philip K.	Hall, Joseph T.
Alston, Robert P.	Headen, A. D.
Brooks, Elias	Headen, John B.
Brooks, Issac N.	Headen, Cpt. William
Brooks, John T.	Hutton, James
Brooks, Samuel M.	Johnson, Joseph
Brooks, Thomas A.	Johnson, Thomas
Caviness, James	Kirkman, Dr. George
Cotten, Richard C.	Lineberry, Rev. William
Crutchfield, Samuel H.	Marsh, James B.
Dorsett, Robert	Perry, Samuel B.
Dorsett, William	Rogers, Henry H.
Dowdy, Joseph	Self, Frances
Evans, Owen S.	Teague, D. P.
Hackney, A. G.	Teague, L. T.
Hackney, Daniel	Temples, Joah
Hackney, Miss Elizabeth	Webster, Albert
Hackney, Samuel C.	

Daniel Hackney was by far the largest and most frequent customer. He purchased merchandise on 122 occasions with a total value of \$137.28.

He had been postmaster at Saint Lawrence from 1837 to 1844 and may have had an interest in the store. Among the regular customers there were only four with cumulative purchases in excess of \$50.00.

Sporadic Customers: 46 in number. These are individuals who made purchases on 4 to 9 occasions. Some of this group were the wives and children of the regular customers. William W. Matthews made purchases on seven occasions. He was then living four miles west of the store at the crossroads which bore his name (now the Siler City area).

Transient Customers: 78 in number. These are individuals who made purchases on 1 to 3 occasions. They probably include visitors to the community and travelers stopping there during a journey. Captain William Marsh, a veteran of the Revolutionary War and then approximately 100 years of age, purchased six yards of homespun and a pair of shoes in October of 1851. His home was located approximately one mile west of the store.

A small amount of barter is indicated. Daniel Hackney and L. T. Teague were given credits for hauling and Joseph Johnson was given credit for shoeing a horse. Henry Dorsett was given credit for 13 3/4 pounds of tallow and for 4 1/2 pounds of feathers.

There are a few entries of "cash loans" and of "cash out of drawer" charged to the accounts of customers.

#### LIST OF MERCHANDISE

The list has been divided into several generalized conventional categories in order to achieve a somewhat orderly presentation.



The first column after the name of an article gives the price per unit, or per pound, per yard, per dozen, etc. as indicated. The second column shows the total amount of each item sold in the unit applicable to it. The third column records the number of sales made of each item and indicates the extent to which they were in request.

The list which follows is based on transactions recorded in the day book from January 29, 1851 to May 10, 1852. The total value of the itemized sales during that period was approximately \$1616.00.

GENERAL MERCHANDISE

<u>Name of Item</u>	<u>Unit Price</u>	<u>Total Amount Sold</u>	<u>Number of Sales</u>
Alum.	10-20¢ @ lb.	5 1/2 lbs.	8
Almanacs	10¢ ea.	9	9
Asafetida - per oz.	5-10¢	4 oz.	3
Bear's oil	10¢ @ vial	4 vials	4
British oil	10¢ @ vial	7 vials	7
Bed cords - per bunch	30-45¢	8 bunches	8
Books			
arithmetic	30-40¢ ea.	3	2
spelling	10¢	7	5
Webster's dictionary	40¢	1	1
Boot blacking	5-10¢ @ box	14 boxes	12
Borax	5-10¢ @ lb.	1 1/4 lbs.	2
Camphor	10¢ @ oz.	10 1/2 ozs.	11
Candles - ea.	5¢	6	5
Candles - per lb.	20-25¢	26 lbs.	9
Candle molds	50-60¢ @ pair	2 pairs	2
Candle snuffers	25¢ ea.	1	1
Candlesticks	30¢ ea.	1	1
Caps (percussion)	5-10¢ @ box	17 boxes	14
Castor oil	10-45¢ @ bottle	14 bottles	14
Cigars	25¢ @ doz.	1 1/2 doz.	2
Colone	7-40¢ @ vial	7 vials	7
Coperas	5¢ @ lb.	27 lbs.	20
Cotton cards	45-75¢ @ pair	5 pairs	5
Envelopes	10-20¢ @ bunch	7 bunches	7
Gun Flints	5¢ @ 1/2 doz.	3 doz.	4
Hair brushes	30-50¢ ea.	4	4

<u>Name of Item</u>	<u>Unit Price</u>	<u>Total Amount Sold</u>	<u>Number of Sales</u>
Indigo	10¢ @ oz.	31 oz.	19
Ink - per bottle	10-25¢	8	8
Laudanum per vial	10¢	15 vials	11
Looking glasses	65-80¢ ea.	2	2
Madder	2 1/2¢ @ oz.	75 ozs.	12
Marbles per set	5-15¢	5 sets	5
Matches	5¢ @ box	11 boxes	10
Opium	50¢ @ oz.	3 ozs.	3
Paper-per quire	15-20¢	36 quires	35
Paregoric	10¢ @ vial	12 vials	7
Pens, steel	10-20¢ @ doz.	7 doz.	7
Pipes, tobacco	10¢ @ doz.	1/2 doz.	1
Powder, gun	30-40¢ @ lb.	27 1/2 lbs.	34
Powder flasks	30¢ ea.	3	3
Razors	30-50¢ ea.	4	4
Razor straps	40¢ ea.	2	2
Saleratus	10¢ @ lb.	15 lbs.	20
Saltpeter	15¢ @ lb.	4 1/2 lbs.	4
Shaving soap	10-30¢ @ box	4 boxes	4
Shoe Brush	25¢	1	1
Shoe threads	5¢ @ bunch	3 bunches	3
Shot, lead	10¢ @ lb.	114 1/2 lbs.	45
Slates	15-20¢ ea.	4	4
Snuff	30¢ @ lb.	11 lbs.	15
Snuff	25¢ @ bottle	8 bottles	8
Snuff boxes	5-15¢ ea.	3	3
Soap	2 1/2-15¢ @ cake	7 cakes	6
Spectacles	50¢ @ pair	8 pairs	8
Sulphur	10¢ @ lb.	6 lbs.	5
Tallow	8¢ @ lb.	14 lbs.	3
Tobacco, chewing	20-30¢ @ plug	62 plugs	66
Tobacco, smoking	8¢ @ lb.	5 lbs.	1
Turpentine	30¢ @ bottle	7 bottles	7
Wafers (seals)	10¢ @ box	4 boxes	4
Watch chain	15¢	1	1
Watch key	\$3.00	1	1

Note: Some items, such as the watch key above, were probably special orders and not from the regular stock.

DRY GOODS

<u>Name of Item</u>	<u>Price Per Yard</u>	<u>Total Yards Sold</u>	<u>Number of Sales</u>
Alpaca	50¢	6	2
Bleaching	10-20¢	83	29
Bobbinet	13-50¢	8	5
Broadcloth	\$4.00	4	2
Calico	7-18¢	485	118
Cambric	10-20¢	73	41
Canvas	10-20¢	4	5
Cashmere	\$1.00	6	1
Checks	15¢	9	4
Coating	20¢	2	1
Domestic	10-12¢	3	2
Drill	12-16¢	8	2
Flannel	24-55¢	24	6
Gingham	12-40¢	57	25
Homespun	8-20¢	147	39
Jean	40¢	17	4
Lawn	20-55¢	29	8
Linen	10-95¢	41	27
Muslin	16-50¢	135	29
Pant stuff	15-30¢	26	5
Plaid	20-35¢	31	8
Sea island	15¢	19	3
Serge	50¢	2	1
Sheeting	10-20¢	37	4
Shirting	10-15¢	202	26
Silk	40-50¢	2	3
Tweed	28-55¢	49	15
Worsted serge	25-50¢	32	8

OTHER YARD GOODS

<u>Name of Item</u>	<u>Price Per Yard</u>	<u>Total Yards Sold</u>	<u>Number of Sales</u>
Braid	8¢	8	3
Edging and fringe	3-25¢	38	10
Lace	3-19¢	123	43
Ribbon	3-20¢	100	50

READY MADE ITEMS

<u>Name of Item</u>	<u>Unit Price</u>	<u>Total Number Sold</u>	<u>Number of Sales</u>
Blankets	80¢	9	2
Bonnets, silk	\$3.00-5.00	3	3
Bonnets, straw	\$1.50-1.80	3	3
Caps	50-60¢	4	3
Coats	\$2.00-15.00	18	17
Cravats	40-90¢	4	4
Goves	13-1.25	19 pr.	19
Handkerchiefs (cotton, linen, silk)	10-75¢	33	26
Hats	75¢-\$2.50	33	27
Hose	19-30¢ pr.	6	6
Overcoats	\$4.75-6.50	2	2
Pants	\$1.20-2.75	7	7
Shawls	\$1.50-4.25	3	3
Shirts	\$1.00-1.60	4	4
Shoes (all types)	55¢-\$2.00	82 pr.	77
Socks	20¢ pr.	1	1
Suspenders	16-60¢ pr.	13	13
Veils	30-65¢	4	4
Vests	\$1.75-4.50	14	14

ACCESSORIES AND NOTIONS

<u>Name of Item</u>	<u>Unit Price</u>	<u>Total Amount Sold</u>	<u>Number of Sales</u>
Artificial flowers	10-50¢ @ bunch	9 bunches	8
Beads	8-12¢ @ strand	5 strands	4
Buttons (@ card, set, doz.)	5-25¢	90	74
Combs, general	10-25¢	16	16
Combs, side	5-30¢ @ pr.	16 pairs	13
Combs, tuck	5-20¢	18	18
Fans	10-90¢	3	3
Hooks and eyes	5-10¢ @ card	9 cards	9
Knitting needles	5¢ a set	2 sets	-
Neck ribbons	35-40¢	3	3
Needles (@ paper)	10-15¢	14 papers	12
Parasols	40-\$1.75	4	4
Pins (@ paper)	10¢	10	10
Sheet wadding	7-10¢ @ sheet	8	8
Thimbles	5-50¢	7	7
Thread, @ ball	10¢	10	8
" , @ oz.	10-15¢	22 ozs.	18
" , @ skein	5-10¢	39 skeins	22
" , @ spool	5-10¢	108 spools	97
Umbrellas	40-\$1.75	5	4
Whalebone (@ doz.)	20¢	1 doz.	1
Yarn - cotton (@ bunch)	75-\$1.05	49 bunches	33

GROCERIES AND RELATED ITEMS

<u>Name of Items</u>	<u>Price</u>	<u>Total Amount Sold</u>	<u>Number of Sales</u>
Almonds @ lb.	19¢	1 lb.	1
Candy @ lb.	20-40¢	19 lbs.	36
Cheese @ lb.	12 1/2¢	56 lbs.	11
Chocolate @ lb.	20¢	1/2 lb.	1
Cinnamon, essence of	10¢ @ vial	1 vial	1
Cocoanuts	5-15¢ ea.	12	3
Coffee @ lb.	12 1/2-16 2/3¢	663 lbs.	108
Crackers	20¢ @ lb.	3/4 lb.	2
Figs	25¢ @ lb.	2 lbs.	3
Ginger	15¢ @ lb.	2 1/2 lbs.	3
Lemons, fresh	4-8¢ ea.	22	8
Lemon syrup @ bottle	10-40¢	18	16
Molasses @ gal.	35-40¢	128 1/2 gals.	85
Nutmeg @ oz.	15¢	2 ozs.	2
Nuts	20¢ @ lb.	13 lbs.	6
Pepper	20¢ @ lb.	12 1/2 lbs.	15
Peppermint, essence of, vials	10¢ @ oz.	6 ozs.	5
Raisins	20¢ @ lb.	6 1/2 lbs.	8
Rhubarb	10¢ @ oz.	4 ozs.	3
Rice @ lb.	5 1/2-7¢	205 lbs.	33
Salt	\$1.00 @ bushel	10 bushels	15
Soda @ lb.	10-15¢	38 1/2 lbs.	38
Spice	20¢ @ lb.	5 1/4 lbs.	8
Starch	15¢ @ lb.	2	2
Spirituous liquors			
French brandy	50¢ @ qt.	8 qts.	5
Gin	35¢ @ qt.	3 qts.	3
Port wine	75¢ @ qt.	1 qt.	1
Whisky	25¢ @ qt.	5 qts.	3
Sugar, granulated, @ lb.	8-15¢	726 lbs.	97
loaf sugar	50¢ @ loaf	4 loaves	4
loaf sugar @ lb.	11-15¢	12 lbs.	3
Tea	\$1.00 @ lb.	2 lbs.	2

HARDWARE AND RELATED ITEMS

<u>Name of Item</u>	<u>Price</u>	<u>Total Number Sold</u>	<u>Number of Sales</u>
Augers	20-40¢	2	2
Awls	10¢	1	1
Axes	\$1.25-1.65	5	4
Bells (cow)	65¢	1	1
Bells (sheep)	25¢	1	1
Bowls (various)	5-45¢	40	19
Bridles	\$1.25-1.75	7	6
Buckets (tin)	25-50¢	15	15
Buggy whips	75¢	1	1
Chisels, @ set	\$1.50	1	1
Churns	80-85¢	2	2
Crocks and jars	20-40¢	7	6
Cups and saucers (sets)	20-65¢	10	10
Currycombs	10-25¢	7	7
Dippers (tin)	10-13¢	3	3
Dishes	10-38¢	9	8
Files and rasps	10-50¢	13	13
Fishhooks @ doz.	6-10¢	10 doz.	9
Forks (hay)	90¢	2	2
Hasps and hinges	5-10¢	24	5
Hoes	20-25¢	3	2
Jugs	10-25¢	8	8
Knives (pocket)	10-80¢	36	32
Knives and forks - sets	55¢-\$1.65	7 sets	7
Lead (1 lb. bars)	10¢	10 bars	10
Martingales - pairs	50-75¢	4	4
Mugs	8-45¢	4	3
Nails @ lb.	5- 7¢	499 lbs.	78
Padlocks	10-40¢	10	9
Pans (various types)	15-35¢	13	10
Pistols	\$1.75	2	2
Pitchers	20-35¢	6	5
Plates @ set	30-40¢	2	2
Plates (butter)	10-13¢	9	5
Plow lines @ pair	12 1/2¢	2	2
Saddles	\$6.00-10.50	2	2
Scissors @ pair	15-25¢	4	4
Screws @ doz.	5-10¢	22 doz.	8
Scythe blades	75¢-1.25	13	11
Sheep shears @ pair	35-45¢	3	3
Shotguns	\$8.00	1	1
Shovels	65-75¢	4	4
Smoothing irons	40-48¢	3	3
Spoons (table) @ set	35-50¢	3 sets	3
Spoons (tea) @ set	25-75¢	7 sets	7

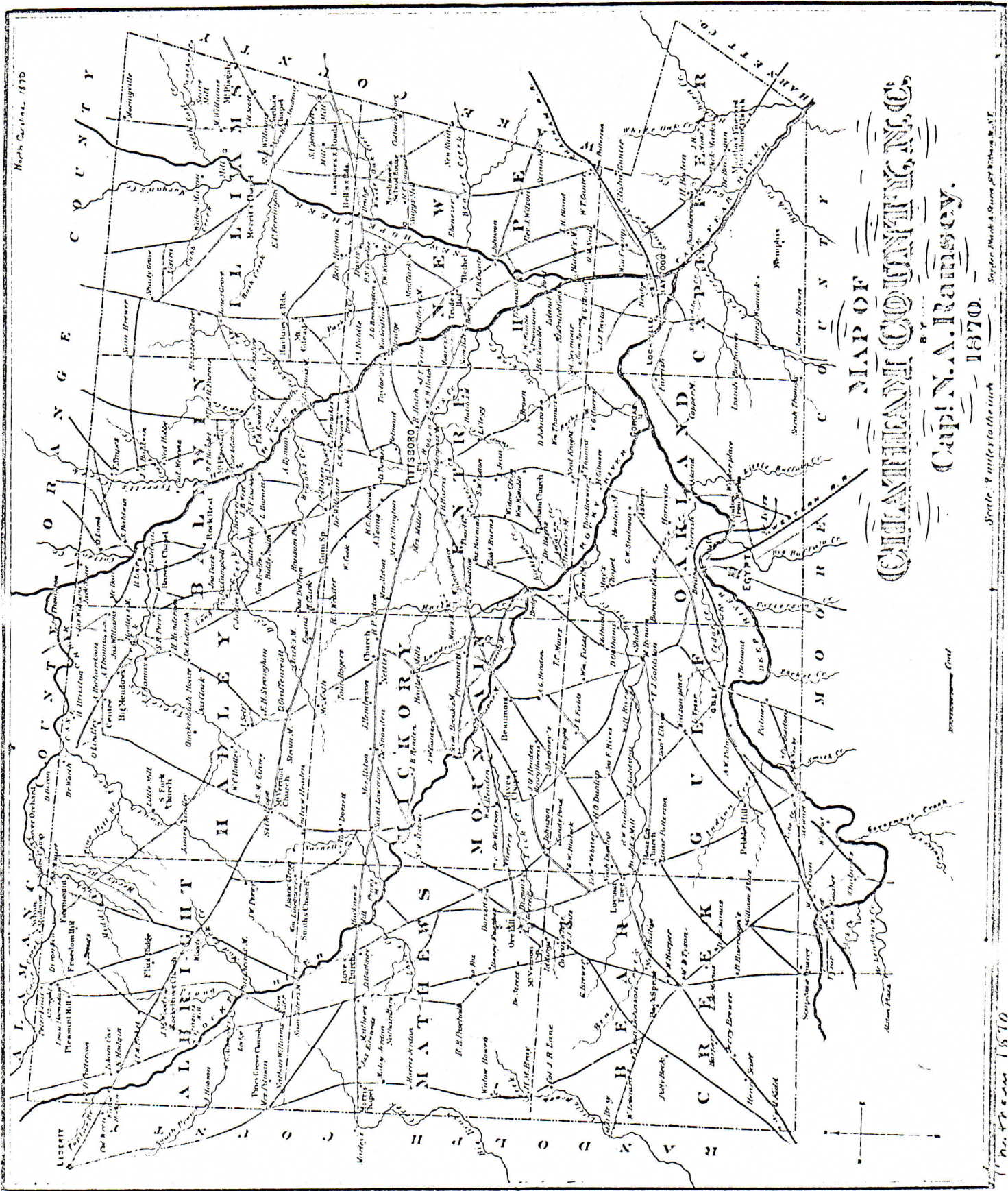
<u>Name of Item</u>	<u>Price</u>	<u>Total Number Sold</u>	<u>Number of Sales</u>
Spurs (riding) ea.	25¢	5	4
Steel (cast) @ lb.	25¢	30 lbs.	6
Steel (English blister)	15¢	27 lbs.	5
Steelyards @ pair	50¢	1 pair	1
Stirrup irons @ pair	25-60¢	3 pair	3
Tacks @ paper	5- 8¢	28	21
Tins (measures)	5-19¢	7	4
Trace chains	45-75¢	10 pair	7
Tumblers	6-13¢	41	8
Whetstones	15¢	2	2

REFERENCES

- (1) Deed Book A, page 212: Feb. 4, 1773.
- (2) Deed Book D, pages 129-130: June 25, 1786.
- (3) Deed Book K, page 78: August 13, 1798.
- (4) Deed Book A-E, page 78: October 20, 1837.

Note: All of above are Chatham County Records in Register of Deeds Office at Pittsboro, North Carolina.





Map courtesy Rare Book Room of Duke University Library

Scale approximately 4 miles to the inch. (One half reduction of original map)

1870