

Daniel Snyder of Bloomsburg

The last **Newsletter** described the "Treasures" represented in the Society's collection of more than 250 Bound Manuscripts (blank bound books with hand-written entries). These volumes include a wide variety of information which can be sifted and combined to enrich a biography, village history, or family history. As an example, consider Bloomsburg pioneer Daniel Snyder (1783-1855).

The four standard county histories (Freeze 1883, Battle 1887, Beers 1915, Barton 1984) provide basic information about Snyder: he came to Bloomsburg in 1810, bought 26 acres along Lightstreet Road at East Street, built a tannery and later the Forks Hotel, bought and sold farmlands, and sired a large family of eleven children. He was elected the county's representative to the state legislature for four successive annual terms, 1841 to 1844, and played a key role in the legislature's "removal" of the seat of Columbia County from Danville to Bloomsburg (enacted in 1845).

But what kind of person was he? What was the business climate in which he was so successful and the antebellum political climate in which he became a county leader? For answers to such questions—to flesh out the dry facts provided by standard accounts—we can turn to the Society's Bound Manuscripts from the early nineteenth century. Of chief value is the two-volume Daybook or account book kept by Snyder at his tannery in Bloomsburg (MS 59); while nothing is "drier" at first glance than daily business accounts, these records reveal a great deal about the man Daniel Snyder.

The leather-bound accounts date from 1810 to 1833, with most entries between 1812 and 1820. As was customary at the time, the accounts were kept on facing pages, with a customer's purchases on the left-hand page and subsequent payments on the right-hand page. The entries are all in Daniel's hand, fairly legible but with erratic spelling and often crammed into available space on a crowded page. Curiously, neither volume includes an index of the customers scattered through its pages, as was usual in such daybooks, though there must have been such a guide.

This Daybook has much to tell us about Snyder's business and, more broadly, about the social conditions at the time in Columbia County. The accounts show that Snyder dealt in a wide variety of goods connected with leather, that his business was mostly conducted in barter rather than in cash, that he had a wide-ranging customer base, and that he routinely extended credit at 0% interest for two or three years or longer.

Most of the sales recorded on the left-hand pages are of various specific sorts of leathers: "upper leather" [for boots], saddle leather, etc. Most of the payments on the right-hand pages are not in cash but in goods, usually animal hides such as "1 calf skin," but also including many other kinds of goods: "5 lbs. of rye," "1 Hive of Beas [bees]," "one Share of the fish Sane [seine]," "one Shad," "2 Days worke," etc. Each non-money payment is carefully valued in the cash equivalent. Curiously, Snyder kept all the accounts in the

outmoded British system of pounds/shillings/pence, even when a cash payment was made in American dollars.

Columbia County historian J. H. Battle recorded that Snyder went nearly broke when he began his tannery in Bloomsburg, because "he hoped to exchange leather for hides, but everybody who had pelts for sale wanted money" so he "had to pay money for hides and sell leather on trust." The Daybook illustrates this dilemma in thousands of specific transactions, and shows further that payment of any sort was often long delayed, with some individuals' accounts falling as much as five years in arrears. Nonetheless, the tannery eventually prospered and provided Snyder with a sound financial footing for other business enterprises.

Snyder's Daybook records the occupation of about ten per cent of his customers; most of these were in trades that required frequent supplies of leather, such as shoemaker, blacksmith, saddler, hatter. Other recorded occupations range widely, including minemaster, doctor, minister, tavern keeper, and two occupations which are surprising for this frontier region: singing master (John Brunson) and printer (William Carothers). In a few cases Snyder noted personal data other than occupation, such as "widow," "old" man, and in one case "long hair."

There were a lot of customers to keep track of; the two Daybook volumes record over 750 persons representing over 200 family names. The customers came from a broad geographic area: only about 50 of the households were then resident in Bloom Township, while the others ranged across several counties and even included, apparently, persons from far away who passed through the area occasionally. Snyder extended credit to them all.

Another bound manuscript, the journal of court judgments for Columbia County 1818-1824 (MS 111), reveals another facet of Snyder the businessman. This book concerns mostly suits for small debts (under \$100), and many prominent Bloomsburg residents of the time appear in it frequently. By contrast, Daniel Snyder, despite his very wide clientele and lengthy credit accounts, is entered in its pages just once, and then as second-hand beneficiary of a debt of \$3.98 owed to another man by Uzal Hopkins (June 10, 1823). Evidently Snyder did not resort to the local courts as a means to make his customers pay their long-overdue bills.

But Snyder did not stay away altogether from the Court House. The minute book of the Columbia County Commissioners 1829-1845 (Manuscript 54) suggests Snyder's rise to prominence in the town and region. In 1831 he was selected as poll tax collector for Bloom Township (and later credited for \$16.49 "Not Colectable") and in 1832 and 1834 he was one of four Bloom Township men chosen for the county jury. His service in such posts, and his wide customer base and solid business reputation, led to his being elected to the state legislature four terms in a row.

The Bound Manuscripts need to be interpreted with care, of course. A certain Daniel Snyder, for example, can be found in the daybook (Manuscript No. 57) kept by John

Wilson, who provided wool carding and other services and goods. In the years 1832 to 1835 this Daniel Snyder bought on account such goods as "8 lb pork at 5 cts a lb" and "1/2 ton hay at 50 cts a ton" and also borrowed money such as "cash 30 Dollars." He paid for these purchases by work at the rate of \$10 or \$12 a month or fifty cents a day, or in kind with such items as "1 vinegar cask." It is very unlikely that Bloomsburg's tanner, by this time a hotel owner and major landowner, would work off his purchases by labor, even though the manuscript daybooks show clearly that before 1850 Bloomsburg was still operating in a largely barter economy. John Wilson's Daybook shows that his home and business was in (modern) Valley Township, Montour County, so his "Daniel Snyder" is evidently another person altogether.

The Bound Manuscripts, then, if read with care, can reveal a lot about how early Columbia County residents lived and worked. If we read between the lines, the Manuscripts can also tell us about the character and personality of the men and women who built our communities.

[NOTE: A searchable **Index** to the Snyder Daybook is now available on the Society's computers. It includes over 750 personal names, inclusive dates of entries for each individual, and notations (if any) such as occupation, along with volume and page references.]