

A Guide to the Virginia Auditor of Public Accounts - Public Ropewalk Records, 1776-1789

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A Collection in the Library of Virginia APA 663
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History

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Title Statement

A Guide to the Virginia Auditor of Public Accounts - Public Ropewalk Records, 1776-1789

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Descriptive Summary

Accession Number

APA 663

Language

English

Creator

Virginia. Auditor of Public Accounts (1776-1928)

Extent

.55 cu. ft. (1 box and 1 oversize folder)

Repository

The Library of Virginia

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

Use Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

Acquisition Information

Transferred from the Auditor of Public Accounts in 1913.

Preferred Citation

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Biographical Information

In May 1776, the General Assembly passed an act giving responsibility for the public ropewalk to the Board of Commissioners to Direct Naval Affairs. Prior to the Revolution there was a ropewalk in Norfolk; in 1776 it was moved to Warwick in Chesterfield County where it produced various types of cordage for naval vessels. On 1 October 1776 the General Assembly appointed Sampson Mathews and Alexander Sinclair to erect and superintend a manufactory for the making of sail duck (sailcloth). Captain Charles Thomas directed the ropewalk at Warwick. By 1779, a tannery was erected at the ropewalk. The British army, led by Benedict Arnold, raided and burned Richmond and Warwick and destroyed the ropewalk in 1781 and in 1785 the property was sold.

For additional information see, "A War-Inspired Industry," by G. Melvin Herndon in *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* [Vol. 74, No. 3, July 1966, pps. 301-311].

Scope and Content

Records, 1776-1789, including accounts, correspondence, receipts, and receipt books relating to the Public Ropewalk in Warwick, Chesterfield County, Virginia. Ropewalks were long covered walks, buildings, or rooms where ropes are manufactured. Hemp fiber was converted into yarn, which was then used to make rope, twine, cord, and sailcloth. The accounts and receipts detail items purchased to run the business as well as orders for cord and other materials manufactured at the ropewalk.

The accounts include the names of persons to whom payments were made, the amounts, and the dates paid. The receipts include the date, the amount received, the name of the person from whom the money was received, and the reason for the payment. Items purchased for the ropewalk included hemp, nails, salt, beef, pork, tar, and the purchase of clothing for slaves working at the ropewalk. Also included are some receipts for the purchase of slaves. Some of the records in this series refer to black artisans. Of note is a receipt, 10 February 1779, for the purchase of the smallpox inoculation from James Currie (who also provided Thomas Jefferson with inoculation).

The correspondence consists of letters to Captain Charles Thomas for orders of rope and cordage for the new U.S. Navy and orders for various ships and schooners. Many of the letters were written by Col. Thomas Whiting, first Commissioner of the Board of Naval Commissioners. Includes an agreement, 1 August 1780, between Thomas Wharton and Charles Thomas for Thomas Wharton to establish a tannery at Warwick. Also includes a letter, 6 December 1779 from the Navy Board regarding the building of a tannery at the ropewalk. Of note are letters, 1781-1782, written from the Navy asking about slaves that had been used at the ropewalk and asking for a list of slaves. This may have been due to the fact that during the Raid on Richmond several slaves were captured by the British.

Included are receipt books for hemp purchased by Sampson Matthews and Patrick Lockhart. The books list the names of people who delivered hemp and the amount. Also lists purchases of salt.

Arrangement

This collection is arranged by folder title.

Contents List

Accounts and receipts, 1776

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Folder 1

Accounts and receipts, 1777

Box 1

Folder 2

Accounts and receipts, 1778

Box 1

Folder 3

Accounts and receipts, 1779

Box 1

Folder 4

Accounts and receipts, 1780

Box 1

Folder 5

Accounts and receipts, 1781

Box 1

Folder 6

Accounts and receipts, 1782

Box 1

Folder 7

Accounts and receipts, 1784

Box 1

Folder 8

Accounts and receipts, undated

Box 1

Folder 9

Appraisalment of public magazine, 1785 September 27

Box 1

Folder 10

Letters, 1776

Box 1

Folder 11

Letters, 1777

Box 1

Folder 12

Letters, 1778

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Folder 13

Letters, 1779

Box 1

Folder 14

Letters, 1780

Box 1

Folder 15

Letters, 1781

Box 1

Folder 16

Letters, 1782

Box 1

Folder 17

Letters, undated

Box 1

Folder 18

Receipt book, Hemp purchased by Sampson Matthews, 1776 October 26 - 1778 January 30

Box 1

Folder 19

Receipt book, Hemp purchased by Patrick Lockhart, 1777 January 21 - 1777 May 16

Box 1

Folder 20

Oversize 1776-1785

Box Oversize APA box

Folder 1