

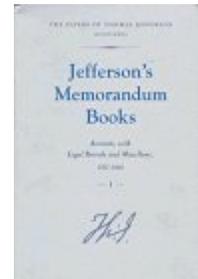
H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



James A. Jr. Bear, Lucia C. Stanton, eds. *Jefferson's Memorandum Books: Accounts, with Legal Records and Miscellany, 1767-1826*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997. lv + 1624 pp. \$200.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-691-04719-5.

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This indispensable reference work has been a long time coming. Part of the Second Series of The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, this volume began to take shape in 1970. Charles Cullen wrote the foreword in 1986, and publication finally occurred in 1997.

But it is easy to see why we have had to wait so long. It took Jefferson over half a century to compile these records, so it is a tribute to James A. Bear's and Lucia C. Stanton's perseverance, dedication, and attention to detail that they finished editing these two large volumes and brought the book to publication by the Princeton University Press in just over a quarter of a century. (Bear is the former Director and Curator of Monticello; Ms. Stanton is Shannon Senior Research Historian at Monticello's International Center for Jefferson Studies and author of *Slavery at Monticello*.) All the major late twentieth-century biographers of Jefferson are absent from the acknowledgments, but surely all those people examined the early copies of the *Memorandum Books* at Monticello's research department. A host of other scholars, librarians, and archivists who appear in the acknowledgments did contribute to the cause.

The editorial work is more than up to the task. Bear and Stanton have identified many of the people, places, and other distinguishing information in the *Memorandum Books*. The two-hundred page index must be judged a masterpiece, because it goes well beyond Jefferson's own index to identify numerous entries concerning agriculture on Jefferson's lands, animals, art and architecture, banks, publications, "building operations and materials" and furniture, clothing, coins and currency, food and drink (one of the largest sections of the index, excepting that on Jefferson), livestock, horticulture, household

articles, medical matters, mills and manufacturing sites, music, newspapers and periodicals, servants, slaves, taverns, etc., textiles, vehicles, Virginia government, writing equipment, and even ferries. A helpful chronology of Jefferson's life appears at the beginning of the first volume, although Jefferson watchers will notice one obvious omission: for July 5, 1784, it is recorded that Jefferson, his daughter Martha, and slave James Hemings embarked for France, while the slave who accompanied daughter Mary upon her arrival in Paris, July 15, 1787, is not noted. That slave was Sally Hemings. The footnotes occasionally suffer in minor ways from the age of the editing process. For example, note 84 on p. 457 identifies Dr. James Currie of Richmond and places his home "on Broad Street near Tenth Street opposite present City Hall." The editors' source for this statement, Wyndham Blanton's *Medicine in Virginia in the Eighteenth-Century*, does state that Currie's house was "opposite present City Hall," but that was in 1931. Since the 1970s, a new City Hall has been built in a different location.

Thomas Jefferson had overwhelming faith in his *Memorandum Books*, asserting in 1788 that if a payment was not recorded therein, there was no such payment. There may have been more omissions than we can ever detect. For example, in 1807 Jefferson responded to former George Wythe servant Lydia Broadnax's appeal for charity in her old age and infirmity with an authorization to cousin George Jefferson that he remit her fifty dollars from the money George was to receive on behalf of Thomas. (Broadnax to Thomas Jefferson, and Thomas Jefferson to George Jefferson, April 9 and 18, 1807, Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Coolidge Collection, Massachusetts Historical Society.) While many other payments "in charity" appear in Jefferson's accounts, this

charitable expenditure is unaccountably absent, and Lydia Broadnax accordingly makes no appearance in the index.

The *Memorandum Books*, begun at least as early as 1767, the year of his first legal cases, contain extraordinary minutiae which may look useless if sampled only briefly. How much should we care that the future author of the Declaration of Independence, Governor of Virginia, first Secretary of State of the United States, Vice-President and two-term President of the United States “Pd. Hyde at Staunton for lodging” on November 20, 1767 (p. 42)? Only the best money management software of today enables users to keep track of expenditures this closely. The question of minutiae becomes even larger when one notes that all of these data require over 1,400 printed pages. But the seemingly insignificant entry for November 20, 1767, like the thousands of other entries, helps answer at least one question about Jefferson’s early career. Jefferson’s surviving memoranda for 1767 begin in late August, when the young lawyer was in Staunton to serve as a lawyer in several cases. After leaving Staunton, Jefferson visited Rockbridge, Bedford, Culpeper, Fauquier, and Orange counties before returning to Monticello in September. Interspersed among his notations for lodging are notes on court cases and records of clients’ payments to him for his legal services. Jefferson thus traveled to where the cases were, a necessary habit of other contemporary lawyers as well as of later lawyers.

Jefferson’s notes on his legal cases end in 1775, when his practice ended. His cash accounts begin in 1771. Whatever accounts he may have kept beforehand went up in smoke when the Jefferson house at Shadwell burned on February 1, 1770 (p. 158 n. 43). These accounts reveal Jefferson’s curiosity—“Pd. for seeing an Alligator,” November 16, 1771 (p. 264), and “Pd. for seeing wax-work,” in Philadelphia, July 18, 1775 (p. 402)—and the thousands of details of his personal life—“Pd Sr. Alberti for tooth pick case,” November 30, 1771 (p. 264). Using the *Memorandum Books* with the *Garden Book*, the *Farm Book*, and Jefferson’s correspondence enables scholars to recreate large segments of the Sage of Monticello’s life.

Subscribers to H-Pol will be particularly interested in Jefferson’s political awakening during the crisis that preceded the American Revolution. When, after the Boston Tea Party and Parliament’s passage of the Intolerable Acts, Jefferson met with the Burgesses in May 1774 to defy the imperial government and support the Bostonians, he only noted on May 26, “The assembly dissolved

this day. Pd. towards a ball for Lady Dunmore 20/” (p. 374). By December of the same year, however, Jefferson interrupted his accounts to list “the Captains in Albemarle [County] to whom Association papers are to be sent” (p. 381). Jefferson had by then been elected to the Albemarle County Committee. The Second Virginia Convention met in March 1775, with Jefferson in attendance. After returning to Williamsburg at the beginning of June, Mr. Jefferson “Set out from Wmsburgh. For Philadelphia” (p. 396) on June 11 and entered into American history. Yet he recorded only that he bought a thermometer and women’s gloves and paid 1/6 “in charity” on July 4, 1776 (p. 420-1). He was similarly silent about public events in many later entries, as one might expect of accounts. However, his detailed notes of where he and James Madison traveled during their tour of the Northeast in 1791 at least suggest the kinds of political contacts the two men made in preparation for building political alliances (pp. 818-25).

Later, during Jefferson’s presidency, his *Memorandum Books* show the extra costs he sustained as a result of his new duties. They also indicate the number of times he paid James T. Callender for multiple copies of that political writer’s publications, thereby giving Callender charitable gifts. One of these publications led to Callender’s arrest and imprisonment in Richmond under the U.S. Sedition Law. After pardoning Callender, the president recorded on May 28, 1801, “Gave in charity to James T. Callendar [*sic*] 50.D” (p. 1042), his last payment to the man who had turned against Jefferson and later published the first open accusations concerning Jefferson and Sally Hemings. The books also contain such useful information as the length of time he was actually in Washington at his post. Inaugurated March 4, 1801, Jefferson left Washington on April 1, not returning to Washington until April 29th. His next stay in the capital was longer, from April 29 to July 30. After spending August and September at Monticello, the president returned to the White House for a long stay of seven months. These long fall through winter stays in the District continued through the rest of his terms until his retirement in March 1809. Even though scholars will rely on the *Memorandum Books* to pinpoint Jefferson’s location during his public life, the letters and other manuscripts will not surprisingly continue to be the most valuable sources concerning Jefferson’s political thought and actions.

Those who hope to find Jeffersonian secrets in the accounts will be disappointed. Sometimes the omissions from Jefferson’s accounts speak more loudly than what was included. Jefferson first served in the Virginia

House of Burgesses in the short and truncated session of 1769. But we lack any evidence of this service in the *Memorandum Books*, the surviving parts of which post-date 1769. What about the Sally Hemings accusations, which affected Jefferson's political reputation then and which still affect the politics of his reputation? Historians have already used the unpublished accounts to make the obvious obstetrical calculations concerning Jefferson's whereabouts approximately nine months previous to the births of Sally Hemings' children. Now many more people can correlate data from the *Memorandum Books* with information on slave births in the Farm Book and draw their own conclusions from the evidence that Jefferson was always at Monticello at the biologically-appropriate time. (See Michael Durey, *With the Hammer of Truth: James Thompson Callender and America's Early National Heroes* [1990], which is missing from the editors' notes as if in testimony to the length of the publication process; and Annette Gordon-Reed's *Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings* [1997].) But Sally and two of her children, Madison and Eston, are mentioned only rarely in the *Memorandum Books*, Sally mostly while Jefferson paid her wages in France and the two sons only once, in 1824.

The *Memorandum Books* are particularly revealing about other aspects of Jefferson's relationship with his slaves, particularly to the Hemings slaves who came to his sole ownership when his wife Martha Wayles Jefferson died in 1782. In 1780, Jefferson the master either paid or entrusted funds with some of his slaves forty-seven times. In fact, one transaction is strong testimony as to Jefferson's trust for Jupiter, born the same year as Jefferson and his "right-hand man": December 13, 1780, "Pd. Jupiter household expenses 10 still owe him" (p. 503). The next month Jefferson noted that he "Borrowed of George 10" (p. 504). This pattern of exchanging money with slaves continued. The index references to "Slaves/Treatment/annual gratuities to/and premiums

to," show the many times the dominant master used pecuniary motivation to get extra or better work from his slaves, or to give them what he regarded as their due. But other slaves could be sold as punishment (p. 1106), flogged (p. 1275), imprisoned (pp. 1106, 1170, 1275), or given to relatives or sold away. As a lawyer, Jefferson sometimes defended his clients' possession of certain slaves. Once, however, Jefferson brought suit on behalf of his brother Randolph Jefferson against an overseer who "by a cruel whipping killed a negro woman Hanah" (p. 177). Jefferson did (rarely) free some of his slaves or allow self-purchase, as recorded in the *Memorandum Books*, but sometimes slaves "freed themselves" by running away permanently.

If one reads only in the *Memorandum Books*, one will conclude that Jefferson missed the forest for the trees. He counted and accounted and counted on his counting, but, as is well known, he never gained full control over his debt problem because of his public service, his spending habits, and his inheritance of the massive debts of father-in-law John Wayles. "The zeal with which Jefferson made daily records was not ... matched by attention to this financial condition on a larger scale," Charles Cullen observes in his introduction (p. xviii). Still, if anyone ever had all the data on which major financial decisions could have been based, it was Thomas Jefferson, whose *Memorandum Books* are unique. The editors have matched Jefferson's zeal for details and have given many readers a new look at one systematic part of Jefferson's mind. There was no dialogue between his head and his heart in the accounts and in the notes on legal cases. The head held all the cards.

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