

# “Shhhh! I’ll Let You In On a Secret: Our Female Ancestors Are Found in Ledgers” — Part 2

By Diane L. Richard

In our *Your Genealogy Today* July/August 2021 issue, we presented Part I of Diane’s article. If you do not have the July/August issue, please visit our store at [www.yourgenealogytoday.com](http://www.yourgenealogytoday.com) (US or CDN links) to purchase a copy or a PDF edition.

## Women as Renters

I first came across renters listed in a ledger when I was exploring one for the Little Rock Dairy Farm, Rocky Mount, NC, ECU, Greenville, NC, <https://digital.lib.ecu.edu/special/ead/findingaids/0563> [this ledger is not online]. The impression I have from reviewing the entries is that these women were working at the dairy, and then paying rent and for purchases made from what may be an associated store. Though the ledger is associated with a dairy farm, it appears that much of the labor was for picking cotton. Marinia Jackson was a renter who was possibly employed to pick cotton and who purchased wood and potatoes. Lydia Hopkins rented a house by the week, picked cotton, purchased potatoes, peas, and wood. What a fascinating glimpse into their lives.

## Millinery Ledger (or similar)

Though general stores, previously discussed, often served the function of providing anything someone wanted, especially when located in a small or more rural community, you did sometimes find a dedicated millinery store which sold various materials for the home sewer and was in the business of

Date	Description	Value
Sept 21	Rented house by the week	10
Oct 8	44 lb cotton	10
"	1 pk potatoes	
"	17 lb cotton	
"	11 lb cotton	
"	22 103-11	
"	25-86	
"	13 bushel potatoes	40
"	324 lb cotton	10
Nov 31	1 pk potatoes	
Nov 1	order at games	25-
"	old cotton	36
"	65 lb peas	
"	1/2 Bar potatoes	20
"	1/2 12 lb potatoes	20
"	1/2 lb peas	20
		181
"	1 pk potatoes	10
Dec 28	1/2 Bar	20
Jan 3	1/2 Bar potatoes	20
		231
"	6 111 lb cotton	
"	33 11 11	
"	1 Load wood	20
"	25 lb cotton	25-
"	1/2 Bar potatoes	20
"	86 lb cotton	
"	1 lb	
"	Load wood	25-
"	1 pk potatoes	10
"	potatoes	306
1890		20
Jan 6	1 pk potatoes	326
"		10
"	Rent of house	336
"	1 Bar potatoes	20
May 1	at work	561
		31
		411

Lydia Hopkins was a renter, picked cotton, and purchased wood and other supplies while also being compensated for work at the Little Rock Dairy Farm, Rocky Mount, NC.

selling hats, veils, baby caps, and other forms of headwear; very niche. The customers are listed as men and women (Miss and Mrs.), though the items were always purchased for the females in the household (except for baby caps). An 1899 ledger from the W.S. Clark store that operated in Tarboro, NC [via <https://lib.digitalnc.org/record/104390>] tells us a bit about the sartorial style of these young ladies. The 1900 census for Tarboro gives us the household of Mersellus L. Hussey (post office clerk) including daughters Mattie, Lottie, Lola (possibly the Lila of the ledger) and another named Mary.<sup>1</sup>

- M. L. Hussey -

Date	Description	Amount	Total
Oct 9	4 yds Satin (Miss Mattie)	4.00	
" 11	By 7/4		7.00
" 12	1 Hat (Mattie)	3.30	
" "	1 " (Lottie)	1.25	
" "	1 " (Lila)	.50	
14	By Hat Miss Mattie		3.30
"	1 Hat	3.50	
"	1/2 yds maulins	1.10	
"	1 1/2 " Ribbon	.08	
"	1 1/2 " " "	.03	
16	1 Corset Ledy	2.25	
Nov 2	1 Hat	7.50	
Oct 26	1 Veil Miss Mattie	4.00	
30	1/2 yds maulins	2.25	
"	1 " Ribbon	.05	
"	3/4 " Veil	1.25	
"	1 " Blue	.25	
"	1 Hat	2.00	
Nov 11	1 " "	1.65	
Dec 29	1 " Miss Mattie	5.35	
By	Ribbon 1/2 Veil 1/2	4.70	
	By aunt to Store Auk		20.20

Mattie, Lottie and Lila Hussey seemed to regularly get hats and related materials in 1899 from the W.S. Clark store, Tarboro, NC.

## Toll Roads, Bridges, Ferries

In the course of living their lives, many women needed to use toll roads, bridges and/or ferries to get where needs took them. For all the toll roads that have existed through time, few records seem to survive for those who paid the required tolls. Some

Year	Item	Amount
1821	1/2 horse	12 1/2
1822	1/2 horse	12 1/2
1823	1/2 horse	12 1/2
1824	1/2 horse	12 1/2

A sampling of tolls for the Yadkin Toll Bridge, 1821-1824, showing women paying tolls for themselves, horses, buggies, children, etc.

do and a ledger for the Yadkin Toll Bridge Company, 1821-1824<sup>2</sup> includes brothers paying passage for sisters, single women, married women, and widows paying passage for themselves, horses, wagons, children, and more.

## Textile Mills

The Industrial Revolution explosion meant that many went from working at home to working in mills, factories, and related, especially in the 20th-century. Many women and children ended up

NAMES	Month April 1909												Total	Rate	AMOUNT		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12					
Anna Cox																	
...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...

Ledger example listing mostly women, Fries Textile Mill, Fries, VA.

<sup>1</sup> Year: 1900; Census Place: Tarboro, Edgecombe, North Carolina; Page: 14; Enumeration District: 0001; FHL microfilm: 1241194 via Ancestry.com, [www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/7602/images/4117822\\_00031](http://www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/7602/images/4117822_00031)

<sup>2</sup> Folder 84, V-258/1: Ledger, Collection Number: 00258, Fisher Family Papers, 1758-1896, The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC, <https://finding-aids.lib.unc.edu/00258/>



employed in mills. A sampling from the Fries Textile Mill [VA] corroborates that many women worked there. To learn more about the Fries Textile Mill, check out this Virginia Tech Online exhibit, <http://digitalsc.lib.vt.edu/exhibits/show/the-only-game-in-town--a-selec>. It will give you contextual information relevant to mill workers everywhere.

## Undertakers

Though loved ones buried many deceased on the family property, others were buried in church and community cemeteries, which sometimes required an undertaker's involvement. A frustrating aspect of Z.P. Morrison and Sons Undertakers' records in their 1891 ledger<sup>3</sup>, is that typically men are listed as account holders with references to wives, sisters, and children with no forenames provided. They were clear to point out "colored" individuals, including females such as Sallie Bailey.

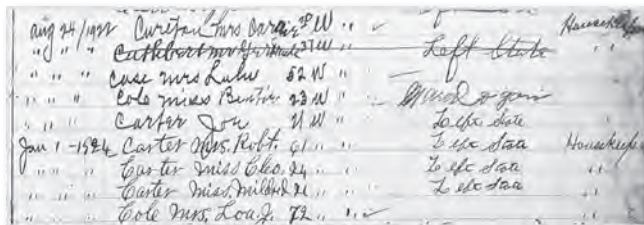
Date	Description	Amount
Aug 28	Sallie Bailey col	
	To 1st Hoo Coffin	14.00
	" 4 " " Handles	2.00
	" Use of Graves without horses	3.00
		\$19.00

Entry for Sallie Bailey, col[ored] in the 1891 Z.P. Morrison and Sons Undertaker's ledger, Florence, Alabama.

## Voter Registrations

The passage of the 19th Amendment gave "white" women the right to vote. This opened up ledgers of a different type where women are listed. In contrast to the other ledger types discussed, these are government-created records and worth mentioning since they are often overlooked. Though I have yet to discover surviving voter registration records for North Carolina, detailed lists found for Crenshaw County, Alabama, and Dade County, Georgia [via FamilySearch, [www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QHV-83C4-499H-B?i=352&cat=237071](http://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QHV-83C4-499H-B?i=352&cat=237071)] give us a sense of these records. Women from their 20s to their seventies are registered to vote for the very first time.

It's not possible to share examples from all the ledgers where women are mentioned. Again, think about their lives and pursue these other ledgers, which may be relevant such as these select different types where I have found women listed.



Some of the women of Dade County, GA, registering to vote for the first time, starting in 1922.

- (1) documenting liquor sales (besides being a beverage, liquor was a disinfectant, medicinal, used as a currency or for exchange, and more)
- (2) those of a brickmaker selling bricks to households, including female-led ones
- (3) church ledgers which often included membership lists
- (4) life insurance ledgers often list wives as beneficiaries for their husbands' policy
- (5) slave insurance ledgers do list some enslaved women as the focus of life insurance policies
- (6) insane asylum ledgers, private sanitoriums, and other health-related establishments often have records found in private collections and provide us access to information on patients, including women, the name of the associated correspondent, admission dates, and frequently a death date (pre-vital records) if the patient died while under care
- (7) lumber ledgers will list women who have sold lumber rights on their land or need planks created from provided timber, etc.
- (8) ledgers of midwives obviously reflect a female-run "business" where the women were the recipient of the services provided though it's not unusual for these ledgers to list the husbands as they were who was responsible for paying the charges owed
- (9) ledgers associated with businesses tied to ports and seafaring/mariner-associated businesses
- (10) post office ledgers as previously discussed in Researching Postal Records, Diane L. Richard,

<sup>3</sup> Florence-Lauderdale Public Library, Alabama, FLPL Digital Archive, <https://cdm15947.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/Businesses/id/1370/rec/1>

*Your Genealogy Today*, November/December 2017, where we can learn personal details about religion, politics, hobbies, occupations, and more

- (11) stock mark ledgers as previously discussed in Stock Marks Aren't Just Animal Brands – Use them to Identify People Also!, Diane L. Richard, *Internet Genealogy*, April/May 2017 where women are listed getting stock marks in their own right or initiated by a father or mother
- (12) saw and grist mill ledgers sometimes list women as weavers (probably to construct bags to hold the ground material), purchasing supplies (as an essential community business, it would not be unusual for them to also serve in a limited capacity as a general store), have corn ground, etc.
- (13) what other types of ledgers might list women?

Many other types of ledgers have not yet been explored by me, which document women! You will want to research into ledgers to learn intimate details about your female ancestors. I hope by now that you are convinced that ledgers just might reveal some interesting insights into your female ancestors!

### Locating Ledgers

Ledgers and similar are found both online and offline, with many more only available offline. We can use online resources to determine their existence.

### Archivegrid

<https://beta.worldcat.org/archivegrid>

Think of it as a catalog for archival and manuscript collection finding aids. Not all are included, but many are!

### Archive Card Catalogs

Not all archives/manuscript collections (Federal, State, Regional, County, Private, Museum, etc.)

Often successful ArchiveGrid and manuscript collection finding aids search terms:

- Ledgers
- Accounts
- Lists
- Members

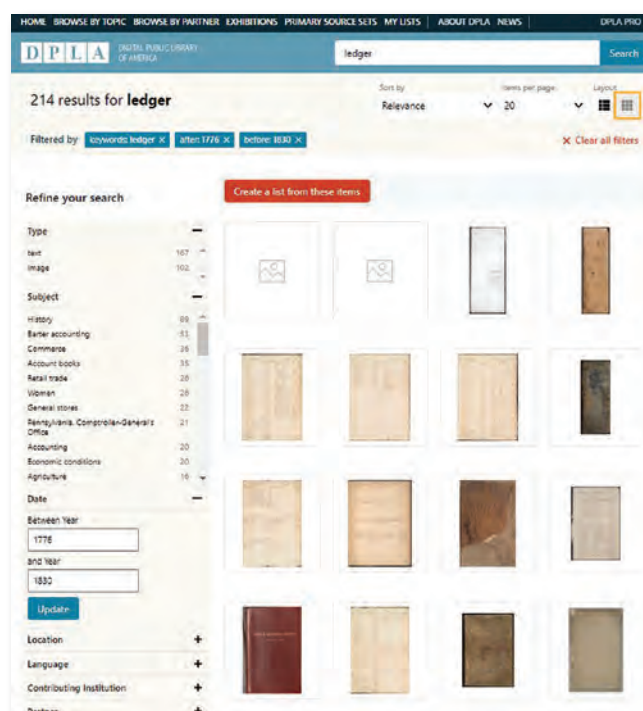
currently participate with ArchiveGrid. If not included in Archivegrid, search its dedicated catalog to discover its holdings.

### Libguides

Check out this community, <https://community.libguides.com>, where archivists, librarians, and other professionals are letting you know about resources relevant to an impressive array of topics.

### Digital Public Library of America (DPLA) <https://dp.la>

It is a massive clearinghouse of about 42 million images, texts, videos, and sounds from across the United States and includes ledgers. It will direct you to the “home” repository for any found material.



Select search results on DPLA for ledgers between 1776-1830

### Google™ (aka web browser) Searching

Don't forget to do general internet searching. When I search for ledgers and a location, I often stumble across genealogy or history society newsletters, blog posts, webpages, etc., where business ledgers/accounts are abstracted or transcribed. For example, the *Magazine of Virginia Genealogy* has a series of articles on the “Accounts from the Store of Thomas Partridge & Co., Hanover Co., Virginia, 1734-1756,” where women are listed. These are very helpful since we can now easily search on the customers' names, especially if the original ledger does NOT have an index, which is very common.

It ends up that this publication is available through Ancestry.com (\$), giving us multiple ways to access this information.

I have also found that other researchers are as fascinated as I am by ledgers, and they may include references to ledgers they have accessed, such as for the Store of Thomas Patridge & Co, and even provide images of select entries.

### Extensive Online Digital Collections Which Include Ledgers (NC as an example)

Repositories vary in the degree to which they have placed material online. I am fortunate that NC has put a lot of material online, including ledgers and records of accounts. Two of the sizeable online collections, as examples, are:

- (1) DigitalNC, [www.digitalnc.org](http://www.digitalnc.org) – Original materials from over 270 libraries, museums, and archives across North Carolina. It is continually expanding.
- (2) North Carolina Digital Collections, <https://digital.ncdcr.gov> – contains almost 110,000 historic & recent photographs, state government publications, manuscripts, and other North Carolina content from the State Archives and the State Library of North Carolina. It is continually expanding.

It is important to remember that not all descriptions are created equal. Via Archivegrid, you explore finding aids designed by unique institutions using their own methodology, though sometimes employing widely available templates. These finding aids are also created by multiple archivists through time and so reflect their idiosyncrasies. This means that what information is or is not included in any finding aid versus catalog description versus ArchiveGrid can vary. So, if you see a location or family name or trade/business that seems relevant, look closer at the information about it. For example, the New York Historical Society has an item – Ledger, 1821-1823, Solomon Townsend 1805-1880, yet the detailed description has “Ledger, 1821-1823, recording personal and business transactions, as well as the accounts of Mrs. Ann Townsend.” So, the ledger doesn’t just document Solomon’s business and includes details

regarding purchases by Mrs. Ann Townsend.

Additionally, I struggled to identify business ledgers for women business owners beyond those of midwives. We know women-owned and run businesses existed – for example, many women did become postmasters and hence would have had a need to maintain records. So, don’t let my lack of success in documenting ledgers for women-owned businesses deter you from looking. As more finding aids are created and/or become digitized and more original ledgers themselves are digitized, we’ll continue to find women well-documented in this record type.

### Conclusions

If you are researching the women in your tree, you will not regret looking at ledgers. Yes, there might be a few ledgers you might skip, such as a ledger of mine workers or some other job dominated by men at the time, but as far as a community business, to me, they are all fair game, and I haven’t found one, that I remember, that does not list women. These are a type of record where so many in a community are listed, including the women. Given that women are often not documented in official/government records, private collections fill an essential gap when exploring women’s lives. Even if you don’t find entries for your family, you’ll undoubtedly gain some perspective on the community in which they lived. And, don’t assume that everyone just transacted business in their county or even state! Lastly, as usual, just because the examples in this article are mostly from NC, ledgers are something that I have found surviving for every state, though not necessarily for every county. Go look! ☞☞☞



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