

# Backcountry Bartleby: The Account Books of James L. Smith 1836-1898

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On February 27<sup>th</sup>, 1855, Jonathan Long loaded a kitchen table onto his wagon and drove over the ridge to drop it off at the log home of James L. Smith. Smith, his wife, Elizabeth, and their four children would soon be breaking bread at this very table. It wasn't fancy, but it was well made of local pine and fastened with hand wrought nails. James Smith had made those nails, (10 cents a dozen), and for that and other work he would credit Jonathan Long \$1.75 for the new table. <sup>1</sup> Fair to buyer, fair to seller...that pretty much summed up their business relationship.

As the two men lifted the table off the wagon, Jonathan pointed out the broken back latch on the singletree. James Smith assured him that it could make it back across the creek, but advised him to bring it into the shop for a "tune-up" next week.<sup>2</sup>

Later that evening, Smith noted receipt of the table in his account book. In careful penmanship he entered other transactions for the month: a "matick" upset on both ends for Alexander Sicheloff (12 ½ cents), "shoveils" laid for John Delapp (30 cents each), a frying pan ribbited and four quilt "steaples" made for John Haines (what a good husband John is...Smith mused aloud as he tallied up the cost (12 ½ cents).<sup>3</sup> February was a slow month at the blacksmith's shop. Were it not for old Henry Ledford and Solomon Long and their insatiable appetite for triggers Smith figured he would be in that poor house down in Lexington!<sup>4</sup> (This was his little joke with Elizabeth when she started asking for new things...like the Jonathan Long table!)

James Smith studied his account book. Accounts payable were substantial, but few were regularly settled up and Smith could see the bottom of the money box. And, it being February, the bartered goods were seasonally low...beans, meat, linen...not much coming in

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<sup>1</sup> Account books of James L. Smith, Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts, Library: F 264.S3.S6, Book 2, p.2. Entry for February 27, 1855.

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Long owned property approximately 2 miles east of James L. Smith's on the opposite side of Brushy Fork. James Smith owned property along the east and west sides of Brushy Fork. See Davidson County Deed Books beginning with Book 15, p.547 (1838), with additional transactions recorded through Book 49, p.197 (1895). According to local history, in the mid-nineteenth century there was a foundry on the west side of Brushy Fork near present-day Highway 52, and it is possible that it was the site of Smith's shop (on land he owned and later deeded to the Methodist Church. See Record of church conference January 4, 1891, Midway Methodist Church, Davidson County, N.C.)

<sup>3</sup> See JLS Account books, 1847, Book 1, p 102.

<sup>4</sup> "In March, 1827, the Davidson County Court voted unanimously to build a poorhouse, to be constructed of brick, and John M. Smith, William R. Holt, and Henry R. Dusenberry were appointed to the building of the same." See Jacob Calvin Leonard, *Centennial History of Davidson County North Carolina* (Raleigh, NC: Edwards & Broughton Company, 1927), 37.

in the dead of winter.<sup>5</sup> Smith might have to gently dun the gun boys.<sup>6</sup> They always paid in cash. He pondered this option. Generally he didn't like to press for payment. He understood hard times and changing circumstances. But he had his eye on some acreage along Farmer's Creek that was ripe for planting tobacco, and the time to buy was now before the railroad people got hold of it.<sup>7</sup> "Farmer's Creek"...the name said it all. "James L. Smith, Farmer"...he was determined to see that written in the next census book!<sup>8</sup>

James Smith was what historians would label "aspirational," dreaming of profiting from the land, not the anvil. In this sentiment he was not alone, as many trade and craftsmen sought to climb the economic and social ladder to become farmers. And while some of his neighbors accomplished this by moving west where the frontier lands were cheap and abundant, James Smith was not so adventurous. He was bound to the tightly knit group of second and third generation German families that made up his community in Midway, upper Davidson County, North Carolina. He was not a rambling man!

James Luther Smith was born in 1809 in North Carolina.<sup>9</sup> His exact place of birth, his parents, and his siblings (if any), remain a mystery, although records from the Abbotts Creek community to the east of Midway show several "Schmidts" on passenger manifests who settled there in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, there were many Smiths in the lower part of Davidson County (formerly Rowan), particularly in the early Jersey Settlement, but these Smiths appear to be predominantly Scotch Irish immigrants.<sup>11</sup> Church records of the Sandy Creek Meeting House (St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church) in the Tyro section of Davidson County contain a record of the birth of a James Smith on December 18, 1809 to Adam Smith and wife, and it appears that this is the James L. Smith whose accounts are now at MESDA.<sup>12</sup> What is known is that James Luther Smith was living in the Midway

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<sup>5</sup> Throughout the account books there are multiple entries referencing payments in goods and services; receipt of whiskey, brandy, yards of "domestik", iron, hides, tobacco, "taller", muskrat and coon skins, corn, "pottatoes", wheat thrashing, log rolling, plowing, etc.

<sup>6</sup> Among Smith's customers were several gunsmiths –Solomon Farington, Henry Ledford, Andrew, Felix, and Solomon Long, Jacob, John, Hamilton and Christian Weer (Wier), and it appears that he supplied most, if not all, of their triggers. Of the fourteen "Davidson County School" gunsmiths documented by John Bivins, Jr., eleven were customers of James L. Smith. See John Bivins, Jr., *Longrifles of North Carolina* (York, PA: George Shumway, 1968), 28, 179.

<sup>7</sup> Farmer's Creek is a tributary of the Yadkin River, and it is situated a few miles west of Smith's land. Smith's grandfather-in-law owned land along Farmer's Creek in 1814, although there is no evidence that Smith himself ever actually acquired land in that area. See Abstracts of Deed Books 25-29 of Rowan County, North Carolina, 1818-1828 p. 158, 31 January 1814; p.180, #135, p.198, #153. The N.C. Railroad Goldsboro to Charlotte line was chartered in 1849 and completed in 1856, running for thirty miles through Davidson County. Much land speculation and politicking surrounded the choice of the exact route. Ultimately the rails were laid out through the middle of the county, several miles south of Smith's land. A later Southbound Railroad (completed 1910) would eventually traverse Smith's Midway community. See Leonard, 91, and M. Jewell Sink and Mary Green Mathews, *Pathfinders Past and Present, A History of Davidson County North Carolina* (High Point, NC: Hall Printing Company, 1972), 209.

<sup>8</sup> In the 1850 U.S. Census James L. Smith's occupation is "blacksmith;" in 1860 it is "mechanic;" in 1870 it is "farmer."

<sup>9</sup> Federal Census Records, 1840, Book 235,492.

<sup>10</sup> See passenger list from Ship Two Brothers, September 14, 1749, List 131 C in Millard H. Bodenheimer, *Browntown and Abbot's Creek* (Lexington, NC: 1986), np.

<sup>11</sup> Sink, 7-12.

<sup>12</sup>Mary Jo Shoaf, transcriber. Records of Sandy Creek Meeting House (St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran

section of Davidson County by 1828, when he married into the Protestant Lutheran and Reformed German community that had settled there decades before.<sup>13</sup> His wife Elizabeth was the daughter of George Bodsford and Eva Raker Bodsford, second-generation (possibly third) “Midway-lians.” George Bodsford was born in North Carolina in 1771, his father having come from England. George received a state land grant in 1819 for property along the Brushy Fork of Abbotts Creek where he raised Elizabeth and her seven siblings.<sup>14</sup> Eva Raker’s father, Frederick, emigrated from Germany to Montgomery County, Pennsylvania in 1753. By 1814 he was living on Farmers Creek where he owned land and raised Little Eva and the Raker boys (not a backcountry band!).<sup>15</sup> In 1819 he acquired additional acreage on nearby Frys Creek from one John Craver in a sale which included all of Craver’s blacksmith tools and his shop<sup>16</sup>. Perhaps when James Smith married Elizabeth Bodsford she came with a dowry of anvils and bellows, because shortly thereafter her husband was established in the community as a blacksmith/gunsmith.<sup>17</sup>

James and Elizabeth Smith had six children during the course of their seventy-three years of marriage, four of whom survived into adulthood. These four children remained in the Midway area and married within the community. James Smith’s will, probated in 1902, divided his real property equally between his heirs, the youngest of whom, Rebecca Jane, was married to John Perryman, a local farmer.<sup>18</sup> Loyal to the land, or consistent to a fault, the Perramons (Perrymans) begat other Perrymans who begat more Perrymans who remained (and still remain) in Midway.<sup>19</sup> In 2009, in the home of Rebecca Perryman’s great-great grandson, J. Elmer Perryman, the account books of James L. Smith were found in an old trunk. Acquired by MESDA in 2010, these books were carefully preserved as an invaluable resource for study and analysis of the pre-industrial trade and craft practices in a small backcountry community.<sup>20</sup> Spanning the tumultuous 19<sup>th</sup> century, the story told in these books is multi-layered, a saga of aspiration and acceptance, failure and success, getting and spending. Ultimately it is the story of one man – unique, but not uncommon - who shaped and was shaped by his time and place in the Southern Backcountry.

To open the box containing James L. Smith’s books is to take a sensory step back in time. The folios look pristine, beautifully bound with leather and marbled paper. Turn the cover and the yellowed pages emit a musty smell, the odor of history...and cat urine! These books survived not because they were intrinsically valuable, but because they were FAMILY!

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Church) (Swicegood’s Church) 1781-1857. Davidson County Public Library, Lexington, N.C.1980. R-Gen.NC 284.1.R.

<sup>13</sup> Sink, 19-21.

<sup>14</sup> Rowan County, North Carolina Deed Abstracts, 626. p. 843 24 November 1819. State Grant #3132.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. ,p.158 31 January 1814; p.180, 7 March 1814, #135; p.198, 7 March 1814, #153.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.906, 25 October 1819, #673.

<sup>17</sup> Davidson County, North Carolina, 1850 Census Population Schedules, Volume 5, Northern Division, p.287.

<sup>18</sup>Davidson County, North Carolina, Abstracts of Wills, Will Book 4, p. 108, 4:549,550 James L. Smith, 21 Dec. 1889. Prov. 22 Mar. 1902.

<sup>19</sup> Davidson County, North Carolina, Census Population Schedules, 1850 – present, Northern Division, Midway Township.

<sup>20</sup> MESDA curatorial records, James L. Smith Account Books, Library F264.S3.S6.

And families are messy. They have children and cats. Things happen in the course of 175 years. Be that as it may, these books are in remarkably good condition, legible and intact, and written in a neat, accomplished hand. Spelling, syntax, and semantics are different matters, but parsing the meanings of Smith's entries is half the fun.

The first of these three account books opens with the following: "James Smith's Day Book. August 22, 1836. Bought in Clemmons Store, Prise 70." What follows are hundreds of entries detailing the transactions Smith had with his Midway neighbors as a blacksmith, gunsmith, money lender, livery lease agent, shooting match enthusiast, and alcohol distributor. The names, dates, and services overlap and intermingle to paint a picture of village life in the nineteenth century Piedmont backcountry, a place where necessity was the mother of invention, production and supply. As the village blacksmith/gunsmith, James L. Smith was a central figure in the life of his community, the craftsman of first resort, the intermediary or economic middleman between settler (man) and subsistence (nature). His account books reveal the scale of his work to be "small, personal and communal," yet they also show it evolving in scope to accommodate the changing character of nineteenth century rural industry.

Just by looking at Smith's books we know that he was literate (unusual in the early years) and English speaking. (Yet it is interesting to note that he was married to a woman who was neither!)<sup>21</sup> He was industrious, multi-talented, fastidious in his record-keeping, fair and maddeningly consistent in his services and prices. He made, laid, pointed and upset... "shoveil" after shoveil, "acks" after acks, shear after shear, and trigger after trigger after trigger. For diversion now and then he straightened "spectickles," forged bell clappers, mended "pianner" keys, put legs "in" pots, and welded tooth pullers.<sup>22</sup> When feeling his inner Longfellow, he "shewed" horses and assorted beasts, all around or just "behind." He aligned bands and traces (and, no, he wasn't practicing orthodontia), made collars and "steaples" (totally unrelated to the priesthood), crafted stay "chanes", chest locks, and fur knives, and mended stillyards, windmill cranks, and "coffy" mills. A broken hake? Busted clevis? "Sithe" head a little logy on the landside? No problem. James L. Smith could – and would – make it like new.

Deciphering Smith's books is a romp through the glossary of blacksmithing, gunsmithing, and 19<sup>th</sup> century agriculture. To wit (with Smith's phonetic spellings):

Laing (laying); upsetting; ribbiting (ribbeting); clevis; hame hook; steeples; singletree; coulter plow; horse fleame; frissen (frizzon); borin rod; found nales; wipers; shotes; bleu dying; mattock; cro-bares; peggenall, swoping coller, and so forth and so on...

With a feel for his range of production and his talents as a blacksmith/gunsmith, the reader can probe a bit more to discover James Smith the Entrepreneur. Not content to bang

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<sup>21</sup> Note: According to the Federal Census Records for 1840, Elizabeth Smith, age 37, wife of James. L. Smith, could neither read, write, nor speak English. For an interesting look at the retention of the German language in the area, see Leonard, 139-140; also, George Raynor, *Piedmont Passages* Volume III (Salisbury, NC: Salisbury Printing Co., Inc., 1991),10,11.

<sup>22</sup> See entries for John Delapp, Delila Hanes, William Beard, Adam Nifong, respectively.

away at the anvil, Smith branched out into the service industry, leasing wagons and buggies, procuring newspapers and spirits, taking in boarders, and even doing “parcels of writing” for his less educated neighbors.<sup>23</sup> All these services were duly noted and charged for in his books. But lest one thinks James was all work and no play, the detailed accounts of his wagers, wins and losses at shooting matches dispel that notion. Not only did he make guns, he went out and shot them for fun and profit. Legs, sides, hides and hard cold cash passed hands at regular intervals, and on balance it appears that Smith came out ahead.<sup>24</sup>

For the most part the Smith account books read like a broken record, a repetitious melody with a beat that’s hard to dance to. But just when he’s about to lay another “shoveil” or make yet another “pare” of triggers, James stops accounting and waxes poetic. He observes the first peach blossoms or an early snow. He feels the earth move under his feet and records the quake.<sup>25</sup> Or his heart is stirred and he composes a song, “Get out the Way with Your Poke Bury Pison”, written with anti-Whig fervor reflective of his conservative, gun and religion clinging nature (well, that may be a bit harsh...).<sup>26</sup> Another ditty of loyalty and loss at Bunker Hill and Quebec is severely lacking in the rhyme and meter department but is noteworthy for its obvious fascination with Revolutionary history.<sup>27</sup> James Smith was a patriot and a civic participant. He served as a Davidson County commissioner and regular juror in the Court of Common Pleas, although in the former capacity it does not appear that he distinguished himself.<sup>28</sup>

Of course the JLS account books are as much about his customers as they are about his debits and credits. Who were these loyal patrons? Where did they live and worship and what did they do? Simply put, they lived in Smith’s front, back, and side yards;<sup>29</sup> most of them worshipped at Midway United Methodist Church;<sup>30</sup> and they farmed, made guns, hats, shoes and furniture, and operated saw and grist mills.<sup>31</sup> These people were practical, principled, and hard-working, at least as viewed through the lens of this book and through

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<sup>23</sup> See entries for Wiley Weer, William Beard regarding newspapers; references to “Patriot and Flag” newspaper- see Sink, p.218.

<sup>24</sup> Smith Account Book 1, back inside cover, “paying and winning and losing at shooting matched,” 1840; also 1842 list of shooting matches, Book 1, np.

<sup>25</sup> Inside front cover Book 2.

<sup>26</sup> Book 2, np. The “song” may have been composed by John Brinkley, a neighbor and customer, whose name appears just below the verse. It references the 1844 presidential campaigns of James K. Polk and Henry Clay. The pokeberry was a symbol for Polk. James L. Smith’s recordation of this anti-Clay song or poem suggests that he was a Polk supporter, which would have put him in the minority in Davidson County in 1844 – Henry Clay carried the county with 1,091 votes to Polk’s 610 votes. See Leonard, 157.

<sup>27</sup> Book 2, np.

<sup>28</sup> Sink, 403; Leonard, 42. James L. Smith is listed as a County Commissioner in 187; his jury service is noted at Davidson County, NC Minutes of the Court of Common Pleas and Quarter Sessions, Vol.111, p.234.

<sup>29</sup> Federal Census Records, Davidson County NC, Northern Division, Midway Township, 1850 – 1870 - order of entries corresponds with Smith’s customer lists. Also see Map of Davidson County, copyright L. Johnson, 1890; and Map of Davidson County, N.C. drawn by C.M. Miller, C.E., October, 1910.

<sup>30</sup> See Dora Zimmerman Reynolds, *History of Midway Methodist Church, Davidson County, North Carolina, 1963*. Also, History and Directory, Midway Methodist Church, 1845-1967.

<sup>31</sup> The 1850 Federal Census lists occupations for some of the following Smith customers: John Bodsford –shoemaker; George Essick-basketmaker; Alexander Bates – bricklayer; William Thomas – tanner; Felix Long – gunstocker; Henry Ledford – gunsmith; Andrew Sappenfield – machinist; Jonathan Beard – ploughmaker; Anthony Olszewski – tailor; William Beard – hatter; Solomon Long – gunstocker.

census records, deeds, court documents, and historical accounts. They paid their bills, raised their children, prayed to God, and avoided jail and litigation. They enjoyed tobacco and liquor, presumably in moderation. If they had a dark or reckless side – and who doesn't – they either hid it or wrapped themselves in the protective secrecy of their community. What if anything negative happened vis-à-vis their dealings with James Smith stayed with James Smith? His account books were strictly "G-rated.!"

A snapshot of his customers reveals that they were part of a tangled web. Almost all were related coming and going, many of them to James Smith himself. The majority of them were men, married with children, but some were widows or spinsters (old women).<sup>32</sup> Old, young, male, female, repeat customers or one-time wonders – he treated them all the same and never altered his prices. Bulk discounts and inflation adjustments were not part of Smith's business model! Most customers were members of the Methodist Church in Midway, a church they formed in 1828 probably as much for geographical reasons as for theological ones, and most are buried in the cemetery there and are tread upon by their descendants who continue to worship at Midway Methodist today.<sup>33</sup> Clodfelters, Nifongs, Swisegoods, Sinks, Longs, Beckerdites (yes, Luke's people)<sup>34</sup> Hains, Beards, Ellers, Rothrocks, and Leonards...were, are, and no doubt will continue to be part of the Midway fabric.

When Midway, or "Mittway", was established in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century it attracted settlers who wanted the access to nearby Salem, and later Lexington, and the security, privacy, and convenience of the natural creek boundaries. It developed as an enclave of people who spoke German and married within their community, yet entertained outsiders and traded in neighboring towns. As a half-way point between Lexington and Salem, a stage coach stop on the east-west plank road from Fayetteville to the Wachovia tracts, it was perfectly situated to thrive while remaining small and somewhat insular - perhaps retarditaire - in habits and attitudes.<sup>35</sup> For the most part, local needs were locally met, by choice as much as necessity. The freedom and independence craved and crafted by the people of Midway was well served by their strategic location.

The self-delineation without isolation of the Midway community enabled it to perpetuate the best of its traditions while evolving with the times. From within its boundaries came a body of work reflective of backcountry artistry that was both sophisticated and well-crafted. Perhaps the table that Jonathan Long delivered to James L. Smith in 1855 was not fancy or high-style, but most likely it was well made and thoughtfully designed. <sup>36</sup> After all, Long was an accomplished "member" of the now famous Midway/Abbott's Creek "Swisegood

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<sup>32</sup> Delila Hanes, Elizabeth Beard, Margaret Delapp, Sally Burk, Catherine Long, Mary Long and Margaret Clodfelter are among the handful of women entries.

<sup>33</sup> It is interesting to note that James L. Smith's obituary states his religion as "Lutheran." It is possible that he is buried at Midway Methodist Church, but was never confirmed as a member. See Lexington, N.C. *Dispatch*, March 19, 1903.

<sup>34</sup> Luke Beckerdite, editor of American Furniture.

<sup>35</sup> Sink, 208.

<sup>36</sup> See also Account Book 2, p.30, for the following entry for Jonathan Long, February 6, 1856: "Received one table \$4.00."

School” of cabinetmakers, whose pieces are coveted by museums and collectors nationwide.<sup>37</sup> And Henry Ledford, another loyal James Smith customer working in Midway, crafted long rifles to die for (and by). His beautifully shaped and engraved guns are showcased in museums and featured in books, drawing comparisons to the Vogler masterpieces from Salem.<sup>38</sup> And while an artisan’s skills and the craftsman’s understanding of construction principles can be natural or acquired, their end products are not realized or fully developed in a vacuum. They reflect the values, traditions, resources and demands of the community in which they are crafted. No museum wall board or auction house catalogue is likely to note the maker of the screws and nails in a chest of drawers or the smith who set the triggers and forged the frizzen, but those trade/craftsmen were integral to the process and the components they made contributed to the design and integrity of the object. An understanding of their roles – both in their shops and in their communities – helps us appreciate the “decorative arts” and the material culture of the backcountry. Smith’s account books are a valuable interpretive tool in this regard.<sup>39</sup>

James Smith continued to operate his blacksmith/gunsmith business for fifty-plus years, doing, or most likely supervising, the back-breaking work of “shewing” horses, upsetting “acks”, mending plows, and sharpening shears. Triggers, for better or worse, never went out of fashion, making him a wealthy man by the time he died in 1902.<sup>40</sup> While in his later years he seemed to spend more time fishing and attending camp meetings rather than mustering and entering shooting matches, James Smith remained an active member of the Midway community. In 1891 he deeded a piece of land to the Methodist Church for expansion of their cemetery, and it is there that he is buried alongside his wife and many of his neighbors and customers.<sup>41</sup>

James L. Smith’s life was played out against a backdrop of change, upheaval, industrialization and war, yet the picture of him that emerges from his account books is one of constancy and dedication to place. James Smith – neat and plain, steadfast and enduring – a cross between Rousseau’s “noble savage” and Longfellow’s mythic village smithy. But closer, multiple readings of these account books suggest that this picture is indeed more myth than reality, that James L. Smith was not the hand-crafting, self-sufficient, self-taught, romantic and rugged artisan/tradesman of an earlier time, but a pivotal character bridging

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<sup>37</sup>Frank L. Horton and Carolyn Weekley, *The Wisegood School of Cabinetmakers* (Winston-Salem, NC: Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts, 1973).

<sup>38</sup> Bivins, 42,160.

<sup>39</sup> It appears that among Smith’s customers, Henry Ledford and the Long families (gun and cabinetmakers) were not only among his most constant customers but lived the furthest distance away. This perhaps attests to Smith’s skills and reputation. The connection between Smith and the gun makers is especially worthy of further study, as he not only supplied their triggers but other components as well. Between 1845 and 1852 Smith also records receipt of gun barrels from (or possibly for) Henry Ledford.

<sup>40</sup> Smith acquired several hundred acres of land during his lifetime. Davidson County Deed Book 15, p.547 records Smith’s first purchase of land along the Brushy Fork of Abbotts Creek in 1838 (along Weer, Nifong, and Burk’s lines) 10 acres, 23 peckes. There are at least fifteen other recorded land transactions over the next fifty+ years, ending with Book 49, p.196, 197, September 13, 1895. Almost every deed references the Brushy Fork of Abbotts Creek.

<sup>41</sup> Midway Church Records, Davidson County Public Library, p.25; also, conversation with church historian and genealogist, Becky Nifong Lassiter, July 16, 2012.

the frontier and the developed backcountry. A late 19<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup> century romantic gloss (or cultural racism) persists in our thinking about the “backcountry” or the post-colonial inland south. To the victors go the spoils of historic interpretation...and the South was not victorious. James L. Smith’s account books expose and amplify a different type of businessman and model – one that relied on mass-production, “out-sourcing”, and a hierarchy of commercial and social relationships. Where Smith appears old-fashioned and immune to inflation or market fluctuations, the reality may have been a calculated response to the evolution of industry. Better machinery, a more skilled workforce, more efficient production methods enabled greater output and cheaper, or at least constant, prices. He appears to expand his range of products and services to the point that it defies reality to consider him a sole-proprietor or even a small shop owner, much less a laborer or craftsman marching to a one-man backcountry band.

James L. Smith was a clever and successful craftsman/service provider/middle man who amassed a small fortune and hundreds of acres of land, yet his name does not appear among the movers or shakers or early captains of industry in accounts of local history. He was not ahead of his time but neither was he stuck in the past. He occupied the middle ground between the craftsman and the industrialist, a vital but selectively dismissed role in the re-telling of backcountry history. To read his account books is to see so much more than a brawny man wielding a ball peen hammer or a nimble-fingered lock and trigger maker. Even a cursory reading suggests that nineteenth century pre-industrial production and supply scenarios were more sophisticated in the southern backcountry than usually thought. James L. Smith was getting and spending, buying and bartering, moving people and products throughout the region and across the decades. He may have listed himself initially as a blacksmith, and aspired to be a farmer, but his account books show him quite clearly to be that emerging nineteenth century phenomenon – the entrepreneur. Blacksmith, gunsmith, livery agent, land speculator, broker, money-lender, etc... Donning successive white collars left him with no red neck by the time he embarked on his final commercial venture - that of a liquor retailer - in 1892.<sup>42</sup>

In his ninety three years James L. Smith may have never cut precision dovetails or engraved a silver patchbox, but those who did were certainly indebted to him, as were many others who availed themselves of his services and talents. And while museums may not

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<sup>42</sup> See Liquor license, Book 3, insert.



celebrate his work, these detailed and fascinating account books remain to be studied as a celebration of his life and his community in the nineteenth century Southern Backcountry.

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