

PROVISIONING LISTS

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How can we get more accurate images of our ancestor's lives? Probate inventories give us some idea of their possessions, but often with less detail than we would like. There is another record that gives an even more complete idea, at least for a limited time period.

During the earliest years of colonization in America, there was no infrastructure, no English civilized environment or mercantile structure. After arrival, it would take some time before the first crops could be harvested, and these would have to last until the next harvest. The settlers would, literally, have to create their own environment from scratch and supply it with items they brought with them.

To make it more likely that settlements would succeed, promoters prepared and circulated provisioning lists delineating all items that a family would need to bring with them. There are several such lists. I found an excellent presentation and discussion by David Cressy in the chapter called "Needful provisions" in his book *Coming Over*. He focuses on early New England, but the items that made up a typical English household would have been very similar from one colony to another.

The lists included the cost of items and were annotated with adjustments that could be made by "the poorer sort." They were organized by categories and included all aspects of daily life: victuals (food), household implements (kitchenware), apparel, arms (for protection and for hunting), items for fishing and for building, tools (for building and for raising crops), and woodenware (which meant tools not made of metal). I've consolidated entries from several of the lists in the discussion below and consulted *The Oxford English Dictionary* for meanings of obsolete terms.

VICTUALS

One hogshead [a large barrel of 63 or more gallons] or eight bushels of meal, one hogshead of malt, one hundredweight of beef, 100 pounds of pickled pork or 74 pounds of bacon, two bushels of peas, two bushels of oatmeal, one bushel of greats [grits], two dozen or one firkin [a small cask, about 1/4 barrel] butter, half a hundred cheese, two gallons of vinegar, one gallon aquavite [ardent (inflammable) spirits such as brandy], one gallon of oil, two quarts mustard seed, half a hogshead of salt to save fish, and spices such as sugar, pepper, cloves, mace, cinnamon, nutmegs, and fruit. For fishing they should bring twelve cod hooks, two lines, one mackerel line and twelve hooks, and 28 pounds of lead for bullets and fishing lead. With what game they could shoot (you'll notice no mention of netting or traps), this would have to suffice a family of six for many months.

APPAREL FOR ONE MAN

Four or six pairs of shoes, one pair of boots, four pounds of leather to mend shoes, three or four pairs of

Irish stockings, one hat, one Monmouth cap [the flat, round cap worn by soldiers and sailors], three falling bands [a band or collar worn around the neck], three or six shirts [varied between lists], one waist coat, one suit of frieze, one suit of cloth, one suit of canvas, twelve handkerchiefs (there is a note that for the poorer sort these may be of blue calico that in summer they could use for [head] bands), one sea cape or gown of coarse cloth, and "other apparel as their purses will afford." For each man there should also be one pair of canvas sheets, seven ells [an ell is 45 inches] of canvas to make a bed and bolster, and one coarse rug [bedcover].

HOUSEHOLD IMPLEMENTS FOR A FAMILY OF SIX

One iron pot, one great copper kettle, a small kettle, a lesser kettle, one large frying pan, a small frying pan, a brass mortar [for grinding spices], a spit, one gridiron, two skillets [footed kettles placed over the coals for cooking, not frying pans with handles], platters, dishes, and spoons of wood. One list includes the comment "As for bedding, and necessary vessels for kitchen uses, men may carry what they have, less serving the turn there than would give contentment here." In other words, they should get by on less in the New World.

TOOLS OF VARIOUS KINDS

For a family, the suggested tools varied between one list and another, but included some of the following: six chisels, one wimble [a tool used for making holes] with six piercer bits, three gimlets [another tool for making holes], one or two hammers, two hatchets, three axes (one broad axe and two felling axes; another list suggests there should be two broad axes and five felling axes), two pickaxes, two steel handsaws, two handsaws, a whip saw, and a file and rest.

Items related to husbandry included three shovels and two spades (one list specified an English spade and steel shovel), three hoes (one broad hoe of nine inches and two narrow hoes of five or six inches; another list suggests there should be five broad hoes), two hand bills [a long staff with a hooked blade on the end], one wood hook, two frows to cleave pail [a frow was used to split the staves for barrels or pails off from a larger block of wood], two curry combs, a brand to brand beasts, a chain and lock for a boat, a coulter [the cutter on a plow for breaking turf] weighing ten pounds, a hand vise, a pitchfork, and a share.

Tradesmen should bring their own tools: "Other tools as men's several occupations require, as hand saws, whip saws, thwart saws, augers, chisels, frows, grindstones, etc." There were reminders that for building they should take nails of all sorts (one hundredweight of spikes, nails and pins), locks for doors and chests (three locks and three pair of fetters), gimmals [rings or hinges] for chests, and hooks and twists for doors.

WOODEN WARE

A pair of bellows, a scoop, a pair of wheels for a cart, a wheelbarrow, a great pail, a boat called a canoe with a pair of paddles [could be purchased in America], a short oak ladder, a plough, an axletree, a cart, a casting shovel, a shovel, and a lantern.

ARMS

One musket, rest and bandolier, ten pounds of powder, sixteen pounds of shot, six pounds of match [used to light and fire the musket], one sword, one belt, one pistol with a mould, one complete light armour, one long piece, one

sword, one belt, one bandolier, twenty pounds of powder, sixty pounds of shot or lead, and one pistol and goose shot.

I began this review trying to imagine the household that was created by the settlers, but I must admit that I complete it wondering who packed all that stuff compactly for the voyage over!

RESOURCE

David Cressy, *Coming Over: Migration and Communication between England and New England in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1987).