This is an account ledger of a freight warehouse, steamboat landing, and general merchandise business operated by the Bird family at the confluence of the Mississippi and Ohio rivers. The warehouse was located at Bird’s Point, Mississippi County, Missouri, or at Cairo, Alexander County, Illinois. An index to the accounts is available.

Abraham Bird and his family moved from Virginia to the mouth of the Ohio River around 1795. Bird was one of the first settlers in, and a founder of, Cairo, Illinois. At about the same time, a family member moved across the Mississippi River to the area which became known as Bird’s Point in what is now Mississippi County, Missouri, but which was then on the boundary between the Spanish districts of New Madrid and Cape Girardeau. In 1798 Abraham Bird received a Spanish grant to land in Missouri opposite the mouth of the Ohio River. He established a plantation on the grant in 1805, living there until the flood of 1814-1815. Bird left the area after the flood, moving to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and leaving the Missouri and Illinois lands to his sons. The settlement which grew up at Bird’s Point, known variously as Bird’s Landing, Bird’s Orchard, and Birdville, was well-known as a steamboat landing and supply point during the peak of the Mississippi River’s steamboat era. The town of Bird’s Point was platted in 1889, only to be devastated by a tornado in 1896. Fire destroyed much of what remained in 1905. The town continued to dwindle after that date, primarily due to encroachment of the land by the river.

The account ledger of Bird’s Warehouse indicates the volume which the steamboat trade had reached on the Mississippi River by the 1830s. Fifty boats and several captains are included among the accounts. Their business with the warehouse included freight storage, transshipment of cargoes from Ohio to Mississippi River boats, and supply of the boats with fuel and groceries for crews and passengers. The warehouse also functioned as a general store, dealing in food, hardware and domestic items. Many individuals, including freedmen and/or slaves, from both sides of the Mississippi are noted in the accounts. Many entries indicate that the warehouse accepted payment in kind, taking cordwood, deer and buffalo hides, and foodstuffs.

Unfortunately, the location of Bird’s Warehouse cannot be determined precisely. The site is identified in the ledger only as “Mouth of the Ohio.” Those individuals who can be identified positively from the accounts represent areas in Mississippi and Cape Girardeau counties in Missouri, and the area around Cairo, Illinois, on the Ohio River. Contradictory accounts in local histories compound the problem of locating the warehouse. John M. Lansden, in History of the City of Cairo, states that both Cairo and the Bird land holdings on the Missouri shore bore the name Bird’s Point in the early nineteenth century. Goodspeed’s History of Southeast Missouri states that Abraham Bird moved to the Missouri side of the Mississippi River in 1805, and that he left his land to his son, John Bird, upon his departure for Baton Rouge in 1815. Powell’s History of Mississippi County, Missouri notes that Abraham Bird was a freight agent at Bird’s Point by 1811, loading and unloading boats traveling on the Ohio River. John Bird, on the Missouri side, and Thompson Bird, who entered the Cairo holdings at the U.S. Government Land Office at Kaskaskia in 1817, are listed together on pages of the warehouse ledger and were probably joint owners of the operation.

The account ledger of Bird’s Warehouse was filmed for the Western Historical Manuscript Collection-Rolla by the Southeast Missouri State University at Cape Girardeau.
Index to Accounts

Names are listed as they are rendered in the ledger. Alternate spellings should be considered in many cases. Remarks in parentheses are as noted in the ledger. Editorial comments or questions are in brackets. Asterisks indicate names entered on the index cards.

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Welton, Zeddoe.
West, John.
White, Willis.
Whittaker, Alexander.
Wiley, John.
Wilkerson, Ferdinand.
Wilkins, Capt.
Wilkinson, James [‘Ky.’]
William Carithers & Bros.
Wilson, Able.
Wilson, William.
Wood, W. B.
Woollard, Samuel.
Wright, John.
_Wyoming_ (steamboat).
Wyter, E.
Yellow, Peter.
Youngblood, Aaron.